



Steve Stiles

And so the mellow fruitfulness of December, with candied peel, cinnamon tarts, plum pudding, figs and nuts, and oranges both real and chocolate, gives way to Freezy January, when your nuts, let alone your figs, are certainly in danger. And another issue of Vibrator Brighton and Hoves into view, sliding easily on its crystal runners over the crisp bed of sparkling snow, singing showtunes from Frozen all the way. Indeed, time to watch Frozen yet again while dandling a three year-old on your knee and juggling a one-year old in the crook of your arm. (I should not be allowed around children).

CORFLU IS COMING!

By the time you read this, Corflu may well be only slightly more than a month away. If you are already coming there is no reason why you should listen to me telling you why you should. For the rest of you, if you don't you will be missing one of the fannish events of this or any other year. I am not saying *our* Corflu will be any better or worse than all the others, but I certainly hope it will be as memorable, and if you miss it, then you won't have anything to remember, it's that simple. Corflu is not a full-on Worldcon experience but a cozy-con where everybody tends to know everybody else rather than recoil in horror from complete strangers as at Worldcons. If you feel you don't know everyone else, the ticket for that is as simple as a membership of Corflu. After attending once, you *will* know everybody else. There is no exclusionism at Corflus and no need for harassment codes; anybody who misbehaves will simply be taken into a quiet corner by our Chairman (Pat Charnock) and given a stern talking to. That's how we roll at Corflu. So unless you are Ian Williams there is no reason not to join us. Or even if you are Ian Williams.

I'm Graham Charnock. My address is graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk. Please send review copies or cheques to 45 Kimberley Gardens, London N4 1LD, UK. This issue is dated January 2015. Deadline for locs for next issue 31st January 2015. Thanks as always to Pat Charnock for proofreading and correcting my errant mammaries, if she does. Thanks to Nic Farey for the numberplate.

INTO THE SHADOWS

Are you really into the Shadows? The Shadows rose to fame as Cliff Richard's backing group, supplanting him from the number one position with their hit Apache, then going on to have a string of hits in their own right. Everyone remembers Apache, of course, but what of Foot-Tapper or even The Rise & Fall of Flingel Bunt. (The Shadows always had a sense of humour with regard to their titles, hence such titles as The Stars Fell on Stockton and Theme from a Filleted Plaice. It's hard to conceive of anyone not knowing the Shadows oeuvre, but Vibrator is such a wide ranging and eclectic magazine that I feel I may have to fill in a few of the details. There may be people living in the furthest outposts of deep and dark Texas who have never heard of them, after all.

In my raw youth as a record buyer (my pocket money allowed me to buy one single a week) I was aware of the Shadows, and being a protean guitar player, their records appealed to me. As it happened at about the same time I chanced upon American Surf Music, in the form of the Chantays and the Surfaris, and that immediately supplanted any interest in a UK group which frankly didn't seem to have the attack, of the Fender Stratocasters and Twin Reverbs of my favourite groups. This has since devolved into a whole argument about US and UK guitar tones as delivered by amplifiers such as Vox, Marshall and Fender. You wouldn't believe what an important effect it has had on popular music, or perhaps you wouldn't really be bothered either way.

My interest in the Shadows lay properly dormant for several years. I was busy writing fan letters to the Ventures and receiving back signed photographs from an exotic address in Hollywood. My record collecting activities moved from singles to LPs as I discovered a basement in Soho which had US import releases of Ventures albums.

Then after I had been sacked from my advertising agency and forced to find some source of income I got a job with Her Majesty's County Courts in Willesden. It was a mundane civil service job but it changed my life on so many levels. For a start, I met my future wife. She used to wear hot-pants in those days and decided to hoick them up alongside my desk and tantalize me with her incredibly long legs and silken thighs. Not a lot of work was done those days. We started to go out for lunch to local pubs and eventually kissed. I remember the exact moment. I felt, oh boy, am I going to get lucky tonight. (Well it was a few months later).

What has this got to do with the Shadows. Well, at the same County Court there was a guy called Herbert North. He was nerdy looking and lived with his parents who worked at the Fullers Brewery in Chiswick. We started talking about our interests and I discovered he played guitar in a group which did local pubs and functions. I need not tell you he was a big Shadows fan, and had a Burns Bison and an Echoplex echo machine which accurately reproduced their sound.

You non-musos can gloss over these technical points.

At some stage the *other* guitarist in Bert's group (named the Burlingtons after a local road) decided to leave, and I was invited to join.

It was not what I had envisaged for my musical future, but I managed to find more excuses for touring around West London playing crap that out-weighed the bad experiences. Every weekend I went out, drank beer and played music to people who danced, then went home tired. Occasionally I tried to change and deflect the group and entice them into other more rocky areas, but it was largely without any effect at all. At one stage we met at a pub to discuss our future and the drummer confused me by asking what we were all doing it for. I couldn't think of any answer beyond fame and glory, but of course the drummer meant we were all doing it simply for a chance to play. That never seemed enough for me, and I was always consequently a thorn in the group's side, exhorting them to do what I thought was better, or at least not so bad.

But I continued playing with them. They occupied most weekends and kept me distracted from real life. And I thought the guitarist had genuine talent. But things happened. The drummer was a QPR fan and left his car parked outside the match on one day. It was stolen along with his drum kit. For a while we replaced him with a local fireman, who had no real talent, except for fire-fighting. Then the bass guitarist, Bob Edwards, introduced us to his brother Mick who was a hard-hitting drummer of the old school. The first time he sat in with us, we belted through an R&B number and afterwards I turned to him in amazement. "Well, you have to hit them, don't you?" he said.

Mike played with us for some time, but the group was falling apart. Herbert had met a woman and discovered playing with women was even better than playing with his guitar. He was also rising up the echelons in the Civil Service and didn't mean to do anything which would jeopardize his job. I formed a splinter group for a time, with a guitarist Bert had introduced me to, called Brian. He had a 1963 Les Paul which he sold to re-invest in sound equipment. You probably don't know much about guitar prices, but that would probably have been worth at least £150,000 at today's prices. As a group (Eric & the Magnets) we were more funky and bluesy but less appealing for working men's club audiences. We played a few sf conventions were the crowd predictably proved to be less discriminating. Regrets, I have too many to mention.

Some years ago I was rung up by the drummer of the original Burlingtons and invited to a reunion get together. He told me Mick the drummer had died. I later found out that his brother Bob, our bassist, had also died. They were both lifelong employees of the Fullers brewery and had died of alcoholism. There was little need for me to feel connected to anyone anymore.

At one stage I agreed to go with Bert to a Shadows concert in Croydon. It didn't tell me anything new I wanted to know, except that Bert was invited backstage to meet the group. He worshipped them and I hope he got something

from this personal audience. But I had realized finally what the Shadows could never give me, or rather what this experience had saved me from.

FIRST OUT OF THE TRAPS THIS MONTH WITH A LOC WAS PHIL PALMER ALL THE WAY FROM NEW ZEALAND. IF I RAN AN ALSO HEARD FROM FEATURE HE WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE IN IT, BUT I DO NOT, SO I AM FORCED TO SHARE HIS PITHY COMMENTS HERE:

Thanks Graham! I won't make the mistake of putting my thoughts on it into Evernote this time as last time they made such a pretty display that I gazed upon them in rapt admiration without feeling the need to compose them into sentences. Happy New Year! Phil.

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FOLLOWING UP VERY QUICKLY, AND ONLY SLIGHTLY LESS PITHILY, WAS BRAD FOSTER.

"Indifference will not be tolerated"? No worry about that here, never indifferent about any of the zines that come my way these days. Lack of skill at being able to come up with anything interesting to send in response? Now -that- is more of the problem.

However, you helped this issue with your "desperate times" section which has, indeed, provided a small loc hook for me.

You mention being concerned about your mental state, due to sometimes having a hard time recalling the word for something or other, though, given time, it would invariably pop up in your mind. But then you go on to talk about your mother who did not simply forget a word, but would use the wrong word and not know it. I think we all experience the first thing, what with so much info crowding our brains, and new info trying to get in as well. I do that now, and it does not overly concern me- it is an irritant to not have every word on the tip of my brain anymore. But it is not the same as thinking you -do- have the right word when you don't, and not being able to recognize the fact. That is much more troublesome, and I hope, if that is my fate, it is still decades away.

As for the mental state of dogs, and if they "think" as we humans think of thinking. I've not had much first hand experience of them myself, having been trained by cats all my life. But I can say it seems that cats not only "think", but they can generate thought enough to know how to make us do their bidding.

And now, I am off to offer food and drink to my furry masters, and to clean their boxes of waste for them. It's not a job-- it's a lifestyle!

(EDITOR: Did I really talk about my mother? The only thing she confused was my name when talking to me, either alone, or in company with my friend. She was suffering from degenerative brain disease so i suppose that could be excused. These days whenever I forget something I always like to run through a litany of the names of my family members to reassure me I have not had a stroke.)

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MEANWHILE R-LAURINE TUTUHASI CATCHES UP ON VIBRATOR 2.0.8

(EDITOR: In V 2.0.8 I remarked on my feelings on gambling)

I'm not a gambler, either. I tried it once just to have done it. Well, I played a nickel (5¢) slot once. I played a dollar. All winnings were kept and not recycled. I went home with over \$5. I followed a friend's advice.

As for tax laws, in the US one is able to accept tax-free gifts of up to \$5,000 from each person per year. The amount may have changed. Since the funds for the fan funds come from numerous people chipping in small amounts, there is no tax problem here.

It occurred to me seeing your little 1'6 logo on the first page, I bet there are many people born after the change to decimal currency who wouldn't even understand what that means. I was there when the decimal currency was being phased in.

(EDITOR: When I was in Vegas for Corflu Silver I ventured only once into the casino, because I thought it stupid to go all the way to Vegas and not do it. Like R-Lauraine I played the slots starting off, I think, probably with a \$5 pot. I hit buttons fairly randomly and by the end of the session I'd made a profit of some \$3.50 and got a checkout ticket. I didn't cash it, of course, but brought it home as a souvenir where it was far more valuable as a memory than its cash worth. 1/6d was actually the price of the British Edition of Astounding Magazine, from whose cover the logo was lifted.)

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CLERIHEW CORNER

I am beholden to a Certain List for bringing the following clerihew to my attention:

There was a young woman named Jill
Used a dynamite stick for a thrill
They found her vagina in North Carolina
And bits of her tits in Brazil

If you have any favourite and preferably sexist Clerihews or indeed, limericks, feel free to submit them for inclusion (best rates paid for original material).

SIGNIFICANT PARTNERS

The current trend for same-sex marriages is causing me some difficulty. It used to be safe to assume that if a woman announced she was married, she had a husband, and when a man announced he was married he had a wife. Now you have to shilly-shally around the thing using vague terms like *partner* or, god forbid, *significant other*. Puts me in mind of my oft-related anecdote about manning the registration desk at Seacon 79 and being asked by Tom Disch if wives of special guests got special rates. I innocently asked if his wife was here, and Tom mischievously grasped the arm of John Clute, who was standing next to him, and said, "Yes, here she is!". It was a thwacked forehead occasion, but of course Tom set me up for it initially by using the term *wife*, (NB. I didn't give John Clute a special rate).

CROSS-DRESSING DRESS SENSE

For reasons probably best not gone into at this stage, I find I have to buy a dress. Can anybody, apart from Joseph Nicholas (not that I am excluding him), give me some hints? Size is the first problem. I do not understand female fashion sizes except that most women I know seem to either want to be a 12 or else mourn desperately for the days when they could in fact wear 12s. I don't know what this means in real terms, except I suspect Pat is a 10, and based on that I would probably be a 42, if such a size existed. The next question is what do fat women do about buying dresse?. You understand I am not being sizeist here but merely accepting that if I qualified as a woman, it would be a fat one. Do I also invest in a corset to smooth out my bulging midriff or simply not bother about it? Or do I plump (pardon me) for one of those all enveloping muumuu-style affairs. And then: what is the best place to shop for such things? Online is safest, you betcha, but I somehow want to experience the real shopping for clothes sensation.

Fairly safe options would seem to be M&S or BHS, but do any of you *real* women out there (or Joseph Nicholas) have any favourite shopping venues.

FRED SMITH IS LONELY AND WOULD LIKE TO MEET PEOPLE WHO LIKE BIG BANDS AND BIG BANG THEORY

Many thanks for the Christmas issue of Vibrator and I should make your deadline this time, unlike last time when I didn't. Except, I did!

When you talk of Irish "bands" do you really mean "bands", i.e. instrumental groups as opposed to singer/dancer collectives called "bands" by the media? One of my pet crotchets made even worse by the term "boybands" often inflicted on us by the arbiters of culture when discussing "music"! However, the groups you mention apparently do play instruments (if badly) so that's okay. I've heard of the Pogues and Stiff Little Fingers but not the others so can't comment on their worth. In any case all these rock bands sound monotonously alike to me, my taste being more into jazz and the great American songs of the 20th Century!

Jim Linwood's photo that you printed (in response to Paul Skelton's query as to the identity of the woman in the photo in V7, not V8!) is very nice but having met both of these folk I have to say that Fran Evans was much more attractive in reality than in the photos. Vince Clarke wasn't! As it happens I failed to recognise Fran in the V7 photo although I knew Ethel, of course.

Taral Wayne in his list of old TV shows that he has on DVD doesn't mention two of my favourites: *The Brittias Empire* and *Jeeves and Wooster*. Are they maybe not available in Canada? I would have thought the boxed sets easily found on Amazon. What about *The Big Bang Theory*, Taral? Do you like that or is it maybe too close to how some fans live (or obsess)?

When you say that you have written over three hundred songs did you really mean that or was it exaggeration for effect and who is this "Brian" who has only written five? Regarding crib sheets I never needed them for any songs I might sing but I did often use chord charts as a memory aid for things I was playing, even some numbers that I knew quite well. A fellow musician said that in my case chord symbols were a crutch which, I suppose, was partly true.

Mark Plummer seems confused as to his actual age, young or old. Well I can enlighten him: a mere sprog with the down still adhering to his skin compared to grizzled ancients such as you, me, and Robert Lichtman with our vinyl records which, yes, we have to lift up and turn over to play the other side. However, Robert still has the dexterity to raise his foot and place it on the bathroom basin! For the cutting of toenails I go to the podiatrist which is a lot easier and only required every sixteen weeks.

Lots of stuff about Bob Dylan and various recordings this time which means very little to me since it's not my kind of music but Robert does say, on hearing Dylan's "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight", for the first time "chills ran up and down my spine". I had the same experience the first time I heard, not Dylan, but Frances Wayne (with the Woody Herman orchestra) singing "Happiness Is A Thing Called Joe" (Harold Arlen, Yip Harburg). Recorded in 1945 it's an amazing performance, so good that Peggy Lee even said subsequently that it was a pity that Frances Wayne did so well since she would never again reach that level and I don't think she ever did!

Regarding tall buildings in San Francisco, it was 1991 I visited and I did see the Pyramid, of course, which is very distinctive, but didn't realise that it was taller than the Bank of America building. There can't be much in it, heightwise, but I'll take a look at the web anyway. Thanks, Robert.

Hugs to you all!

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*(EDITOR: I'm surprised when you say Bob Dylan is not really your cup of tea because that almost immediately puts you into the *kinda weird* category as far as I'm concerned. Even old Mike Meara, the dyed in the wool jazz buff, has*

room in his heart and record collection for Mr Zimmerman. I'm afraid I use the term **bands** almost exclusively in the rockist sense which I realize might antagonize someone like you possibly more cognoscent of Woody Herman and Duke Ellington. I agree though that boybands are an abomination in everything including the name. Another pet music peeve of mine is people referring to rhythm and blues as a sort of watered down modern soul music, rather than the urban thrashings of the likes of Chuck Berry and John Lee Hooker, but I guess that distinction is also one unlikely to bother you. I've met Robert Lichtman and can indeed testify that he is very slim and limber for his age. I'm not sure I'd like to see him cutting his toe-nails though. As for songs, three hundred is indeed a modest approximation. A lot of them can be found on this site: (I'm not saying they are all good songs <https://soundcloud.com/stream>)

PAUL SKELTON ENLIGHTENS US ON DOG PSYCHOLOGY

Regarding Irish music, I've always found it was better not listened to at all or, in extremis, with fingers in both ears. Also, having seen 'Visit Ireland' adverts on TV, where everybody is in the pub swigging either Guinness or Magners cider, whilst apparently enjoying the sort of music that Neanderthal Man decided he'd rather become extinct than go on listening to, I think Irish pubs are also best avoided.

Or is that just me being cranky again?

I've often looked into a dog's eyes and thought "There's something going on in there. I just wish the fuck I knew what it was." I'm pretty sure dogs do think, even if it's not at the $e=mc^2$ level. For instance you are supposed to make sure that they always have a bowl of water available. With our first dog, Smattie, we fucked up once. There he was in the kitchen with his empty blue plastic water bowl and there we were in the lounge watching TV. So he picked his bowl up in his mouth, brought it into the lounge, sat down in front of us, and dropped it at our feet. He'd identified a problem, worked out what needed to be done, and carried out a plan to effect a solution...and he definitely was thirsty because he near to drank the damn bowl dry when we filled it for him.

I don't know if Bestie has actually figured out that I'm a total fuck-up, but he definitely plans ahead to ensure that my propensity for this does not inconvenience him. After he's chivvied me out of bed of a morning, and been out in the garden, pissing everywhere he needs to piss to ensure that, when they next return the cats and foxes know that by golly this is his bloody garden, and come back inside, he returns to the kitchen and makes immediately for his empty food bowl. This is made of relatively thin moulded steel and scrapes resonantly across the kitchen floor and clanks metallically against the skirting board as he pointlessly licks it out. Then he sits beside it and stares at me. But I am made of sterner stuff. Besides, I've read all the books that point out you should always feed yourself before you attend to your dog, lest he think he's the boss. So I always tell him it's twirly and that he has to wait until after I've eaten. So he goes into the front room and lays on the back of the sofa in front of the window, ready to bark or grump at any people or dogs, who/which walk by, or to whimper and internally haemorrhage if anything small and defenceless passes that he needs to rip to shreds, but can't get at.

Anyway, cut to the chase, when he senses that I've finished my breakfast he returns to the kitchen, sits by his empty food bowl and stares at me. No contest. Bestie can stare at you for England. So I prepare his food. It takes a while. I won't go into details, but we spoil that fucking dog! Then I place the bowl on the floor alongside his water bowl. He walks over, sniffs it to verify that it's acceptable, then walks out of the room to go and lie on the back of the sofa again and see if there's anything out there worth barking at. He's just not fucking hungry! He's simply making sure that there will be food available to him when he does become hungry. He does this every sodding day. Now that is thinking.

Now I'm not suggesting that their method of thinking is in any way analogous to our method of thinking, but it is a way, and it does seem to work within their limited environment.

As to my previous letter being 'cranky', I'll simply admit that I was channelling Cas. 'Cas' and 'cranky' are two words where the first is simply a short form of 'Cas and cranky'. You insist on addressing your fanzine to 'Paul & Cas' so I suggested she should LoC every alternate issue. She pointed out that she never read any fanzines unless they featured an article either about Richard III or about how to convert a pond-full of frog spawn into a lawn-full of eentsy-weentsy frogs, and as this has only occurred once in the last twenty years, the LoCing was definitely down to me. So I thought, "OK, I'll channel Cas. I'll be cranky!" Guess I got it right.

Oh, by the way, when I found out that even with off-brand ink, the 'free' laser printer I'd been offered would cost over £150-per-go to ink up, I decided that Robert's remarks in that area weren't really all that interesting after all. I've just bought myself a new little Epson X322. Certainly the cheapest printer I've ever bought. Does everything I need.

(EDITOR: I recently ordered four 100ml bottles of printer ink at £4.00 because it was post free, and only afterwards realized it was coming from China. Which probably means a wait of several weeks for delivery. But how anyone makes a profit on these deals, I do not know.)

PAUL SENT THIS PS:

I really should be more careful when I interrupt a LoC and then return to it later. That way I won't forget the bloody point of it all. We see ourselves as The Thinking Animal, and hence as special for that reason, and therefore tend to be dismissive of that ability in other animals. My response to whether or not dogs think wasn't really just about dogs, it's just that dogs are what I have most experience with. I think that many mammals and some birds think to some degree, but it is possibly only the 'problem-solving' element of thinking. I don't believe they spend much time contemplating the meaning of life, or why some days the sky leaks and some days it doesn't.

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PHILIP TURNER REPORTS ON A RECENT LOCAL SURGE IN AMPUTEES

I'm feeling a bit shaken to bitz by all the vibrators which have arrived recently. They seem to be popping up at an alarming frequency; which I have taken as a strong hint to respond.

U2? I have managed with complete success to ignore them since they came into being and I intend to continue this policy. Rory Gallagher, on the other hand, was excellent and always will be.

(EDITOR: Well, he ensured that by pursuing the old rock star policy of dying comparatively young. Although apparently his last gigs were pretty shambolic affairs and embarrassing to watch)

No matter how much you are in control of your ending, you will never be able to tie up all the loose ends. So as your own personal extinction approaches, the question is what, if anything, absolutely definitely has to be finished? And will the sky fall in if it isn't?

(EDITOR: Never was a truer word spoken, Philip, and I have taken this on as a stern rejoinder whenever my wife asks me to clear away my dirty underwear).

Nice to see the picture of "Aunt Fran" in the mag. The Varleys have been family friends of the Turners pretty much forever. They offered me hospitality at their home in Wimbledon when I had to go to London for exams back in the mists of the 20th century and their correspondence with my late father went through a golden age when both parties embraced the Computer Age and the possibilities of scanners and colour printers.

I could send you a picture of the bread I've just baked, which would be way more interesting than a paper bag but, on reflection, probably only to me.

Things I never got round to: I still have a Build Your One Empire State Building kit [1:1200 scale] from the Guardian, exact vintage unknown, 20th century, though.

There seems to be rather a lot about toenails in the LoCs. Is it too late to mention that here in Romiley, we solve the problem by having our feet surgically removed and hiring staff to do our walking about? Probably.

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JERRY KAUFMAN HAS SETTLED INTO A NICE ROUTINE

A pattern - send a letter to Graham a month after an issue is published - has been established. I'll keep it up.

Don't talk to you about U2? You started it. I like them, though they're not one of my favorites. I still enjoy songs like "Sunday Bloody Sunday," "With You or Without You," etc. My favorite Irish band, however, isn't in the same genre - it's Altan, the Irish traditionalists.

I'm not a musician, so I don't have the chops to criticize the Edge. I can only say that I recognize his playing when I hear it; I can't say that about many guitarists. I recently watched a film from about two years ago, called *It Might Get Loud*, that featured a meet-up between the Edge, Jack White, and Jimmy Page. Each one got to show off his instruments, reminisce about hearing older music, playing in dives, learning their moves. Well worth watching, I thought; maybe you'd enjoy it, or maybe you'd just gnash your teeth.

We have adopted many paper bags, ourselves. We even let them range freely about the house. But we have ulterior motives - we put them to work by stuffing them with things like new groceries, smaller bags, books to donate, and even (*gasp*) food scraps to go into composting. (The City of Seattle actively collects food and yard waste to compost.)

Speaking of Bob Dylan, as we were, I've just read that he's bringing out an album of songs made famous by Frank Sinatra. This is one of the more surprising Dylan offerings to come along. I wait for it breathlessly, although new albums by the Decemberists, Lucinda Williams, and Sleater-Kinney, will keep me distracted (once I buy them) until the Dylan/Sinatra thing comes out. I'm sure the article I read gave the album name, but I think it could be called "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered."

I grew up riding a bicycle that had no gears, and the brakes worked by pressing the pedals backwards. I never learned to use hand brakes or gear shifts. I wonder how long it would take to learn, if I wanted to start riding a bike again?

I hope everything goes well with Corflu, and wish I could be there.

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ROBERT LICHTMAN SENDS A SHORTER LOC THIS TIME, OBVIOUSLY SMARTING FROM ME DESCRIBING JACK CALVERT AS MY FAVORITE WEST COAST CORRESPONDENT

Your opening question leading off *Vibrator* 2.0.11 (after the obvious one about Who Needs Fanzines?) is a good one: "If you have survived Christmas and the New Year, why not tell me how you have done it. What are your secret solutions to this endemic annual problem?"

We have no universal formula – things vary from year to year. Also, in our case as Americans the late November Thanksgiving holiday has to be factored in. The past couple years have involved going to Santa Cruz, where my youngest son lives, for either Christmas or Thanksgiving and being part of a large family affair. They decided against that for Thanksgiving this year, so we had a smaller celebration at our house instead. My oldest son came by himself, plus the son from Santa Cruz, his girlfriend/fiancé, and their then 11-month old son (my fifth grandchild, born December 18 of 2013). We tried to get everyone interested in having dinner at one of the restaurants that's open and serving, but after some discussion it was decided that might not be the best for the grandson. So rather than do a potluck thing, we ordered our repast from the local Whole Foods: a roasted organic “Diestel” turkey (10-12 pounds), plus a “foodie favorites side dish collection” for eight, guaranteeing there would be plenty of food to go around and plenty of leftovers to try to get them to please take away. We got agreement that we would put the turkey in the oven to warm up, and that the boys would take care of warming everything else so Carol & I and girlfriend could hang out in Full Doting Mode with grandson. And it all worked out well – one of the best parts being at the very end, where we managed to send off with them *all* of the remaining turkey (plus some of the other food). I'm really not all that keen on it, so not having to face weeks of leftovers done in creative ways was a real mitzvah.

Christmas was a whole different story. One of my sons lives in New Mexico and wasn't coming west for the holidays. Two of the others (and my ex-wife) were going to Germany (where girlfriend's parents live) and celebrating there. We were, of course, invited to join them but weren't interested – and they were understanding. That left my oldest, who we'd just seen for Thanksgiving and who apparently had made other plans because he never got in touch about Christmas. So in the best Jewish tradition, we had dinner on Christmas Day with another couple at a Chinese restaurant in Berkeley. It was good. And for New Year's we ordered in some Burmese take-out and watched a movie. The lights went out around 11:30, and we were awakened at midnight by the usual array of Oakland fireworks and probably a few gunshots, plus a lot of whooping and hollering from a party that was happening nearby.

As for “It's Christmas!!! Who needs fanzines!!!” – it was the day after that I put the new issue of *Trap Door* in the mail, and copies turned up on your far-off exotic shores less than a week later.

Of his friend “injecting his arm with a syringe,” Jim Linwood writes that “The theme tune from *Man With The Golden Arm* ran through my mind.” I can definitely relate to that. I was thirteen when the movie came out and that theme music was a popular hit that I heard often on the radio. I didn't see the film just then, but I picked up, read, and enjoyed the paperback edition of the novel. The other day there was a news report that in the treatment of heroin addiction the latest trend was – no other way to say it – cold turkey. My mind's mental image department immediately flashed a scene from the movie of Frankie Machine (as played by Frank Sinatra) sweating it out in his own extended withdrawal. Small mental world Jim and I share!

I scanned with increasing desperation through your “Desperate times call for desperate measures” department, striking out completely until I came to “Generally I don't like the novels of any of my friends.” I have the same problem, although unlike you I don't have any of them pressing signed copies of their work on me. The big problem, really, is that I barely read science fiction and most of them write it. I'd rather read one of their fanzine articles than tackle something involving as much time commitment as a novel. There have been exceptions, of course. The one most recent involves Lord Kettle: I've read and enjoyed *The Fungus* (him and Brosnan) and am currently making my way through *Future Perfect* (him and Chris Evans). I've read a lot of Ray Nelson, who's definitely an old friend and whose SF (and other stuff) I've been following since his wonderful “Turn Off the Sky” in the August 1963 *F&SF*. Another old friend, Dick Lupoff, has written a voluminous quantity of both science fiction and mystery – and I've read more of the latter than the former. Avram Davidson wasn't exactly a close friend, but I did know him when he lived in San Francisco and even helped him move a few times. His SF is hard sailing, but I've read a fair amount of it. His ex-wife Grania Davis is another old friend whose work I've enjoyed, my very favorite being her first novel, *Dr. Grass* – after that she veered into fantasy, which is mostly not my thing. And, oh yeah, there's you.

Thanks to Mark Plummer for setting me straight on his actual age.

Your (ahem!) “favorite west coast correspondent,” that nice Mr. Calvert, notes the return of mushrooms in our mostly drought-stricken part of the world: “As soon as the weather started getting gray and rainy, these things started appearing in lawns, front gardens, and those grassy strips (whatever they're called) along the street edges of sidewalks – the ones that prevent your passenger from getting out of the car after you've found a parking space.” The technical term for that area, which I learned during my years at the Santa Rosa Public Works Department, is “parking strip.” I didn't know this previously, because having spent my early years in the midwestern parts of the U.S. I always heard them referred to as “tree lawn.” (http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/tree_lawn) Within weeks of our short December rainy season ending, we had several outcroppings of them on our front yard hill. As Jack also writes, “The fungi show up all of a sudden,” surprising us when we notice they're appeared. Fortunately, in our case at least, we were spared “great ugly multi-layer things that might appear in a novel by H.P. Lovecraft, or Roy Kettle.” And they didn't “fade away almost as quickly as they appear,” but instead hung around for nearly a week, slowly decomposing back into the soil from whence they came. We're waiting (and hoping!) for the next round of rain to see if they appear again or if, instead, they crop up somewhere else, suggesting that our yard is underlain with a vast mycelium farm.

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MILT STEVENS DARES SUGGEST I AM PRONE TO MAKING ERRORS

There is a serious error in Vibrator 2.0.11. I don't live in the Mid-West. I live in the land of the lotus eaters (i.e. Southern California). People in the Mid-West risk being blown away by tornadoes. Where I live, most people take drugs to avoid worrying about being crushed by falling debris during the next earthquake. People who have tried both tornadoes and earthquakes usually prefer earthquakes. Even if the buildings do collapse, we aren't likely to freeze in our climate.

This year, we got two full months of Christmas. Once upon a time, the Christmas season officially started after Thanksgiving on the last Thursday of November. Retailers started having sales on the day after Thanksgiving which became known as Black Friday. (The day was black because it was the day retailers began making a profit for the year.) The pseudo holiday has become so well entrenched that I even heard one Black Friday jingle this year.

This year, Thanksgiving almost disappeared, and the Christmas started at the beginning of November. Traditionally, my family has no particular interest in December 25. My father worked odd hours as a police sergeant, so we observed Christmas whenever it was convenient. We've continued that tradition even after my father died. This year, we got together on December 20.

Years ago, I realized what was the true spirit of Christmas. Since then, I've been doing all my Christmas shopping at the bank. I'm a horribly unimaginative gift giver, so I just give each of my relatives a hundred dollar bill. So far, I haven't had any objections.

As far as the intelligence of dogs is concerned, I think some dogs are more intelligent than some people. The difference in intelligence is one of kind rather than degree. We can symbolize, and they can't. I've seen the theory that there are a dozen species that are just below the borderline for our sort of intelligence. The thing that's sort of unusual is the dogs and humans share the same set of emotional responses. We've been running with dogs for over 100,000 years. Somewhere along the line, we started becoming more like each other. You never have any trouble telling what a dog is thinking. On the other side of it, a dog always seems to know when you're feeling badly.

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LIGHTS OUT FOR FREEDOM

In last month's issue I banged on at some length about internet piracy and what I saw as incursions on our freedom. This was treated with vast indifference by most people (ie everyone) so perhaps I should learn to leave well enough alone. But then I learnt about Aaron Swartz.

Aaron's story is closely linked to a piece of proposed US legislation called the Stop On-Line Piracy Act (SOPA). This, as Wiki succinctly reminds us, was intended to expand the ability of U.S. law enforcement to combat online copyright infringement and online trafficking in counterfeit goods, allowing people to be prosecuted for what many people saw as a Draconian level of *offences*. It was in effect not unlike our own present government's efforts to impose supervision of Internet Service Providers and restrictions on them, but more far reaching in its implications. As wiki says, this had heavy support from organizations that rely on copyright, including the Motion Picture Association of America, the Recording Industry Association of America, Entertainment Software Association, Macmillan US, Viacom, and various other companies and unions in the cable, movie, and music industries (or generally what we would call organizations with vested interests).

Apart from its main thrust being on so-called *protection of intellectual property rights* the proposed legislation proved to have ramifications which went far beyond this, which if extended *ad absurdum* (the way law frequently is) would lead to limitations and restrictions being imposed on providers and other related organizations on the flimsiest of pretexts. Many so called *hacktivists* claimed it represented an infringement of people's basic rights to freely exchange information and launched a campaign based not only on appeals to reason but on *denial of service* attacks. Lots of people and organizations with a broadly liberal bent piled in with vocal opposition on the back of this. Aaron Swartz, a whizz-kid computer programmer and entrepreneur (he founded the popular Reddit site and was a Research Fellow at Harvard University's Safra Research Lab on Institutional Corruption) was in the vanguard of this movement. The result of this activism was that SOPA, as someone said, soon became a dirty word among legislators, and the bill never came to fruition.

As a reward for his high-profile activism Aaron was subsequently persecuted and prosecuted by the US Government on fairly trivial cases of *computer abuse* and data theft and rather than accept a plea bargain took his own life, aged 26. Some may see suicide as a rather extreme response to the prospect of a limited jail sentence, and it's true Swartz was a depressive, but he was also both a patriot and a staunch believer in freedom both of speech and information. He had political aspirations but knew they would never amount to anything since he was a marked man as far as the government was concerned. Most of all I think he felt let down and disillusioned by the people who ruled his country. Swartz undoubtedly committed illegal acts (mainly downloading documents from public sources, which other agencies were accustomed to charge for) but the decision of the government to pursue him at such lengths was vindictive and in the end can only smack of statutory revenge.

VIBRATOR BACKSIDE

Hey ho, time to turn the electric blanket off and let another issue of Vibrator grow old and cold. Time to snuff the tea-lights, pull yourself out of that warm comforting bath and rub yourself down with the harsh towel of reality. Not much meat in this issue, I think you will agree, but at least it has a whole-page cover, sort of. Thanks to Steve Stiles for that. The trouble is occasionally for the good of my health I go on the wagon and stop drinking, but being sober is not good for my creativity, and the stunningly witty articles and pieces of intellectual literary exposition don't come as easily as they might. There's a while argument to be had about this, of course, and many things to weigh in the balance. Is having bad dreams really worth it for the occasional idea or a story they sometimes throw up?

This issue of VIBRATOR is dated January 2015. Deadline for the next issue is 31st February 2015

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