

March 2016



I know this is the part you guys all buy this magazine for - the inspiring editorial words of wisdom designed to stir your souls and get you participating in fanac and feeling a rosy glow of fannish brotherhood. That and photos of toilets frequented by Dave Cockfield (titter, ye not!). So what can I say? Get your fingers out and respond, or else I will have nothing to do but to resort to musings on my latest blood test and how my foot hurts. If this issue happens it will be Vibrator 2.0.26, the March 2016 issue. If the 2.0.26 bit baffles you, it is just a software-based affectation referring to the fact that this is the second incarnation of my fanzine Vibrator which initially stirred its stumps (It's Alive!) in the seventies. Copies of the original Vibrator go for vast sums on the black-market these days, sums mostly paid by people keen to keep their names out of the press and avoid criminal proceedings (read what Lord Roy Kettle used to get up to before he became a member of the landed aristocracy!).

Rest assured, though, you will find nothing salacious in the All New Squeaky Clean Vibrator, unless you supply the details yourself (best prices paid for Exclusive Rights).

Vibrator comes from Graham Charnock: <u>graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk</u>. Deadline for the next issue is the end of April, say Friday 29th for the sake of argument.

MY FIRST LOVE

Amy and Walker Smith's daughter was simply the most stunning creature I had ever seen. The family lived at 52 Sun Street in Haworth. I remember being first shown into their front parlour, a dark room, the darkness not alleviated by the dark oak furniture and the table cover with a dark green chenille cloth. I was introduced to their daughter who lay recumbent upon a chaise longue. She had fine white porcelain skin and was radiant. Her smile lit up the dark room. She welcomed me and spoke to me and laughed and joked with me, often in a coquettish manner. I fell in love with her instantly and felt immediately at home in her presence, warm and welcomed.

My father was born in Haworth and knew the Smith's from his early childhood. Walker was a mill-worker, a small frail man who suffered from shingles and died eventually from heart failure. I believe Amy and my mother had worked in the mills themselves. My father was the son of the local Haworth butcher and when he grew up became a mechanic at the town's only garage. They moved away to London after the Second World War, but would go back to visit their friends regularly, and it was on one of those trips I first met Amy and Walker's daughter. I wondered why whenever I saw her she was always recumbent on the same sofa or chaise longue, but illnesses were never discussed in those days, although like any young child I kept my eyes and ears open and soon became aware she was chronically ill. She had spina bifida which in those days was irremediable and left her prone to infections and other disorders. I never saw her when she was really wracked by illness although later I came to imagine it and admired her obvious resoluteness. She was always cheerful in my company. When I learnt she

had died so young, hardly when I myself was grown, I was not entirely surprised, but I was heartbroken. It seemed cruel that such a beautiful person could be taken away so arbitrarily.

Anyone have any similar tales of their first loves?

WHAT DID YOU DO WHEN THE INTERNET WENT DOWN, DADDY?

Up until last Wednesday the internet was fine. I was doing my usual thing of checking all my emails almost as soon as they arrived and going on Facebook to argue with aggressive right wingers who worked me up to the point where I was trembling, and drinking far too much.

I woke up on Thursday morning, looking forward to more of the same, and even possibly keeping up with my friends on my favourite Yahoo Group, RIGHT WING NAZIS ARE US. But what was this? A little red star had attached itself to my wifi icon. Perhaps I'd been taken over by Communists? But no, it was more sinister than that.

When I ran a check it advised me to simply plug an Ethernet cable in. I checked. My Ethernet cable was plugged in. Now my broadband comes from Virgin and it occasionally goes down but I have always found them to fairly efficient both in dealing with customer queries and getting the system back up again, so I wasn't particularly worried. Pat reported that she had phoned them and got an automated message which said maintenance work was going on until 3.00pm so that seemed quite acceptable. But 3.00 and 4.00 came and went so I rang them again. Now there were no reports of interruption due to routine maintenance or from any other source. In fact when I got through to the customer services in India they told me there was no record of faults on my line, but they would test it. Well, they did, and sent several pinging signals (or whatever they do). There was no response from our modem/router. All this suggested to me the router had been fried and was no longer operable. I was a bit disappointed when the best the Indian Lady (top marks for politeness and charm) could offer me was an engineer in four days. That seemed a long time to replace a faulty router, but it was the weekend. And I suppose India was a long way away, so it might take him some time to arrange a flight.

So I settled down to the prospect of three or four days without the Internet. How did it go? Well, of course, first I went crazy. It was like an addict being deprived of his regular drug. There I was sparking off ideas of things to search for on Google, such as what to do when your internet fails, but of course I couldn't. I couldn't even edit a piece of creative writing I was involved with because I couldn't decide whether a bluejay was a bluejay or a blue jay (It's a blue jay, in case you are worried. I should have just called it a bird, but you know me, I am a stickler for introducing authentic colour when I can).

Like a junkie, I started thinking about strategies for getting my fix. Going to high street internet cafes? But my son assured me those machines would be loaded with programmes designed to read my key strokes and steal my passwords if I went on any of my favourite sites. Actual cafes that offered free wifi? But that would actually involve me buying expensive coffee

which I didn't particularly want. I considered asking them if I could use their wifi without buying an expensive coffee, but I somehow lacked the nerve. How about local libraries? Well they were miles away (if they were still open and hadn't been closed down by Tory councillors) and, co-incidentally, I had developed plantar fasciitis and was unable to walk. It seemed ironic. I was isolated by my disabilities both real and technological. And I couldn't even Google plantar fasciitis to convince myself of my self-diagnosis.

A day later I was beginning to feel a bit milder about it. I began to look on the bright side. I was not getting so angry with people by arguing on Facebook, and certainly seeing less posts about Donald Trump was a boon. Although I was rather sad not to see my daily fix of a photograph of West London from Jim Linwood, I was at least no longer being irritated by Rob Jackson on my Yahoo Group. If it hadn't been for my plantar fasciitis I would have been living a fairly benign life.

On the Saturday before the engineer was due to arrive I went round my son James' place to celebrate the second birthday of his toddler, Violet (AKA Letty). I took my Ipad and asked him if I could use his internet. It didn't work out as I think I expected. I was used to processing group posts through emails, and my Yahoo Group has a particularly clunky and non-intuitive website which has in fact been known to have driven people out of the group, and if reports are to be believed, to actual suicide. I couldn't find any continuity in the posts it showed and it was impossible to conduct a conversation. This was the updated version of the site instigated by their new CEO whom I hope rots in Hell.

Still on Sunday a new Day of Hope dawned. The engineer arrived and within five minutes had replaced the faulty power adapter. I didn't ask him if it was worth him coming all the way from India. He might have thought I was taking the piss.

-- Graham Charnock

WHO DROVE YOUR CAR IN THE WAR OF THE ROBOTS, DADDY?

They tell me Driverless Cars are the thing of the future, a bit like flying cars, jet packs and spandex jackets for everyone. Of course we are not talking about driverless cars, we are talking about cars driven by computerized systems rather than human drivers. I am assured by lots of people that these are already driving around on our roads and any protest by myself about the onslaught of this technology will be futile, just the way they said Hitler and the rise of Nazi fascism was inevitable. Well, I'm not having any of it. I accept that as an sf fan I'm supposed to accept this tosh, but I'm sorry I don't.

It would seem to me fairly simple to produce a system which will mitigate the effects of an impending and otherwise unavoidable collision, (airbags, anyone?) rather than one applied to a self-driving vehicle which would work predictively registering a number of constantly changing parameters to avoid a *collision situation*. So I don't see self-driving cars ever working, at least not in a useful sense where they are purposively taking people from place to place on a regular basis.

There is an argument that technology will produce cars which are crash-proof. All cars are crashproof when they hit a human being; it's the human being who isn't. What do you do when some doddery old geezer walks out across a crossing against a red light. Or someone decides to jaywalk and misjudges it? I've seen that happen in Green Lanes countless times. And one old guy was killed at the lights at the end of the road quite recently when a lorry ran him down, quite near the place another toddler walked out in front of a bus. SF author Doug Hill walked under a bus in Wood Green. Good to know a computerized system would have saved him. My God, have we learnt nothing from Terminator: The Rise of the Robots?

Humans are crap at driving already, why should the machines we invent be any better?

Traffic conditions change second by second as do the immediate environs of a car in progress. Sure you can *probably* build a computerized system which can *probably* keep up with all this and parse all the possibilities and avoid them, apart from a sink hole opening up beneath you, or your system being hacked by the kind of idiot who likes to shine laser beams into pilot's eyes. As soon as someone is killed in such a car the manufacturer's are going to face a multi-million dollar class action for damages, and raised insurance premiums are going to make the whole thing unworkable. I'm not a technological luddite but I know what will work and what won't. My friend Nic Farey, a taxi-driver by trade (do keep up, regular readers) said that to make such a system workable would require *all* cars, motorbikes, buses and etc to be networked. And that isn't going to happen. And my network's just gone down for four days.

They will network my car over my cold dead body. And I suspect over the cold dead bodies of a lot of other people. And if eventually all road transport will be networked there will be a period when they won't, and millions will die. Old Meg has predicted it. Strange how planes that drive themselves still manage to crash, isn't it?

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(EDITOR:It's no secret that Vibrator is not so much an sf fanzine as a thinly disguised excuse for a musical one. I like my music and I like hearing about other people's tastes and adventures. So when Curt Phillips, renowned collector of both books and records, and famed Radio Presenter throughout Virginia, wrote this on a group, I was keen to grab it up.)

OLD CURT'S RECORDS

In which Curt Phillips waxes lyrical

I've gone through phases of collecting records. I think that at its peak I had about 125 LP's, nearly all rock from the 70's. That might not seem like a lot but that was about all I could encompass at the time, and all I could afford by buying them all at full price or from the old Columbia Record Club. I'd also gone into 8-track tapes thinking - in my early teen age years - that there would certainly never be a better way to listen to music in my car... The 40 or so 8-tracks I amassed at one time may be buried in my basement somewhere or may have drifted off to some higher destiny in a yard sale or some younger cousin's collection. I haven't seen those 8-tracks in decades.

I hung onto my LPs for the long term until - quite late in the CD era -I finally began to replace my LPs with CDs. I think the first one I ever bought was "Dark Side Of The Moon" (although I've kept the LP of that one too out of sentiment) but sometime afterwards I discovered that some record shops would buy or trade for LP's and I slowly began taking in a handful at a time to trade away for credit. Of that original 125 I have maybe 10 left, kept either because I hadn't found a CD version or because of some attachment. I kept the first LP I ever bought, "Headquarters" by The Monkees, 1967, and I still have The Beatles white album because it seemed important to do so. Still have a 5 LP boxed set of the Complete Buddy Holly because it was a Christmas present from my sister and was quite expensive at the time (although I also later picked a CD set of the same release because it was so much easier to listen to...). My CD collection grew mostly as I found used CDs of interest at garage sales and flea markets now and then, and up till 5 years ago I only owned about 50 CDs in total, some rock, some classical, a few jazz. Then one day I bumped into an old friend who asked if I'd like to host a radio show on the college station that she managed. That's when I started getting serious about collecting CD's.

My first show was to be one devoted to big band swing from the 30's and 40's, but I didn't have much in my collection that I could use on the show, and the very limited collection at the radio station had nothing at all. So I scoured the local flea markets and used music shops and found a few basic CD collections of old big bands to use. I didn't really have a lot of money to devote to this new hobby interest so I made a game of trying to find used CD's cheaply or free. I started by checking out CDs from the local public libraries here and copying them onto duplicate CDs at home. One important source of free material was a website in France that I stumbled across called "Jazz On Line" which currently archives over 40,000 old jazz releases, most of it exactly the kind of material I was looking for. I explored and discovered and downloaded hundreds of songs from that site, and burned them onto about 40 homemade

CD's of big band jazz that I still use on my show. The most important benefit of doing all this a process which took up several weeks of exploring that site's files - was that it *taught* me so much more than I'd ever known before about big band jazz and swing artists. For example, there were artists that I already knew fairly well such as Glenn Miller or Bing Crosby, and then there were artists that I knew very little about like The Boswell Sisters or Gene Krupa or even Artie Shaw. And then there were artists who I hadn't known at all like Don Redman, Sam Donahue, Lucky Millinder, Jimmy Lunceford, and one of my favorites, Andy Kirk and his Twelve Clouds of Joy! All marvellous discoveries for me, and each new discovery led me to many more. Gene Krupa had a female vocalist named Anita O'Day who really romped on such Krupa hits as "Thanks For the Boogie Ride", and "Massachusetts", and O'Day went on to a long solo career. In fact, I had never heard of Anita O'Day until after I'd listened to those Krupa sides and started wondering who that vocalist was. Once her name became fixed in my mind as being *that* singer, I realized that I'd noticed a CD by her in a certain thrift shop in town but had passed it over as I looked for artists that I knew something about. On my next trip there I found that everyone else had passed it over too and so I bought it for 50 cents. It turned out to be a very nifty collection of her solo work and her work with other bands, and my education was advanced another notch or two. Learning about Anita O'Day led me to learning about jazz trumpeter Roy Eldridge with whom she recorded several good sides, and so on and so on.

My search for cheap CDs led me to one of my favorite used bookshops, McKay's Books in Knoxville, TN. I'd shopped there for many years looking strictly for books but had almost never ventured up to their second floor, which is occupied solely by used CD's. Climbing those stairs brought me to a massive musical mecca that remains one of my best sources of CDs to this day. McKay's - which has matching stores in Chattanooga and Nashville - has an impressive inventory of just about everything and they take all manner of CD's, dvds, books, games, and several other categories of such collectibles in trade. Thus I can go to the local flea markets, buy up good items very cheaply that I would otherwise have no interest in for myself, trade them in at McKay's for credit and come out way ahead. By doing this I can use credit to buy a CD that McKay's has priced at \$5 for only 50 cents to a dollar out of my pocket. This is the main reason that my CD collection now stands at about 1000 in only 5 years. I could never have afforded all that music otherwise. At that price I can afford to experiment and buy CD's by artists I haven't heard before, many of which turnout to be sensational. One day at McKay's I found some boxed sets of CDs by Bessie Smith. I knew the name, and knew that she was a blues singer who died in Texas under tragic circumstances in the early 1930's, but I'd never *heard* her music before. That day I decided to take a chance and bought one of the two-CD boxed sets from Columbia, and listened to it on the two-hour drive home. On my next trip to McKay's I bought all the other Bessie Smith CDs that they had in stock. I don't play her on my Sunday big band show - she's a little outside the narrow focus of that show - but I've played her on my Friday night rock/jazz/blues show, and I listen to her for myself now and then. If anyone reading this has never listened to Bessie Smith before, I suggest that you go and find her somewhere. Bessie is the real deal.

I've found that one of the very best things about learning more about these fields of music is that it opens up your social world so much more. There are record fairs where old CD's and records are sold and traded which attract hundreds of other collectors and enthusiasts. I've only been to one very small one so far, but I hope to attend more of them. And there are books and websites. Some of the best writing about music I've ever found is about jazz music. Check out Gunther Schuller's landmark THE SWING ERA (Oxford Press, 1989) and Scott Yanow's SWING (Miller Freeman Books, 2000) sometime. And best of all, you get to meet and talk with other jazz enthusiasts, like Mike Meara, who knows a lot more about early jazz than I'm ever likely to, (and with whom I *still* hope to have a long sit down discussion about jazz someday - something we've only managed to do in passing thus far in life...).

Quite to my surprise, after getting my LP collection down to a handful, I suddenly found that I was finding great old LPs out there in the world priced so cheaply that I couldn't avoid taking them home with me. Usually just one or two here and there, but earlier this summer I found an antique store with a stash of about 5000 old LPs from the 50's and 60's, almost all of them in the "easy listening" and "big band" categories. Of course I had to look at them all. It took hours and most were of no interest to me, but there was a large group of old Big Band on some specialty labels like Hindsight Records and Soundcraft Records, which I knew were collector labels that issued material from radio transcription discs, and thus not generally available otherwise. The owner came over and I asked his pricing. He thought a moment and said, "I got those records 6 months ago and you're the first person who's even looked at them. If you'll take a minimum of 20, you can have them for 25 cents each." I bought a lot more than 20. Most of the group I was looking at appeared to be in unplayed condition (*always* look at any used record before you buy it!) and many of the Hindsight records were still sealed. Some were by known artists like Harry James and Dick Jurgens, and others were by bands I'd never heard of like Gray Gordon and Chuck Foster, but at 25 cents each I bought all that I could carry. I can't lose! Any of these that I don't like when I listen to them, I can later trade in at McKay's for 10 times in credit over what I paid for them in cash. I'll take that deal all day long. And thus does my education in old big band music continue.

Those 1000 or so CD's in my collection are split more or less evenly between old big band jazz and rock and other things from my youth, the latter group being music I use on the Friday night show. After replacing most of the LP's from my teenage collection with CD copies I started filling in some of the blanks with releases that I'd missed before. Collecting a complete Steely Dan was an early priority, as was completing my collections of other favorite artists such as The Dave Matthews Band (still far from complete; Dave has a *lot* of live recordings available...), The Beatles, Sting, Billy Joel, and others. And I've started picking up music from the years before my own youth like the British Invasion material, early Kinks, and early Pink Floyd (I'm still working towards a better understanding of the Syd Barrett years) and others. Plus, I've started exploring other genres like folk and country, and I'm slowly picking up some classical CDs - at the moment - and an opera or two. I don't spend much time listening to classical music these days, but now I'm old enough to understand that the day may come when I'll be more interested in it, so I buy those CD's now when I find them at flea markets.

I'm also old enough now that I've seen several changes in the formats of how music is sold and delivered, and I can see that it's now likely that one day in the near future these CD's will be as antique as the 78's I still have. Eventually we may have an inexpensive device that will play all the music ever recorded, and the days of hunting through dusty old flea markets for used CD's and LP's will be gone forever. But for me, part of the enjoyment is in the search for something old that's new to me, so while it lasts you'll find me on most spring weekends out looking for discarded treasure in those flea markets and used book and music shops. You just never know what's in that next old box until you look.

Curt Phillips

COME INTO THE PARLOUR, MAUD.

Some recent discussion has caused me to think about the way we used to use living spaces back before open plan living became desirous and ubiquitous

I was brought up in an end of terrace house which had two rooms and a kitchen on the ground floor, and three bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs, although the third bedroom was more of a box room). The front room, which my parents called a parlour (I suspect because of their Yorkshire background) was a formally arranged room with comfortable chairs arranged around an open-grate fire. The back room was reserved for dining, and family meals were always taken around a table. It was also the room where the big family radio was ensconced, so we would prolong the dinner experience by listening to BBC broadcasts of Billy Cotton and other afternoon programming which sometimes included comedy or even rare treats like JOURNEY INTO SPACE. There was never much argument because BBC Home Service was all you could get, unless you wanted to listen to classical music (we didn't).

The coming of TV, the big box in the corner, changed all this, and changed a lot of people's habits as far as gathering and congregation were concerned and how they used their living spaces. These days when we have friends round (rarely) usually the first place we take them is the kitchen. If it's a double-glazing salesman or a Pensions advisor we take them into the *front* room (actually a long through front and back room) where the coffee table is and the comfy chairs. We have a television in the front room (which we don't invite Pensions advisors to watch) but TVs are so cheap and ubiquitous these days you can hang them on the wall anywhere, including kitchens and bathrooms.

Both Pat and I noticed when taking our children round to the houses of friends who were Indian or Asian that their *front parlours* conformed very much to our own somewhat archaic perceptions filtered through Asian sensibilities, with a preponderance of gold and yellow and red.. They probably got their idea of formal rooms from us, but where they got their weird sense of colourful and gaudy and sometimes ketch decoration, I don't know. But I have seen those travelogue shows where they paint their buses and stuff similarly. Immigrants arriving after the second WW probably saw only the glitzy baubles the comparatively wealthy Western acquisitive society was trying to sell them. Or maybe they simply don't have any

taste. I was under the impression these Asian families lived very communally in other areas of their houses, especially the cooking/dining areas, and these immaculate and formal front rooms were just for show and prestige.

A lot of these front parlours used flock wallpapers, as of course, did a lot of Indian restaurants once upon a time. I suspect flock is/was the most expensive of wall coverings and people bought it as a luxury for just that reason. Prestige, again. If you went to a restaurant that had flock wallpaper you would anticipate it being a *posh* restaurant. And you would want that reflected in your home as well. Nowadays the style in interior decorating has swung right around and in a *posh* restaurant you might more expect to find Industrial Modern, all clean lines, stainless steel, and tiles and mirrors. A lot of this has crept into interior decorating in modern family homes as well.

And oh, course, I am forgetting that we had a tin bath hanging on the wall.

LETTER COLUMN

IAN WILLIAMS

I've come to realise that the reason my locs on Vibrator are so crappy is because it's too intelligent a fanzine for me. Or maybe it's just you. I wish this was a joke but it isn't. It's me being honest.

For example on page 3 there is a word that sends shudders through my plump little frame causing it to vibrate like jelly -Economics. I've skipped over the sciencey stuff because I understand that, more or less. In my first term in the 6th Form I took Economics, British Constitution, and History 1789-1918 (or thereabouts). Brit Con and History, no probs. But I could not get away with Economics and dropped it in favour of Religious Knowledge. There was a lot more work but at least I understood what I was doing. Made me a laughing stock of the Sixth Form but by then I'd stopped caring.

Anyway I read the piece without really understanding it and came away with the impression that Roy should be ashamed of his son for being involved in work which does nothing but produce money which is then used to produce more money for no rational purpose or benefit except to make more money for those who already have lots of it and do nothing but make more money for....

Dogs on the loose. Well now, having recently taking up walking around a local park (see Facebook for details) I've come into contact with numerous dogs who seemed to enjoy the opportunity to run free of their collars. Just yesterday while walking up a bank I saw ahead of me a young woman with two small lively dogs and a larger dog. On seeing me she hurriedly put the collar on the larger one not because it was dangerous but having noticed my walking stick she was concerned that the dog might accidentally knock me over because it was so playfully friendly. A nice gesture. But most of the dogs I've seen in the park, if not actively

friendly, have made no aggressive movements or noise. I think it's nice they have a chance to get off the lead.

Not being a David Bowie fan to any degree I think this conversation has run its course. Pretty much the same can be said of climate change and is usually spoken of at length and with great erudition by Joseph N. It's starting to hurt my enfeebled brain. It's happening but I'll be dead long before the worst of it.

I see I've inadvertently caused Paul Skelton no little concern about his possible knee replacement. Sorry, Paul, but while my knee is coming along nicely, as a result of putting more weight on my right side, I recently developed lower back pain (very painful) which then caused sciatica in my right buttock (15 days and no sign of abating) which had the effect of, at its worst, causing me to yell out loud, words like "OW!" "AAAAH!" "FUCK!" as pain lanced down my right leg. It also makes sleeping at night rather difficult. But this may not happen to you. Still, there are benefits as people can be very considerate -see the dog incident above and in Starbucks this morning the assistant offered to bring my coffee to my table.

Fred Smith asked how many cats I have. The answer is six, Fred and thank you for asking. They come and go through a bog-standard cat flap in the back door. So far no intruders have ever used it. Not even the cat next door who my neighbours got from me. I did see the Cats vs Dogs programme you alluded to which, as I suspected, turned out to be a pleasant two part documentary about their biology and behaviour. Recently enjoyed a short series about raising orphaned animals to be re-homed back in the wild in Costa Rica and South Africa. There was another good one about Chester Zoo and their breeding programs.

I'd like to thank Dave Cockfield for enlightening me about the masturbatory habits of gentlemen who frequent London public lavatories. I always wondered. Still, at least it's at my level of comprehension. More, I say, sir!

I do hope, dear Graham, that you will do more to make Vibrator more comprehensible to those of us on a lower intellectual level than your esteemed self.

A final word. In the early 60's I picked up a UK paperback of a book called Anything You Can Do (aka Earth Invader) by Darrell T. Langart which I rather liked. I recently came across it again in a cheap e-book collection of Randall Garrett stories and find I still enjoy it even if I can remember the twist at the end. See what I mean about my limited mental ability? Some might consider this a piece of perfunctory hackwork but to me back then it was what SF was all about.

Ian Williams can be found at ianw700@gmail.com

PAUL SKELTON

First of all let me state how surprised I was at the alacrity with which you responded to Cas' Facebook message that your first attempt to mail us a copy of this issue had met with some form of dimension-warping accident whilst subject to the not-so-tender mercies of the Postal

Authority, and had arrived in an unreadable and much changed state. Obviously normal service has resumed with this second copy you mailed, as evidenced by this LoC. Quite why or how the first was transmogrified into a salt & pepper set in the shape of black & white Scottie dogs will I suppose ever remain a mystery. As you can see, I have undertaken to LoC the second version & will leave it to Cas to respond to the first. If her LoC does not arrive in time you will just have to accrue it (Obscure hybrid accountancy/condiment pun — collect the whole series. On second thoughts, you're right...don't). I can only conclude that it was her mention of this 'Dimensional Warping' that triggered your recalling that Supercollider movie, which presumably you had mercifully expunged from memory. Sorry about that. However, speaking of which...

Golly Graham, you seem to be full of surprises this issue! I hadn't realised you were so *au fait* with cutting edge theory in modern particle physics. The 'Higgs-Bosun' indeed"! Obviously you are right to be worried about this as clearly it will be more powerful than the Higgs-Naval-Rating-2nd-Class, though personally I would be more worried about the 'Higgs-Chief-Petty-Officer'. All these potential particles of which I was previously unaware. That last one worries me particularly with regard to your piece on the Supercollider film. I can see it now, an episode of *The CERN Lark*, in which the CERN captain says "The beam is moving off to one side. Left-hand down a bit."...at which point of course your disaster film would continue in much the same way as the original version but with (allegedly) more hilarious consequences.

I am also surprised at your apparent surprise that people generally seem to want to get as much money as they can for doing as little as possible. I suppose at one time there might have been a higher percentage of people keen to use their learning to improve the human condition but in these days of zero-hours contracts just having a job, never mind one that does more than maintain a minimal standard of living, is something to be prized. Yes, Leroy's son makes far more money for his employers than he makes for himself, but not everybody can come up with a cure for cancer. Come to think of it, so far not **anybody** can come up with one. Yes, too much of mankind's effort is spent making money rather than with making progress (see all the stuff about 'Global Warming' and 'We Are Doomed!' in the current issue) but it's been so for a while and it isn't going to change.

And yes, it is baffling that the Super-Mega-Rich don't stop and say to themselves "OK, I've got more money than I could spend in a million lifetimes. Why don't I simply stop accruing more and just spend the rest of my life using what I've got to provide what the world really needs — a shit-hot monthly focal-point fanzine! It ain't going to happen. We are just going to have to make do with *Vibrator*.

I have to admit it was a blow to my ego when Ian Williams admitted he only realised something was up with his (apparently randomly assembled) issue of *Vibrator* when I appeared to be going on "in an erudite manner". Until I read that I had honestly thought I'd been successful in my attempt to pull the wool over fandom's eyes. Randy Newman sure knew what he was talking about in his song *Short People*.

When you wrote "the correlation between gravitational waves and black-holes colliding seems speculative at best" it resonated with both the realist and pessimist within me. Because a theory works and explains stuff it doesn't mean that it's right. Newton seemed to work, within the limits of then-current knowledge. Going back even further, so did religion. My worry is just how far can we go towards understanding the universe? We can experience and 'understand' four dimensions. Our current 'understanding' is that the universe encompasses many more. Perhaps we can hope to express some of these others mathematically, but can we ever hope to understand them? But if we can't understand much of the universe, can we ever understand enough to escape from what this issue seems to agree is our doomed place in it, even if as a race we were prepared to make the effort?

I am not holding my breath.

There are two main alternative schools of thought on the 'Dangerous Dogs' issue. One holds that there are no dangerous dogs, only dangerous owners. The other would argue that all dogs are dangerous. Both viewpoints are correct within their own frameworks. As an excyclist I once had a copy of 'Richard's Bicycle Book' which explained how to deal with a dog which was bothering a cyclist by grabbing it by a rear leg, twirling it around as fast as you can and bashing its brains out against a wall.

Any dog will bite if sufficiently provoked. The amount of provocation depends upon how well trained they are or how badly abused (or even maliciously trained) they have been. Big dogs are more dangerous because they have bigger jaws. A pet dog is not a member of your family but rather a member of your pack. It will not respond to reasoned argument or take part in philosophical debate... but it will try to fit into the slot you provide for it, especially if it is a comfortable, well-fed slot. But all dogs like to play and they don't do colouring or jigsaws for them play is generally a 'fighting' game. Bestie has a toy that we throw. He chases it, shakes it violently until it's dead, then he brings it back. He does not however relinquish it but tries to make me take it off him, growling quietly the while. This stage will involve me swinging my arm from side to side, or up and down, with him on the end often leaving the ground. No different in principle to the drug-dealers with their rings on a rope...except for intent. Bestie could keep this up for hours but I can only manage about ten minutes.

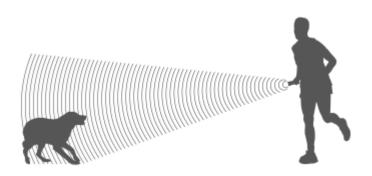
Paul Skelton can be found at paulskelton2@gmail.com

JIM LINWOOD THREATENS TO SET HIS WIFE ON ME

Many thanks for Vibrator #25; another excellent ish but, sadly, another all macho one – perhaps I can persuade Marion to be the only female on the block.

Like you I am wary of dogs but have no great affection for them. I don't like dogs in urban areas but if I lived in the country I would consider having a Labrador Retriever. I grew up in Nottingham where every other house seemed to own a mongrel dog and I had to hop, skip and jump when walking the mean streets to avoid stepping in turds. When I worked for the Environment Agency, which involved sometimes walking alone along London's rivers, I was

issued with an ultra-sonic dog repellent. One day in the Erith Marshes I spotted a large barking Alsatian and I decided to try out the repellent for the first time. I pressed the button and pointed it at the dog — instead of running away it decided to follow me and only went away when I stopped pressing the button — I never used the repellent again.



Dave Cockfield mentions a French style pissoir near Charing Cross Station - there is another one outside Vauxhall Station. Pissoirs in Paris are things of the past having been phased out and replaced by coin-operated booths like the ones here in London. Perhaps Boris intends to phase these out in London and replace them with pissoirs.

Jim Linwood can be found at **jlinwood@aol.com**

DAVE LANGFORD

Thanks yet again for the merry little Vibrators that have been popping through the letter box; and apologies for dragging up the ancient D. West/Rob Hansen artwork confusion from long ago. Probably I missed the issue in which it was long ago sorted out; or maybe those particular brain cells have been visited by the Senility Fairy.

All too many similar cock-ups happen within the austere ivory tower of the SF Encyclopedia. The other day I was checking some Josh Kirby sf covers and found one, buried deep in the Ted Tubb checklist, that clearly wasn't Josh. The actual artist was one Ken Kelly. To the all-seeing Eye of Clute, these guys called K***y look alike. Then came a message via the reader-feedback form pointing out that a "Fantastic Voyage" link in some other entry didn't go to the theme essay on Fantastic Voyages but to the film entry. This time the all-fumbling Finger of Langford must take the blame -- but I wish JC had called the bloody theme entry Bizarre Journeyings, Extraordinary Peregrinations or something else less easily confused. It was embarrassing to find the mistake repeated half a dozen times in a mere 5,100,000 words of SFE text.

Still, there are plenty of non-Langford SFE embarrassments to distract critics with. My favourite, courtesy of the expensive web design company that created the site, is that a search for the well-known skiffy magazine If reports no hits at all. Apparently the word never appears. Well, of course it does, but I have a theory that the search engine looks for interesting keywords and ignores particularly boring parts of speech like "the", "if" and "Sad

Puppies". This led to the epoch-making experiment of searching for "If This Goes On" -- a Heinlein title as you well know, you Golden Age skiffy fan you -- and getting hits for hundreds of entries, none of the first ten pages of results including any of the five entries that mention the title. In fact, exactly the same results as a search for just "goes". For God's sake don't tell our competitors.

Still, the work has its compensations. There's a nice scene in a Robertson Davies novel where the small-town newspaper proprietor, having been slagged off by a local bigwig, gets the fellow's draft obituary out of the files and lovingly re-edits it. Now the bean-counters at Future Publishing are cancelling my long-running column in SFX, the Encyclopedia entry for that magazine may be in need of a little reworking....

Dave Langford can be found at drl@ansible.co.uk

PHILIP TURNER TALKS MORE SENSE THAN IS GOOD FOR HIM

Assuming that cover tells us what sort of a mood you're in, it's time to tread carefully!

If I were feeling a need to be ingratiating, I'd point out that ladies don't write to you because they're too busy doing all the heavy lifting of keeping the world turning so that the menfolk can come along at the last minute, do something cosmetic and claim all the credit. At least, that's the impression I've been given.

"a compressed fluid heats up as a result of increased internal friction produced by molecules bashing into one another more frequently and more energetically in a reduced volume"

I agree with Ian Williams on Sandy Denny. As it sez in one of my books (Dreamers of the Day, 1999, page 93) ". . . when it comes to female vocalists, there's Sandy Denny and there's everyone else."

Crumbs! I'm writing this crap about "the most important fanzine currently being published". If that doesn't intimidate me into tackling the Big Bag of Ironing until I recover my equilibrium, nothing will.

Taral Wayne hit the nail on the head, sustainabilitywise. There are just too dam' many human beans and too dam' many idiots encouraging them to live in places that can't support them and breed children they can't afford to feed. An island that's 3 inches above the high-tide line, or a flood plain, is a stop-over, not somewhere to expect free wi-fi, a shopping mall and civilization.

As Paul Skelton pointed out, it's not the job of our government to tidy things up in other countries at the British taxpayer's expense. But there's a good reason for it. Gordon F. Broon used to tell us that Africa was his passion. Mainly because he could buy lots more friends there with a given amount of other people's money than he could in the UK.

Ah, fusion power. The Next Big Thing of the 1970s. Whatever happened to that? My novel The Charmian Effect (1980) was written at the time when there was a British fusion project

active in Oxfordshire and it had something to say on the subject; but it's so long since I last read it that I can't remember what.

Last thought on D. Bowie: little he did after 1973 is much cop and he's another notch on my "Well, I lasted a bit longer than him" list, along with Adolf Hitler, Attila the Hun and a lot of reasonably respectable people.

Taxi Nic was (mercifully?) brief about the endoscopy thing. It actually goes on for a week before you have to take the two shots of liquid sludge to clear the tubes and have your body invasion. And one of the important parts of the message for the early days is to avoid consuming anything red.

Surprise! Vibrator is now officially a LoCzine, which means that the only way the editor can make his views known is by writing letters to himself and hoping he'll include them in the next ish. What will this do to Graham's grip on reality? Watch this space . . .

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GREG BENFORD

Carefully rereading, I must agree with some Bowie evals you give. I found his music occasionally interesting, but not top line as with Dylan, Beatles--so maybe at the level of the Kinks & the Who.

But! As one who keeps writing stories & novels at age 75 I fathom why doing a last album could work for his mental health. Creation is the opposite of endings, especially the Big One. I have maybe 20 years more (parents died at 92) and want to fill them with travel, friends, creation--both scientific & literary & fannish. (I started a genetics company 10 years ago and it's already created an Alzheimer's drug that works, so maybe can get some neuro improvements from that, too).

So Bowie could've done a better album than his last but Lazarus had some good moments... and probably heLPed him face the inevitable. Creation can mean giving the finger to Fate.

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(Editor: Can I just say all correspondence on the David Bowie issue is now closed. I have ruffled too many feathers for me to feel comfortable in continuing it. Some people it seems cannot countenance any criticism of their heroes. By the way, Elvis was a dirt-bag who had no talent at all.)

MILT STEVENS

In Vibrator #25, you begin the issue with a cute kitten photo. I'm shocked. Running cute kitten photos may not quite be the ultimate fannish depravity but it's close. At least, the kitten didn't have wings.

You also have noticed a few strange things about the economy. Elsewhere, I have commented that our economy is largely imaginary. Parts of it may also be supernatural. In the Great Kerfluffle of 08, trillions of dollars disappeared in a brief period of time. There was much weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. However, nobody asked where all those trillions of dollars had been before they disappeared. Had anyone seen them? People see ghosts all the time. Several trillion dollars should be more substantial than a ghost. Apparently, all that money didn't rattle a chain or even wail piteously.

You may notice The Economy is described as a giant beast. We are told that The Economy must grow eternally. Nothing of our world grows eternally. If you eat red meat and make yourself sick, you will hurt The Economy. Presumably, The Economy may become angered. Some have become priests of The Economy. These are called economists. I've wondered whether there are good economists and bad economists. Could we improve things by burning a few bad economists? Maybe if we added a few bankers.

I'm still thinking about all those trillions of dollars. Maybe they just passed to The Other Realm. Maybe we could draw a pentagram and summon a few million back to our realm. Maybe we should try it as a program at the next Corflu.

The "This Area Subject To Increased Police Activity" sign reminded me of a similar effort we had in Los Angeles. Certain areas (such as MacArthur Park) were designated drug free areas. Signs were posted stating sentences for selling drugs in these drug free areas. The drug dealers responded about as you would expect. They stole the signs, and business went back to normal. I notice that the sign you printed also warns against "Inappropriate Behavior." That makes it sound like a convention harassment policy. When it comes to "Inappropriate Behavior" the possibilities are almost endless.

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LLOYD PENNEY

Thanks for firing Vibrator 2.0.25 my way...I should be able to get this done, after this computer performs its regular cock-ups. I think it needs a trip to the shop. In the meantime, some commentary, and the requisite smartass stuff... (Like the Newfoundland licence plate...)

You're getting even more cantankerous, putting a kitten on the front cover...all together now, awwwwwwwwww...

Valentine's Day cards were the bane of my existence when I was much younger. I hated them, but still hoped for at least one when I was in public school. Nope, not a one, and one I did get was a cruel joke. I am much happier now, I get and give Valentine's Day cards, and I have excellent reasons to do so.

It is great to hear about theoretical proof of gravitational waves, but the only people who might benefit from this new knowledge are out-of-work physicists, and universities looking for

grant money for further research. Economics? I look at that as more of a soft science, or sometimes, I will put it in the "Yeah, right" category with astrology and anything to do with Erich von Däniken.

We should be wary of any animal we bring into our homes. I can say this right now because Yvonne and I have no pets, but we have been bitten and clawed by the little cuties our friends have in their homes. Dog and cats, and almost any other animal we might think of as pets, still have teeth and claws, often quite sharp. We find this out when we do not respect these animals as living beings, and as toys instead.

The letter column is making plenty of comments about how 2016 is turning out to be a most dangerous year for the famous. Bowie is still missed. I never did see The Prestige, but I did see pictures of Bowie as Nikola Tesla, thought he was perfect. John Nielsen-Hall is right about us being an industrialized society, but we've got to start putting some of those amazing brains and put them towards being industrialized and not polluting. Not just reducing that polluting, but eliminating it entirely.

American politics is entering a dystopian stage...how many times did The Simpsons, when it did flashes to the future, tried to show how bad things would be by starting with a President Trump? Now, the horrible fiction may become a horrible fact, and will make our dystopian SF seem far too real. Let's all pinch ourselves simultaneously, and wake up from this potential nightmare.

Charing Cross station has a French-style pissoir? The things you don't learn in the travel books. I will keep that in mind, for I fully expect to be near there sometime in August. Perhaps my nose will lead me straight there.

Joseph Nicholas might remember Johnny Walker on Radio Luxembourg or Caroline, I can't remember...I do, but only because I was a shortwave DXer in my days before fandom. I think Walker still does a bit of stuff on Radio 2, and I think Tony Blackburn finally told the Beeb to piss off.

My letter...no new glasses for me, which is good, for I am still jobhunting, and I couldn't afford them, anyway. Small mercies...

For Nic, not much to say on his article, but I will say happy wedding, and looks like life is fine for you. Best to you on this, and she looks a keeper.

All done, and it looks like I am finally caught up, and my locs are now coming to you in order. Take care, stay warm, and bring it on for no. 26.

Lloyd Penny can be found at penneys@bell.net

CLAIRE BRIALEY IS A WOMAN. SHE HAS WRITTEN ME A LOC. WELL, NOT SO MUCH A LOC BUT A PLUG FOR THE FAAN AWARDS.

I mentioned trying to send a loc, because who could resist your challenge that women don't write to you? But instead of the real loc which I undoubtedly owe to you and quite a few other fan editors whose efforts I have mostly failed even to acknowledge for years, rather than actually responding to recent issues this is mostly about something I want to write about. Women, eh?

You'll deduce from the email address from which I'm sending this that what I want to write about is the FAAn awards, and thus to take the opportunity to encourage people reading this fanzine, and who enjoyed fanzine activity from 2015, to vote in this year's awards. There are eight categories, although it's not necessary to vote in all of them if people aren't so moved.

A ballot form, and more information about all of this, is available at www.corflu.org/Corflu33/faan2015.html - which is also my cue to point out that people don't have to be members of this year's, or any previous, Corflu to vote; they just need to be interested in SF fanzines and want to give a bit of extra recognition to what they liked last year. (Especially, perhaps, if anyone else is also feeling guilty about not having sent as many letters of comment as they should have recently...)

Votes can be sent by email or by post to reach me by 23 April; there's more information about categories and voting on the ballot form, but if anyone's got any further queries before voting then just contact me. I'll continue reminding people of the deadline and badgering them to vote in the meantime, because I'm annoying that way and I'd really like as many people as possible to vote for the fanzine activity that they liked.

Of course, if I didn't have reason to use your organ for my own ends like this (without even being a junk mailer claiming to be called Natalia), I'd now be struggling to find a Vibrator joke that hasn't been over-used already. Maybe lots of women have responded to the fanzine, but all those emails containing thanks for the pleasure you've given them with one or more Vibrators have vanished straight into your spam trap.

Although clearly men have problems of their own. In all the years I've been complaining about queuing for the women's loo, it wasn't until I read Dave Cockfield's letter that I found reason to be thankful that, no matter how long they're taking about it, at least women do everything for which they might need to visit a public toilet within the privacy of a cubicle...

You deserve more, as I do indeed say to all the fanzine editors (maybe I should be trying my hand at a Natalia email after all). But I gather from reading the letter column that we're all doomed. On the assumption that this doom won't entirely overtake us before 23 April, however, I leave you all for now with another reminder to vote on the FAAn awards while you still can. If I survive that, and the Eastercon towards which this train is currently trundling us, maybe I'll manage to write a real loc.

Please use the FAAn awards email address for my contact info this time.

Send your vote for the FAAn awards to Claire at faansfor2015@gmail.com

FRED SMITH

Think you might describe this as the "doom and gloom" ish from the number of dire predictions, etc. that you and some (seems like many) of the old gang come up with. Mind you, after the recent events in Brussels there's good reason for taking a less than optimistic view of things!

Your jaundiced put-down of physicists is well said. When they take a god-like stance their theories begin to be rather doubtful, especially when they get the facts wrong. 'Fraid I was one of those folk who unthinkingly accepted the heating up of meteors and spaceships as being due to air friction instead of compressibility. However, is there not *some* heating, at least, caused by friction? Thinking of how Concorde's skin heated up at supersonic speeds so that the fuselage actually lengthend!

Must watch out for that film "Supercollider" (if it's ever shown again). I did notice that it was on SyFy recently but of course tended to avoid anything on that channel, possibly mistakenly(?).

Dogs! I'm indifferent to them although I do have a childhood memory of a very large dog standing on hind legs, pinning me against a wall and breathing on my face. No biting but I was shaken! Prefer cats anyway!

So Jay Kinney doesn't like commenting on letters. Rather a pity that since letters make up the largest part of the zine, although this time there's more of you V is,of course, a kind of letterzine and what's wrong with that anyway? I do remember when that was an accepted subsection of fanac and we are talking about that "engaged response" (c. Paul Skelton) that can, and should, be interesting.

As you say, Taral Wayne's is a "star latter". If one is a science fiction fan (as we seem to be!) then there has to be agreement that the advances that have been made over the past couple of centuries have benefitted us all and none of us wants to go back to an agrarian society. We are mostly all living healthier, longer lives in this "industrialised" era. Certainly there's a lot of unnecessary waste and what Taral calls "iCrap" and there is doubt that the planet can support seven billion people. But, as fans, we have to be optimistic that science will find a way or, alternatively, war, disease and other calamities will reduce the population to sustainable levels.

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JOSEPH NICHOLAS

I noticed in the new Vibrator another burst of kneejerk invective from Philip Turner about climate change, which prompts me to wonder whether he actually has any argument to offer on the subject -- that is, a structured, detailed explanation for the observed phenomena that will stand as a robust alternative to the existing explanation: an alternative to put forward as a

scientific theory subject to experimental validation and from which predictions can be made. From his past comments on the subject, I would suspect not: he seems to prefer inchoate shrieking, refusing even to go down the typical denialist route of stooping to data only to wrench isolated examples from their context and shout "This proves things!" (But single data points in themselves prove nothing -- they demonstrate only that the people using them have no case to offer.) That being so, why should anyone take Philip Turner seriously?

(EDITOR: I think, Joseph, you are now so shell-shocked about this subject you are unable to differentiate when someone is a climate-change-denier and when someone would merely rather address the issue from another angle. I have no interest in proposing theories about climate change. I am not qualified to do so. But I do have opinions and theories about how the subject is being used politically for agendas that have absolutely nothing to do with the problem at hand, and that is what I for one am more interested in talking about. I don't think Philip Turner is any more scientifically qualified than me (or you) but he is responding from a deep distrust of how politicians and variously aligned think tanks are running rings round the public by claiming they knoiw best about evidence which is sometimes contradictory. And don't quote International Commissions' results to me as evidence for anything. They are not, they are at best concensus opinions and we know how worthless they are.)

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ALISON SCOTT BOOSTS THE FEMALE REPONSE TO VIBRATOR BY 100%

I boldly inserted my customary *Vibrator* joke into the Eastercon newsletter; you can retrieve it from https://www.mancunicon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Issue-5.pdf.

I would like to see the Health and Safety risk assessment for the job of black hole paparazzo.

I am, last I saw, a woman, but having been castigated for my clumsy binary gender views at Mancunicon, I have to say that I do not think it matters much what gender your correspondents identify with providing their letters are interesting, which they were.

As we surveyed rainy Manchester, noted cable geek Bill Burns told me that the damp atmosphere was critical for the cotton mills, and that key investors in the original transatlantic cables were doing so to get a heads up on spot cotton prices. Of a few days rather than a few milliseconds though.

It's important to remember that all dogs can be dangerous, even those of seemingly innocuous breeds. It's all a matter of training and discipline. Only this weekend Flick was telling me that her brother-in-law tripped over his Westie and fell down the stairs, breaking several bones and gouging a big chunk out of a wall.

Taral's letter was properly splendid, but one comment gave me pause. He speaks of the horror of learning to make music to enable folk dances. I go to parties quite often that work

on this exact principle; people play acoustic instruments, people dance, from time to time someone leads a cheery song or sings a more thoughtful one. It's an excellent form of entertainment and gives me some hope for our post electricity world.

Meanwhile, He celebrates home computers while disparaging the latest iCrap -- I am writing this on my iPad while we drive home from Mancunicon, having fished the most recent *Vibrator* out of the Net as I didn't have it with me. It would be hard to overstate how important this tiny toy computer is to my life, and what an advance it is over the previous "iteration". Though I am a big fan of buying new devices iteratively until they get 'good enough', and then stopping.

I wonder, Graham, if you're a little older than most Bowie fans. I remember Space Oddity having a huge effect on me, not its first time around. I think I was about ten, and then, as now, few stories aimed at children end with the death of the hero (the exception then was the Arthurian cycle, which is both much longer and holds out the possibility of return). It was so gloriously perfect, and such a counter to the razzmatazz of the space program. I think I've written before about there being a few pop songs that had immediate life-changing effect on me from the first hearing; Space Oddity wasn't quite one of them because I was not so good at listening to songs then and it took me several goes to understand the plot.

(EDITOR: It's true I am old Father Alison, but Bowie was born in 1947 and I was born in 1946, so you could say we were contemporaries. I remember Mike Moorcock playing an album of his whilst we drove in his Dodge (Charles Platt driving) between studios in West London. As I think I might have said, I likde Bowie then, like everybody else did, he was flavour of the month for several years, but we parted company when he started to get too much up his own arse with the heLP of Brian Eno and also started crooning like Dean Martin.)

Alison Scott can be found at alison.scott@gmail.com

THE LAST WORD AS USUAL COMES FROM ROBERT LICHTMAN

If there was a period in my life when I worried about not receiving Valentine's cars, it's lost in the sands of time, my memory banks, or both. When I was in the first handful of grades in our "elementary school" system, each teacher had everyone in the class preparing Valentine cards for everyone – some of them would even hand out batches of cards to students for whose family this would have been a burden – and we were expected to personalize each card. Perhaps this was a handwriting exercise in part. On the day itself, all the cards would be distributed so that every student had a card from every other student. It was oh so *democratic* that way. No one's feelings were in theory hurt. This practice started in first grade and continued through perhaps as late as fifth grade. By sixth grade at least some of us were getting interested in the opposite sex, teachers were sensitive to that, and this wholesale method of Valentining was dropped.

The lost years would have been from that time on through high school. If there was someone I was sweet on and/or who was sweet on me, perhaps we shyly exchanged cards. I

really don't remember. Am I shielding myself from 60+ year old rejection, pain and suffering?

As for that "consternation about detecting gravitational waves, illustrated in the_media by pictures of black holes colliding presumably taken by Black Hole paparazzi," I agree with you about the incredible amounts of money sunk into making ever more sensitive measuring devices to go further and further back in "time" to see what was going on billions and billions of years ago. It's like the mirror opposite of the much-vaunted doomsday clock that's been ticking away since 1947 to let us know how close as a species we're coming to wipe ourselves out with the fruit of our never-ending arms race. What does give me pause is that these types of cosmic events that don't mean much to us because they're happening (or have happened) so far away and so long ago *could* become personal by suddenly striking our little galaxy without warning and we would be erased instantly (and hopefully without much individual pain). Usually I can insert the proper mental distance between myself and that remote eventuality. But still it niggles. My planet, my family, my fanzine collection! Gone in a flash!

About exchange transfer funds you write, "Anything you Google will not tell you very accurately what they actually do, in understandable terms." Despite your warning I gave it a shot. My eyes soon glazed over, but your further comment that "their basic business is making money by doing as little as possible" seems more or less correct. However, that "little as possible" is only achievable if one has extensive serious training in mathematical and financial realms. So I certainly don't fault Nathan Kettle for having found a job that makes good use of his specific skills – and is probably making him a nice salary, to boot.

Most of the dogs I've experienced in my life have been of the "charmingly stupid and nonviolent" type, as you describe Dr. Rob's flock. But when I was briefly a mail carrier in San Francisco back in 1970, I had occasion to encounter the other kind – who barked and snarled and tried to jump the fence in the yard of a house where I was supposed to deliver mail. In individual cases they weren't out and about every day, so mail could be delivered most of the time. But there was one house up in Bernal Heights where the dog – a big one, with a particularly vicious I'm-going-to-kill-you snarl – was never absent. I was not required to deliver mail under these circumstances, and the post office issued each of us carriers an aerosol spray container of some Mace-like substance (perhaps it actually was Mace) that we could use at our discretion. I'd stored up quite a lot of mail for that house and was tired of having to add it every day to the heavy weight I was required to carry in my mail pouch. So one day, greeted as always as described above, I got it out, waited for the dog to leap high so I wouldn't have to lean over the fence and possibly give him a shot at biting me on the arm or (horrors!) the face, and gave him a hearty spray right in his vicious face. The first one didn't really calm him down, so I did it again. That time he slowed and went away from the fence. Ready to give him a third shot, I opened the gate, dropped the mail on the front porch (rather than have to shove it all, one or two pieces at a time, through the mail slot on the front door), and got the hell out of there. After that event, for some reason that dog was never present again.

Jay Kinney writes, "Reading LOCs on previous issues which consisted of LOCs on previous issues, begins to feel like an infinite regression, if you get my drift." Oh, I do. That's the

danger with fanzines largely devoted to letters – and in the past, when apas were in flower, the complaint made about the nature of many of them: comments on comments on comments. But of course, taking a wider view, isn't this the nature of a lot of human interaction? At least you as editor introduce New Stuff in every issue, which heLPs broaden the feedback in the letters – and eventually the conversation moves on.

Like Fred Smith regarding *Mad* "I preferred the comic to the 'slick' magazine that it became mainly, I think, because it was less, er, colourful and had used up all the lampoons of other comics," but with a caveat: the first half-dozen issues of the magazine were still under the editorship of Harvey Kurtzman. The change was made to evade the strictures of the Comics Code, which wiped out the other EC titles. I was buying the comic and then the magazine back then and liked both. But then Kurtzman left and the editorship went to one Al Feldstein. Although Feldstein brought in some new artists, most notably Don Martin, his taste largely didn't match mine – they were juvenile – and I stopped buying the magazine.

As for Fred's wondering what happened to Wally Wood, perhaps Steve Stiles might have some inside scoop on the subject but it seems to me that Wood's life and times are pretty well covered in his Wikipedia entry: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wally Wood

Having undergone it myself just a few months ago – after avoiding it for a dozen years (ten of which were allowed because of how clean my colon was in 2004) – I had great sympathy for Nic, who writes: "Speaking of arse, I reluctantly have the appointment with the up-the-arse procedure on Friday, meaning that a mere few hours from now I'm allowed 2 toast then fuck all else for over 24 hours, and am scheduled at an inconvenient (ahem) time for me to start drinking the nasty spoo that's supposed to flush you out so the camera can presumably be unobstructed in where it needs to get." According to the report I got afterwards, I didn't flush out enough – even though I followed the instructions to the letter – so that the po' doctor had what he claims to be a hard time making his way through the underbrush. And he says that he found a few minor things and wants me to do it again in only three years. I'm not thrilled about that!

On the back page you write, "I seriously thought it was time to give up this lark and confess I was somewhat lacking as a fan-editor and thinking perhaps going for a monthly sprint was the wrong way to go about it, compared to slow old plodders like Robert Lichtman or the Fishlifters steadily producing substantive work." You're on a different page than me, Claire and Mark. Our fanzines take time and a different kind of effort to produce than yours. But as that nice Mr. Meara noted, *Vibrator* is a focal point fanzine – the fate that falls upon anyone with so much time and energy that he or she can publish frequently – the more frequent the better.

Such fanzines often are largely devoted to letters. The oldest example of this would be Forrest J Ackerman and Myrtle Dougles's *Voice of the Imagi-Nation*, which grew out of an earlier fanzine theoretically published by the Los Angeles chapter of the Science Fiction League – although Warner reveals that the actual production was also largely the work of Forry and Morojo. Its letter column was its most popular feature, and after it folded at the

end of 1938 that letter column – which was called "Voice of the Imagi-Nation" – emerged in January 1939 as a freestanding fanzine. It never achieved the blazing monthly schedule of *Vibrator*, but once World War 2 started it was a rallying point (another term for "focal point") for the tight-knit fandom of that time, with many issues containing fascinating letters from fans who'd found themselves in the armed forces. There were 50 issues altogether between January 1939 and July 1947, although the last two were published with big gaps (it really ended with #48 in November 1945, with the end of the war reducing the need for such a focal point).

More recent fanzines of considerable frequency that served as the same sort of gathering place as *Vibrator* would include Ted Pauls's *Kipple* (at least 170 issues between 1960 and 1969, although it veered into political discussion for the most part after the first few years), Andy Hooper et al's *Apparatchik* (80 issues between March 1994 and June 1997), Arnie Katz's *Vegas Fandom Weekly* (114 issues between November 2004 and November 2008), and less longlived efforts as Andy Hooper's *Flag* and Sandra Bond's *Jiant*. I wish both of the latter were still happening.

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TALES OF A LAS VEGAS TAXI-DRIVER BY NIC FAREY

MIKE MEARA SPECIAL EDITION

I had a bit of an at-fault incident the other day, which I was going to lead this column with anyway, but it might also be quite apposite to a bit of chatter about self-driving cars which has graced A Certain Discussion Group lately. I was picking up at Delano for my first ride on Saturday (which is Friday night out for the rest of the world), and I drew a party of drunk girls who were evidently "celebrating" a bride-to-be, judging by the veil on one of 'em. As they were getting in, I noted to myself that they didn't exactly seem too happy. Now when there's a line of punters waiting, you want to get moving quick so the doorman can load the next one, and I made the mistake of starting to pull away before the last girl was in the back of the cab. Though I only moved a few inches, I got (quite rightly) an instant rebuke from the doorman ("Hey! You need to pay attention!"), but one of the girls went into instant hysteria, screaming at the rest to get out, which they did, the doorman asking if she was hurt and if he needed to call security, as the bird went quickly into incoherence. I'm guessing that he clocked they were pretty fucked-up, possibly drugged-up, and in a multi-tasking epic quietly loaded the next ride into my cab with a wave (basically behind his back) while trying to talk down the screamer. That got me out of there, and I owe him a big drink.

Even professional drivers are going to have moments of inattention and fuck-up here and there (although I suspect that the percentage of ours in terms of time and distance on the road ought to be a lot less that the non-professionals), and really you just hope that when your fuck-up happens it's going to be trivial.

Would a self-driving vehicle have avoided this? Well, almost certainly yes, but in the scrums that are club night clear-outs, such a vehicle would end up motionless for hours trying to get past the club-goers, unless they were completely fenced off from the vehicle travel lanes, which would probably look like the workers from *Metropolis* trudging their way to their daily toil. An obvious added safety feature might be that a vehicle automatically shifts to 'Park' when any door (or hood, or trunk) is opened, and won't permit going into a drive gear until they're all closed. No doubt that's something that manufacturers would heavily resist as an added cost.

More than a few of my fares ask me about the Evil Uber, and last week that actually turned into a convo about the likelihood of self-driving vehicles on the roads (I think the bloke was some kind of network engineer), and we agreed that they'd really only work if the whole system was networked together, and *all* the vehicles on the roads were self-driving. In that case, I thought, why not just have trams and tram tracks (or trains and train tracks for longer journeys) and eliminate individual vehicles altogether? All transportation would be essentially "public", and oh dear, socialism...

MIKE MEARA, PART 2

2016 generally has started out oddly, I might even say disquietingly, in terms of issues on the road and around town. I got a ride to Spring Valley Hospital, nice couple, and I seem to recall me and the bloke half had a conversation about the relative merits of different kinds of fruit. I never had blueberries until I got to the States, but now they're one of my favorites, probably neck-and-neck with raspberries. As I was driving round to drop the couple at the ER (A&E, in British English), there were a couple of blokes coming out (actually around the corner on the street), looking very hopeful as I came by. Rolling down the window, I asked if they needed a cab, and getting the affirmative, said I'd be back there to get 'em in a couple of minutes. It turned out the one bloke was a police officer from Tucson, and his mate had overdone it a bit (or a lot, judging from the stains on his shirt). We had a very interesting talk on the way back to the Luxor, and I was telling him about the pretty insane homicide numbers this year so far in Las Vegas. In 2015, we'd had something like 35 or 36 homicides at this point in the year, whereas this year we're already up over 90! One of the newspapers, I think, worked out that there'd been a killing on average every 46 hours since the start of the year. I also read that homicides are up generally nationwide, so it's not just a Vegas thing. It's probably more proof that (at least low-level) criminals are stupid, since due to the ubiquity of surveillance, Las Vegas is one of the worst places to commit a crime, since almost everyone who does gets caught. It also surprises passengers when I tell them that Vegas is also one of the safest cities in the world to be a cab driver, since we also have cameras in the taxis.

The other thing I've noted is that to all appearances, everyone woke up on January 1st and decided to make a New Year's resolution to drive like a fuckin' idiot. I reckon there's been a major accident of some kind just about every day. I get laughing agreement from most fares when some prat cluelessly changes lanes (often without indicating), and I observe: "I bet that's

a California tag on that car". Nine times out of ten I'll be right, and I've had at least one ride remark "You're not the first cab driver we've had say that!". I'm given to understand that Audi drivers are the worst of the worst these days (when did that change from Volvo?), and I also wrote long, long ago in *This Here...* about the dodginess of anyone who has a Jesus fish decal, since they seem to go about as if God will protect them. The trifecta would therefore be an Audi with a Jesus fish *and* Cali tags. Personally I want to be at least two blocks away from that one.

MIKE MEARA, EPILOGUE (GAY SEX)

To the undoubted delight of my reader (Unc, J), after a serious dearth on this topic, I do have a new incident to report. Weekends, and sometimes early in the week, I'll stage at Piranha, Vegas' premier gay nightclub which anchors the "fruit loop". That usually gets busy around 5am with people having hooked up going off to do unspeakable things in the privacy of their homes or hotel rooms. On the weekend nights there's a taco truck parked outside, so you often end up waiting a minute for people to get their food, which was indeed the case when I loaded a very rotund bloke and two girls the other week, with a conversation between them going over and around the cab that people ought to hurry up and get the fuck in, like now. One of the girls was very Amazonian, the other quite pint-sized by comparison. So finally with rotund bloke in the front seat and girls in back, I determine that we're off to the Flamingo (not that far), and no sooner had we got in motion than pint-size is all over Amazon in the back, knuckle-deep downstairs and mouth full higher up. Delight may turn to disappointment for the reader (J, Unc) in realizing that I determine this much more by inference than by actual observation, though it's certainly feasible to wish for a few more red lights on the way so we can be better eyewitnesses, though admittedly Mr. Rotund in front is almost completely disinterested in anything that those terrible girls might be doing. At one point, making what passes for genteel conversation, he said "Sorry about my taco breath, by the way". "Actually", I accurately riposted, "It's more tuna breath I'm getting in here right now". The Oh-God-I-Can't-Wait thoroughness of the interaction was certainly demonstrated by the adjustments Amazon quickly carried out when she got out (tucking boob back in dress, pulling knickers back up). It's nice to see visitors having a good time, mind you I'm pretty sure her ankle clipped me round the ear'ole a couple of times.

THE LICHTMAN/MEARA GALLERY OF INE FART

At-fault: The words you never want to hear after any accident or incident. As you might guess, the insurance premiums and conditions for cabs are pretty horrendous, and Lucky Cab's policy has something like a \$10k deductible. Their interesting incentive to be careful is to make the driver liable for the first \$3,000 of any at-fault incident (deducted from your paycheck over a year or so). A lot of drivers don't much like that, and there's an argument to be made that a lapse of concentration is inevitable at some point (see above). That notwithstanding, I'm more of the opinion that it's a good encouragement to drive carefully (although not timidly), an enjoinder that sadly many drivers do not appear to heed.

Audi: An excuse to drive like an insensitive shithead. Also, how Texans greet each other.

Blueberries: Not to be confused with dingleberries, which are not as nice.

California tag: The driver is clueless.

Can of Spam: (qv **Delano**) Something which it is barely possible to be deader than.

Delano: Used to be called 'the hotel' (yes, lower case) and is the sister tower of Mandalay Bay. Quiet-to-can-of-spam-dead during the week, the nearest exit door to the 'Light' nightclub in Mandalay is actually here, so on Friday and Saturday nights (my Saturday and Sunday shift, in other words), it's always busy and so I start there for my first ride since it's close to the yard. Manny Pacquiao stayed there when he was in town for his fight with Mayweather, having rather symbolically refused to stay at MGM where the match was taking place. Mandalay Bay and Delano are also MGM properties.

Fruit Loop: The small area around Naples and Paradise (streets) which is home to gay-friendly establishments, not only Piranha but also QuadZ video bar and FreeZone. Other definitions expand this area to include other well-known bars and clubs.

"Taxi Lane Only": A sign which apparently translates to "feel free to drive and/or park here" in California.

Volvo: Never trust a vehicle named so closely after female reproductive parts.

-- Nic Farey

The finishing line is in sight... A final spurt... Oh, now I'll have to clean that up. Yes, Vibrator has Come Again. This issue was proof-read by an Artificial Intelligence named Pat Charnock who obviously didn't have anything better to do at the time.

Thanks to Jim Barker for the cover. Today is April 1st so this seems an apt moment for me to announce that this is the last ever issue of Vibrator. Let's see who that fools... It's not only April 1st but it's almost Spring. The sun is out, the magpies are chattering and frankly any day when I don't have to have a blood test is one to be celebrated.

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