



**April 2016**

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Oh, bugger me, Vibrator 27 already. The mantra has already begun “Must get the pages in the right order, must get the pages in the right order.”

Time to cobble together a new issue. Isn't the English language wonderful \*Cobble together a new issue\* suggests here I am labouring over my last, trying to sew together another seamless issue, a cordwainer, when I am possibly more likely to construct a clod, er, a clog, or a sabot, but does that make me a saboteur? Well, I was accused fairly recently, unfairly, I think, of trying to put the boot in. So here goes.

People often ask how I go about editing my fanzines. Well, no, they usually ask \*why\* I go about publishing them, as in haven't I got anything better to do. Well usually throughout the month I make lots of scribbled notes, then when the last few days of the deadline come up, I panic and revisit them and try to order them into some shape. Then I have a couple of drinks and try it all again. The having a couple of drinks also covers the \*why\* of it because eventually I don't get to the point of asking myself. Rodney Leighton doesn't like me or my fanzine because he thinks we are both obsessed with drink. Well, tough luck, Rodney. I Shtill think you are my Bhesht Frend. It reminds me of the old dichotomy between English and American fans at cons, where the American fans though the English drank too much and the English thought the Americans didn't drink enough. I seem to have spent my lifetime buying half pints for visiting US fans. I mean, come on, what is that about? I put it down to class. English fandom came out of a working class where working men weren't ashamed to go down to the pub every evening and fry their brains with ten pints so they could forget the tediousness of their upbringing and everyday lives. Whilst US fandom probably derived from a middle-class brought up on sipping their martinis when they returned home every evening after work. Man Men contrasted with Andy Capp, perhaps. Well, there you are, surely that's a link worthy of anyone's comment.

You don't have to be drunk to write a loc at [graham@cartiledgeworld](mailto:graham@cartiledgeworld), but it might help me read it.

Try and do it by May 27<sup>th</sup> 2016.

Thanks to Steve Stiles for another great cover. Remember to vote for him for a Hugo if it is not already too late. Otherwise he will set his possum on you.

# SPICY TALES FROM EARL KEMP

I have just had an interesting and rewarding experience revisiting my own past and feel the need of sharing same with you.

I've just read a collection of stories from the Spicy magazines of my youth. It is an in-process work not yet made public or scheduled for publication so I'll avoid all of that here and now.

All the stories were published when I was six years old and, as far as I can remember I did not read them when they were published. However I had a long, exciting, and lust-filled acquaintance with same when I was moving into my teenage years. As well as I can remember, I really enjoyed my tenure with those magazines way back when. I must have been 13 or 14 when I discovered them and thought they were somehow produced for my secret enjoyment. The shocking and exciting things that were happening to me personally, in terms of growing up, becoming a teen, feeling strange urges thomping through my body, especially the genitals, confused me and to an extent terrified me. I thought it was just me, some odd thing that separated me from the rest of the kids I grew up with.

The stories in the Spicy magazines were blatantly sexual. Keep in mind that this was 1935 when those stories were first published, I was six and the US was a radically different world...a planet away at least from reality or anything remotely related to today's perception of reality. The illustrations alone in those magazines were erotic, exciting, promising thrills unknown and sensations inexperienced and orgasms unlimited and continuous.

The main characters in those stories were almost totally nude. The men as well as the women were startlingly beautiful. Just to see any one of them at a distance was to fall immediately into intense lust and desire.

And they were almost always nearly nude. The females would be wearing only tattered and torn panties and the men threadbare and almost transparent boxer underwear that left not one single pubic hair unseen. What a world! What a sight for teenage minds....

Black people were treated very poorly and always were villains or at least rapists. Women didn't fare much better, they were absolutely only one thing, well lubricated, always ready, and with legs wide-spread for the continuous pleasure of the males standing in line to sample those lush, delightful charms.

And the major realization I had in reading those icons of my past was how very much my life had followed that Spicy outlay of pulp magazines. I never thought of it that way before now. Yet it was the blatant pretence that Spicys were pornography that stood out the most in my thoughts. Perhaps it was just those magazines that led me, helplessly to do anything different, into my publishing career at Blake, Corinth, Greenleaf, or any of their other many publishing names over the years. We

began the same way, with totally clean...not one "bad" word, one mention of genitalia, out of place. Clean, clean but for some reason forbidden publications that had to be repressed at any cost...millions and millions of taxpayer dollars spent in attempting to crush just those clean books, however suggestive they might have been.

It was also another radically different time with regard to writing, spelling, editing, proofreading, etc. The inexcusable errors were rampant through the Spicy magazines tenure. Time has taken care of much of that, the spelling of words has changed and attention to detail moved into a digital era where things like editing, proofreading, are immaterial and first draft, uncleaned writing becomes major publishers bestsellers.

No one has pride any more in the things they write, print, publish. Honour has no meaning, only sales \$\$\$ count.

Please don't think that this rant is negative. I don't. If anything it taught me how much I have changed over the decades, trying to keep up with language, with comprehension, with today's realities, whenever today happened to be.

What a fucked up literary world we live in.

--- Earl Kemp

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## **FISH AND CHIPS**

Fish in batter. Why? Batter doesn't add anything to the taste of the fish. Batter exists to provide an envelope for the fish to be steamed in. After that it should be discarded. So why make a selling point of it. Similarly fish in bread crumbs which is even more stupid and just something frozen food manufacturers think people want when they really don't. How about fish in a light dusting of flour, well, that's just something to put on a packet containing fish. Fish. Just fish. That's all we really need. Okay?

Don't get me wrong. As the child of a Yorkshire couple I grew up with fish and chips. We spent a lot of time in the quaint Yorkshire town of Haworth and I remember almost every evening there was a walk up the long steep high street to the chip shop at the very top. The arduous walk made the reward of the fish and chips even more succulent.

The best thing about fish is that it is naturally flaky. The best fish and chips I ever had was from a fish and chip shop in the Elephant and Castle when I was a white van driver and used to stop by quite regularly. But going back to my Yorkshire connection, the second best fish and chips I ever had was in Skipton at Bizzie Lizzies

when I was there for D. West's Wake. I was feeling lonely and desolate and it cheered me up to find such comfort food.

--- Graham Charnock

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## WEMBLEY SWEET WEMBLEY

I've written about my childhood before. This is an attempt to pull a few strands together.

I was born in Wembley in 1946. I say Wembley but it was actually Alperton, a small pimple on the larger wart of Wembley itself. My parents had an end of terrace house in a small close. The close backed onto the Grand Union Canal, so I spent a lot of time exploring it. It ran westwards to Perivale and Horsenden Hill, a local landmark, which was good for kite-flying and for rolling down hills the way kids always do. It wasn't until I got a bicycle that I tried exploring eastwards to the Paddington basin. Nowadays both Wembley and Alperton have been overtaken by Asian communities. When I revisit them I find very little to remind me of my childhood. That is all in my memories

There were two public libraries I visited, one in Ealing Road, the direct link between Alperton and Wembley itself. The other was in Barham Park which was a longer walk, across One Tree Hill and into Sudbury Town. The Ealing Road one was where I explored my interest in rocketry, taking out books on Chuck Yeager and Konstantin Tsiolkovsky. In Barham Park my interest in Children's Literature such as Mumphy and Doctor Doolittle metamorphosed into my taking out books on Organic Chemistry, which were frankly not so exciting.

It's hard to get chronological here. I have mentioned One Tree Hill, a Hill which in truth had more than one tree. But it had an overgrown jungle forest where me and a group of friends would re-enact WWII comics, hiding out in natural bunkers, and squeezing off eek-eeek-eek stuff with pretend machine guns. Also in One Tree Hill was a dental clinic where I had my earliest treatment and learnt to fear the rubberized smell of ether whilst dentists exytracted my teeth. In the parade of shops just below One Tree Hill, though, there was a newsagent where I first found comics in the form of Young Marvelman Magazine. I was never a big comics fan, but Young Marvelman requested letters so I sent them one. It was my first published work, and was a story about how my pet cat came and stood on my chest when I whistled for it. Not only did they print it and pay me five shillings, but they printed it and paid me twice. They must have been really desperate.

My parents moved down to London after the war when my father got a job as an engineer at Wembley Stadium. He was really an odd jobs man. His background as a

dirt-track rider in Yorkshire and a mechanic in Haworth's local garage got him a position on the support team for the Wembley Lions, a speedway team riding a post-war wave of enthusiasm for the sport. But there wasn't much he couldn't turn his hand to, from general welding fixes about the stadium, to chauffeuring racing greyhounds to and from Heathrow to the Stadium's own kennels. His role with the speedway team quite often took him away to exotic Scandinavian climes for International Championships. He also had a fully equipped garage set-up at our house, from which he freelanced, building bespoke equipment for speedway riders and mending broken gear. Many (quite) famous speedway riders would turn up to use his services. He was also a hobbyist and made wrought-iron furniture for our house and garden, and once built a go-kart from scratch, which my brothers and I enjoyed driving up and down our small close. I think his relationship with my mother suffered somewhat because he would spend most of his time in his \*shed\* and she definitely felt neglected. Once he was invited to attend a Speedway Reunion at the Connaught Rooms in Kensington. My mother refused to go with him, so he asked me. My father was not used to formal set-ups and it was embarrassing for me to witness him being so obviously tongue-tied and intimidated by the formality of dress conventions.

Of course I had many opportunities to visit the \*back-scenes\* of Wembley Stadium and it came as a small surprise to me that my father's own workshops had huge walls of fish-tanks, bubbling away with hoards of exotic fishes. It was an obsession he never bought home with him.

Wembley of course had been the site of the Great Exhibition of 1923 when a whole accessional parade had been built in the Egyptian style. When I was around it was still there. But all the Grand Halls were closed, of course, and sealed up, and the place looked like the aftermath of a J.G. Ballard novel. I loved wandering about it imagining what had been and what might still be.

I was into model building when I was a kid. Not plastic model kits, but mostly things built out of balsa wood. Someone opened a hardware store in the parade a hundred yards from me and I hung about it frequently. There was also a craft store on Ealing Road, halfway to my library, so that was useful for picking up sheet materials. Mostly I built Kiel-Kraft model planes but was seduced at one stage by my love of rocketry to buy some Jetex engines from Wally Kilminster's shop up in Wembley proper and tie them to scratch built models of both planes and cars. I remember the smell of burnt flesh on my fingertips as I tried to pry the red-hot engines out of their crashed vehicles.

Later train spotting was a big thing. The LMS mainline ran through Wembley Central station and in the approach to it there was a footbridge, known as the Ironbridge, which offered many splendid views of these mighty steam beasts either approaching from Kings Cross or going down to it. It was a hang-out for local kids whether interested in train spotting or not. Some of them were more interested in

diving over the fence separating the bridge from the track and playing chicken with approaching trains. I can only imagine the heart-attacks they precipitated in those engines drivers. There was also a bridge spanning the two Underground lines which fed beneath the main line, and I remember my school friend Tom Barber walking across the parapet with a fifty foot drop onto live rails beneath him. Ah, the things we did for fun.

North of Wembley Central there was a public footpath with stairs leading down to the track, with only a small wall separating us from incoming expresses on the main line. A favourite game was to place nails or small coins on the track, for the trains to flatten them. I don't recall any kids being killed playing that game, but perhaps we actually knew what we were doing in those days.

I should talk about the primary school I went to, which was Vicar's Green, walkable in ten minutes. I enjoyed that school a lot. I first went there as an infant when we were \*forced\* to take an afternoon nap on camp beds. There was a large recreation field attached where we used to play rounders. It also had an underground shelter left over from the second world war. I revisited it recently and a kind head teacher showed me round a bit bemused by my peculiarly detailed reminiscences of the things like the Almond tree in the quadrangle. I have written about my first love, and it was here at Vicars Green I found my second love. Maggie Murphy was a dark-haired Irish girl with an intelligence I thought matched my own. We used to do Country Dancing in the main hall and when couples were asked to pair off, Maggie inevitably chose me. That was pretty much of a boost for my pre-adolescent sensibilities. Eventually eleven pluses split us up. She went to a Girls' Grammar school in Ealing, and I went to a mixed Grammar School in Greenford.

Greenford Grammar has lots of conflicting memories in my mind. It was hell to get to, involving three changes of buses. The first person I met when I went there was a guy called Ken Shorey. He was okay but I wasn't wildly in love with him. My best friend was Peter Panayi, and we kept in touch after school. My first attempt at actually dating was with a girl I'd met at the wedding of a friend from school, Richard Miles. For some reason he wanted me to be his best man, and she was a bridesmaid. We went out a few times and I actually took her to a showing of 2001 in the Wset End where Brian Aldiss and David Wingrove were sitting in front of me. Shortly after this I received a Dear John letter from her, saying, guess what, she was still enamoured with her first love who was... Ken Shorey. I gave up dating for several years until I met Pat in Willesden County Court. (Ken Shorey went on to become a head teacher in a local school, but did not marry my date).

We sold the family house in Alperton when my mother was moved into a care home, but I still dream about it virtually every night.

--- Graham Charnock

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## **LETTER COLUMN**

Vibrator 26 was the issue of the great pagination cock-up, teaching me always to leaf through copies before I send them out. I'm not expect a vast LOC response this issue in view of that, but at least Philip Turner managed to read it, or enough of it to comment upon:

### **PHILIP TURNER FRLC, FRAF, CBFN, CBA, DEA, BSc Hons.**

You would be well advised to check your next bill from Mr. Virgin to make sure you've been let off four days' broadband. If not, howl like a banshee and complain vigorously. I hope you recover soon from being a planter fascist (which explains the cover pic) as gardening buffs can be quite X-treme at times.

If we do get driverless cars, that's Taxi Nic's column in the dustbin of history. As for a network of cars; by the time the technology is available, all vehicles will have been taken into public ownership under the Corbyn Carriage Consolidation sCam and you won't see the inside of a car unless you're friends with your local Labour party.

125 LPs, Old Curt? So just a dabbling amateur rather than a serious collector? I'd say my front parlour, which used to be the home of Romiley Jazz Archive's LPs, would make Graham's mind boggle. There's a clear path to my dad's old PC, which is connected to an A3 colour printer, and the rest of the space is full of stuff waiting to be approved for retention or discarding. Not much of a welcome for the Pensions Person.

By denying himself the Syfy channel, Fred Smith is doing himself out of the *Sharknado* series and other monumentally daft creature features, which seems like an act of masochism. But on the other hand, he's not subjecting himself to all the daft global warming catastrophes, so maybe he knows what he's doing.

Crumbs! I just been trolled by J. Nicholas. But why the Spanish Inquisition if my views are so unserious? Okay, Joseph, if you really want me to, I will produce a beautifully researched and crafted mechanism for the way the Earth's climate works, and it will knock your socks right off. But it will cost you twenty-three million pounds. Because if the Global Warming Fraudsters aren't doing it for free, I'm bugged if I will.

FYI, Graham, back in the Sixties, when everyone else was too stoned to know which planet they were on, I took a degree in chemistry and found it surprisingly easy to get a job in the Research Department of the local branch of ICI, doing real science. And decades of politician watching have left me well able to sort politics and science fiction from actual science. My mother used to be highly amused by letters from Stockport Council sent on behalf of a gent who wanted the world to

know that he was a B A Hons. Maybe I would be taken more seriously if I started using my letters. On the other hand, recalling the amount of derision heaped on the head of Mr. Hons, maybe not.

According to Taxi Nic, the good citizens of Vegas and elsewhere in the US are doing their bit to reduce the world's population. Nice to see that someone is making an effort.

*(EDITOR: Now would seem to be the time to kick Joseph when he's down, if anybody else wants to join in I will willingly give them air-space. Joseph doesn't seem to see the irony, or the plain stupidity, of companies like TATA trading \*Get Off Free For Producing Carbon\* Bonds, and then justifying it by saying too many such certificates were produced. It is a neat analogy in itself for the whole global warming debacle with academic bodies falling over themselves to produce a veritable pollution of research papers, clogging up the media but certainly not their bank balances.)*

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### **DAVE COCKFIELD**

It was almost certainly past the deadline to create a loc for Vibrator 2.0.25 but I felt that if I didn't sit down at the laptop and knock something up I'd never get past my loccers block.

While staring at a blank WORD page I suddenly heard tons of fun cascading through my letterbox courtesy of Royal Mail. Flyers for the local kebab joint and Domino's, money trawls from The British Legion and the mpfa, both of whom I support, two offers of insurance to cover my funeral expenses, the latest copy of the CAMRA newspaper, What's Brewing, 2 cds (Old Time Angels – Jim Lauderdale and Personal File – Johnny Cash), 1 Blu Ray (a French release of the Cincinnati Kid), and 2 hardcover books (The Ninth Configuration – William Peter Blatty and Grandmasters of Chess – Harold C Schomberg). The loc naturally got put back while I perused my wonderful haul of goodies.

The next day the delivery was sparse, a copy of Vibrator 2.0.26.

What I planned to comment on was Dangerous Dogs. In my working days I used to arrive at my Estate about 5am after a night shift and have to walk about quarter of a mile home. For a while I was quite terrified because two ginormous Rottweilers that were let loose at night used to follow me home. Fortunately it eventually dawned on me that they were not aggressive and just wanted a friendly word and a scratch behind the ears. They are long gone. Now the Estate is full of Wannabees who strut their stuff with pit bulls and the like. You often see groups with their dogs desperate to get at other dogs just held out of reach. Many have scars and often on

a Saturday night you can hear the sounds from across the lake of dogs presumably fighting. This has been reported to the Boys in Blue but they seem pretty ineffectual when it comes to stopping it. Now that all dogs have to have an identity chip by law it will be interesting if there is a crackdown as I can't see many of these dogs having any trace of their owner implanted into them.

Now on to Vibrator 26:

I have to take you to task Graham. In your editorial for Vibrator 2.0.26 you imply that you print photographs of public toilets frequented by myself. In fact you have only ever printed the warning sign associated with one of these salubrious establishments, never an actual photograph of it.

I therefore thought that you and Philip Turner might like a couple of Pissoir Pics from Charing Cross and Camden Town. I haven't yet had the chance to frequent the one mentioned by Jim Linwood outside Vauxhall Station.

I am in awe of your Internet Customer Service experience. You received actual help from someone in India who also turned out to be a polite lady. Well at least she was able to fix you up with an engineer. My only experience was with an Indian chap who could barely speak English. I assume he was Indian because everyone says that is where these call centres are. I'm with BT and over 40 minutes I was given various instructions that were increasingly sarcastic because based on various tests I was told that my Internet was working, the signal was strong, and there was nothing wrong with my equipment. There was no need to get personal but he implied that a). I didn't know what I was doing and b).that my laptop, with its built in Wi-Fi function was fucked up. I hold my hand up to the former but not the latter. After he had hung up on me, probably because I was shouting in frustration by that time, I set about finding my Hub instruction manual. 20 minutes later I read something that the advisor apparently had not known. There was a little hole in the back of the HUB. I pressed a pin into it to reboot everything and then reconnected from scratch. Lo and behold it worked. It is just as well that it was a free 0800 call. For a while I considered applying to BT for a job but I didn't fancy relocating to India.

I was touched by your story of first love. Mine is much less prosaic. When I was 13 I went camping with the Boy Scouts near Alston, the Girl Guides camped in the next field. Over a two week period I fell in love with Elaine who was slim, had long blonde hair and had a smile to die for. Beautiful does not adequately describe her. For some reason she liked talking to the dumpy fat kid and hanging out with him. That was me by the way. Weirdly we all travelled home in the back of a large removal van and upon arrival at the first stop in my home town of Hebburn it turned out that she was getting off. I pretended that it was my stop also as I wanted to get her address without my mates knowing. The van left and we rather shyly exchanged a kiss but before say anything her parents turned up in a car and whisked her off. I then had a half mile walk home with a very heavy Navy style kitbag. I never saw her again but I've never forgotten her.

*(Editor: Did you really mean \*less\* prosaic?)*

Up to the age of 14 I lived in a terrace house that comprised a large living room with a small pantry, and a large bedroom. My part of the bedroom was separated by a blanket hung from the ceiling. There was no hot water and the loo was in the back yard next to the coal bunker and clothes wash area. It was a shipyard house assigned to workers and the best we could get because my stepfather was only a labourer. Bath night was a tin bath in front of the fire at weekends filled with kettle after kettle of boiled water. My Dad bathed first, then my Mam, and then me in succession using the rapidly cooling water. My stepfather was a bit of a crook so we were the only family in the street to have a tv that had fallen off the back of a lorry. I vividly remember watching Dr Who but often missed the end of an episode because my Mother preferred Lost in Space and the channel had to be changed. We both loved Outer Limits and I had to hide under the dinner table to watch it because it was on so late and my belligerent stepfather was usually aggressively pissed by then. Many a night I went to bed more afraid of terrifying aliens than my stepfather.

He made money by charging neighbours a penny to watch our tv so I'd often come home from the park to find about 20 people crowded in the living room. Looking back I guess we were poor but it is not something I ever noticed.

Dave Cockfield can be found at [\*\*daverabban@gmail.com\*\*](mailto:daverabban@gmail.com)

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## **PAUL SKELTON**

Your piece on driver-less cars got me to thinking. I mean, if the car is driving itself and you have no control, just who is responsible if there is an accident...so I Googled it. I went onto a website that involved EY in the now forgotten name, which I suspect means it had something to do with Ernest & Young. An analyst there thought the Insurance industry needed to get its head around driver-less cars, and pdq at that. He felt there would be some transfer of responsibility to the manufacturer, but how that cost would be passed on to the purchaser (if at all, though surely it would have to be) was not mentioned.

He also assumed there would have to be a manual override facility, presumably in case of glitches or your hypothetical hacker trying to run you off the top of a cliff (though of course in this latter case he would probably also have deactivated the manual override). He also reckoned cars would have a sort of black-box, recording the time spent on automatic and that spent on manual, with insurance being costlier the greater the percentage of the latter.

But I wondered further. If you are not actually doing any driving, why should you continue to need a driving license? Furthermore, if you can get into and use these vehicles whilst being unable to drive by reason of never having passed your test, why should you not be able to get in and use them whilst being unable to drive for

other reasons (such as only being ten years old, or being stoned, or smashed out of your brains)? Could this signal the end of the 'designated driver'?

We have a front room, which we don't call the parlour. We don't use it much. It's where I keep my laptop and printer, and where I write my LoCs. It is also, by means of him sprawling across the back of the sofa in the window bay, Bestie's window on the World (I pointed out to him that Alison Scott mentioned that Westies can also be classed as dangerous and I'm sure his barking out of that window at passers-by, human or canine, has gotten louder with his enhanced street-cred). My music system is also in here, along with a wall-rack containing about 600 CDs, but with wireless headphones I have no particular need to be with it. We spend most of the daytime either in the kitchen/diner or the back room, the latter of which we generally refer to as the lounge, which I guess has now replaced the living-room or the sitting-room (or would that more likely have been a synonym for the parlour?). Cas often refers to the lounge as 'the front room', despite it being at the back but I'm never sure whether that's to do with her abysmal sense of direction or an early indication that I should start Googling 'Care Homes'.

This house was originally my parents' second and 'forever' Stockport home. The first, 10 Ilfracombe Road, had a through lounge. It also had a bathroom, which their previous small terraced home in Yorkshire did not. However, being typical Yorkshire folk they still brought the tin bath to Stockport with them when they moved here.

It ended up at the far end of the garden, behind the rose trellises, in a weed-covered and otherwise unused spot. It would fill with rainwater and was an ideal receptacle for the living creatures I brought back in jam jars from various local ponds. Except that it wasn't ideal, really. Oh, it was fine for tadpoles, and the larvae of water beetles or dragonflies. Frogs and newts would crawl out and escape on the first evening of their captivity, but the main way it was less than ideal was for the sticklebacks. They would invariably be found floating belly-up and totally lifeless the following morning. I could only conclude that galvanised tin baths were not meant for sticklebacks. That's why, to this day, I steer clear of mineral-supplement tablets which contain zinc. If it kills sticklebacks, it's not going in my mouth.

Ian Williams mentioned the 'Darrel T. Langart' book *Anything You Can Do*. Wasn't this the one with the alien Knipe? If so I can confirm that I enjoyed it too. I should stop now though as that's my second comment on the LoCs and I don't want Jay Kinney storming around and fulminating about 'That Damn Recursive Paul Skelton'!

Not of course that he has ever given me any indication that he is prone to storming and fulminating but Hey, best not to take a chance. Besides, I have to go and recursively read your previous issue to try and find out why Nick Farey's column seems to be especially dedicated to Mike Meara this time around.

Aha! So that was why. Me, I always read it, Nick. No probs there Boss. Honest!

**PS** – Harking back to your original piece in V25, about people using science mainly just to make money rather than to improve the human condition, and my response in V26, let me give a much stripped down quote (with large, though not I believe significant, chunks removed and represented by ellipses) from part of Robert Bloch’s speech at the 1948 Torcon, as reproduced in Edward N. McKeown’s *Torcon Report*...

“Let’s just assume that by science, I refer to technological developments, through pragmatic methods... So, what is the status of today’s science – in all fields? I think that it’s purely commercial. Certainly it is not a holy thing, set apart from worldly considerations... It is sad but true that even today scientists have the ability to create a much better world in theory – the work you do could be lessened, the clothing you wear could be bettered...your health could be guarded and longevity increased – but it would step on somebody’s toes; somebody who now subsidizes the sciences...”

So no change there then, despite his speech being delivered shortly after coming victorious out of a major war, with the promise of atomic power in the offing and with everyone (OK, everyone except Bob) eager to march optimistically into a brighter future.

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## **STEVE JEFFREY**

Nice cover. I've not seen a Jim Barker cartoon in ages.

First loves. My memory may be fooling me, but I have vague memories of being infatuated with a blond girl named Jacqueline when I was about 6 or 7. My only other memory of that time was seeing *Fireball XL5* on TV, and since Wiki tells me this was aired on ATV between 1962 and 1963, that pretty much fixes the time and place.

While work would be pretty impossible without the internet (I have largely abandoned looking up things in reference manuals for asking Uncle Google) I can go days and sometimes weeks without connecting at home, or even turning the computer on. That latter was a bit more forced recently when Vikki's monitor finally gave up the ghost (in the machine?) after weeks of having to reboot multiple times each morning before the monitor stayed on for more than 30 seconds (trying to log on when you can't see what you're typing is a bit hit and miss). Eventually, after a few weeks of this, we fixed the problem of Vikki's monitor by swapping mine over to her PC after which things went swimmingly, apart from the minor inconvenience of not having a monitor on my PC at home.

After all, I could still connect using my tablet.

You would think...

What's even more annoying, and the cause of more frustrated and angry outbursts than not having a connection, is having a connection that behaves in a sluggish, random and unpredictable manner, because the damn thing is either busy updating 20 apps in the background and/or pops up a message every five seconds to say "Firefox/GMail/Launcher isn't responding. Do You want to close it?" No, I want to throw the bloody tablet across the room until it starts behaving itself properly.

Mind you, our router is about 15 years old, and while it works for anything cabled into the Ethernet ports in the back, the wireless speed is probably pretty crap by today's standards.

I still have most of my old vinyl records, apart from a couple of dozen I traded in at Beggars Banquet and Notting Hill record exchange in the mid 1970s to replace with Ips by the Generation X, the Jam, the Clash and Television. I only listen to that last one much anymore. *Marquee Moon* still stands up as a brilliant and strangely ageless album in my opinion, while Gen X, the Jam and the Pistols are very much slightly embarrassing trips down Nostalgia Street. (There are a few albums from the time that have survived well: *Easter* and *Horses* by Patti Smith; Elvis Costello, Talking Heads. And pretty much all the dub reggae Ips and 12 inch singles I bought in 1977 and 1978: Steel Pulse, Misty in Roots, Joe Gibbs, Lee 'Scratch' Perry, Augustus Pablo, Dr Alimantado)

I discovered jazz late (and country music, and the sainted EmmyLou Harris and then Alison Krauss even later) coming in via jazz-rock fusion/crossover of the likes of Weather Report, Isotope, Colosseum, Barbara Thompson's Paraphernalia and the cross-genre collaborations of jazz, rock and folk musicians on Neil Ardley's albums *Kaleidoscope of Rainbows* and *Harmony of the Spheres*. That led back to Miles, Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Gerry Mulligan.

The only person I know still has a parlour, a 'posh' room that they only use when they have guests, is Vikki's mum.

I hate to point this out but Melanie Studd-Walls' *Tod Bold: A Stand up Life* which came with this copy of *Vibrator* appears to be a spoof, reminiscent of Steve Aylett's *Lint!*. I was a bit surprised you were taken in.

*(EDITOR: What can I say, Steve. When Melanie sent me her manuscript, cum-stains and all, along with artfully posed lesbian photos, I was totally taken in and thought it was a piece of genuine original research. Checking Google however I can find no mention of Tod Bold, so you must be right.*

*I've said a little bit about punk music in this issue and some of my American friends consider Television as a punk group, but I think that is mostly because they were New York and came up through CBGBs. I never did. It's a cliché to say they were too good for punk (and also untrue because there is a lot of good punk) but as a guitarist I immediately recognized Tom Verlaine's fluency and originality as a guitarist and songwriter, put them into a different league altogether.)*

## **JOHN NIELSEN-HALL**

There is much I do not understand. My powers of ratiocination are not what they were. While I am grateful for the free Todd Bold: A Stand up Life , I distinctly remember publishing this in MD #3 or thereabouts. I have not read it - should I perhaps compare it line by line with the text I published, the better to appreciate the many improvements you have made, or what?

Driverless cars will never be quite driverless, I am sure. I foresee congress's and parliaments legislating to make sure that every car has controls which will allow a human to take charge, or will insist that a human sits in the driver position and monitors what the car is doing. Nic is right about the necessity for every vehicle to be networked, but not only is this unlikely in the beginning, there will be people who will insist on their human right to drive their own car, unsurprising when you look at how..erm.. unexciting the design of driverless/electric vehicles are so far. Honourable exception for the Tesla which was on display in Newbury yesterday when we were out shopping, but I suspect that will come in at the luxury end of the price scale, which seems a bit daft, because if you are going to spend pots of money on a car, wouldn't you rather have an Aston Martin or a Maserati or whatever?

Very much enjoyed Curt's dissertation on collecting CD's. In the foreseeable future I will have a great many CD's to get rid of. This is because I have equipped myself with the tech to condense my entire CD collection onto one hard disk. I have bought both a new 2TB laptop and a Brennan B2 hard disk player which rips CD's and then converts them to the FLAC format files. In theory the laptop could do the same job as the B2, but it is significantly slower than the B2, and although it has a B&O sound card, that will only drive the crappy little speakers or a pair of headphones in the laptop. The B2 has a Hi-Fi quality amp inside driving pretty good quality separate speakers. The B2 has the edge in speed because it rips the CD as is and then converts all the WAV files to FLAC whenever you are not using it. All the same, its a tedious process feeding in CD's and taking them out again. I started about a month ago and alphabetically speaking I have only got to midway through the D's. So the massive de clutter of CD's is still some way off. But Real Soon Now. Oh and the laptop? Well that's going to be the backup.

What astonishes me about current attitudes to buying music is that people would rather pay a subscription to what is in effect a kind of radio station, in order to stream music which they still don't own. This will never suit me. I don't have a problem with digitising the music, obviously, but I want it on some sort of permanent media, so I can play it at a moment's notice. Call me old fashioned.

You will note that I am staying out of the "Nathan Kettle is a filthy rich capitalist villain... or is he?" discussion, even though I am boiling with the furious desire to

correct your own and many other peoples misapprehensions about the financial markets and what role they play in the system that provides us all with money one way or another so that we can indulge our little fannish pleasures. This is particularly true of all of us grey old farts who are basically drawing pensions rather than going out to work. I just wish that whereof many people do not understand , thereof they should not speak. Applies to Gravity Waves too, I suspect. But I'm not boiling about that.

*(EDITOR: Am I to take it that you are actually claiming to understand how financial markets actually work? I do not understand how this could be, otherwise you would surely be incredibly rich and not the poor old sausage you obviously are? However if you actually do have some knowledge of how Nathan's employer make their money, and how justifiable the whole process is, I do wish you would share it with us.)*

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### **KEVIN WELCH CLIMBS ON BOARD. WELCOME KEVIN**

Graham. I enjoyed reading the last few issues of Vibrator at efanazines, and was especially glad to see a hyperactive letter col.

On making money the easy way: Of course, Michael Lewis' books are the best things I've found on market gamification. You're familiar with 'The Big Short' after last years movie, but 'Flash Boys' is probably more interesting with its tales of dark trading pools and programmatic trading. One good anecdote: somebody spent some ungodly amount of money digging and installing fiber optic cable in a perfectly straight line from Chicago to northern New Jersey (where most of the exchanges actually operate). The builders obtained easements from every governmental authority along the way, so the cable was laid under streets, through front yards, through school yards and parking lots, under river beds, and so one. Why did they do this? To save a few millionths of a second on each trade. Who did this? Nobody actually knows, but it was someone with a lot of money and a lot of interest in being the first to market at any cost.

As a small dog owner, I definitely want all dogs around me, especially the big ones, on a leash. My little spaniel does too.

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### **ROBERT LICHTMAN**

Great cover cartoon by Jim Barker! I really love the expression on the spaceman's face!

Sad story about Amy and Walker Smith's daughter. How old was she when "She welcomed me and spoke to me and laughed and joked with me, often in a coquettish manner"? I assume that since you don't appear to know her name both you and she were very young and you simply don't remember (unless you're concealing it for reasons best known to you). I don't recall the name of whoever counts as my first love. She was someone I had a crush on when I was six or seven years old and still living in Cleveland. I don't remember any names from my early years of school in Los Angeles, either, until we moved into our new house sometime in 1951. Before that I'd been going to a school that was near the apartment we lived in while the house was being built. It was an easy walk from the apartment to that school. When we moved, we were on the extreme far end of the district borders for that school. I would have had to take a bus or catch a ride with a schoolmate's parent. We had only one car, my mother didn't drive (never did), and my father used it to get to work where his shift began well before when school started. My memory is hazy, but it seems to remember something about a bus.

But we were just *across the street* from the border with Inglewood, one of the many smaller towns surrounding giant Los Angeles, and there was an elementary school on the other side of the street. Somehow my parents got some sort of dispensation from the Inglewood school district so that I was able to start fourth grade at that school. Apparently other parents had done the same thing, and a petition drive to annex our neighborhood into their school system was launched and was successful.

So with a stable school situation I began to start knowing the names of my classmates. One girl I had a huge crush on was Nancy, who was the tallest girl in the class, slender and cute. (I don't remember "radiant" or "stunning," but maybe so.) Of course at that age I was very shy around girls, so she never knew. On the other side of the coin, one of the parents who led the charge to annex us to Inglewood had twin girls, Maybelle and Chardelle. They were a somewhat overweight pair, not all that attractive or intelligent, and I didn't talk to them in fourth grade, either. But by the time we all got to sixth grade, their mother was apparently desperate to get them boyfriends. They were originally from somewhere in the South, where girls begin getting married off when they reach the age of thirteen, and apparently she was of the view that even though now living in Los Angeles her girls should not – *must not* – be allowed to become old maids.

One of the things we had to do as part of school was learn to dance – fox trot, waltz, polka, square, etc. I didn't care for any of it, but when M&C's mother started having late afternoon dances in the large garage of their house – driven, I'm sure, by her views as stated above – and let all the parents know about it, my parents insisted that I go. It was a strange affair with cookies and punch and music on a cheap record player. Their mother maneuvered things so that all the boys got/had to have a turn with each of the twins. I remember holding their sweaty hands at arm's length while shuffling through a fox trot, and that both of them were heavily

perfumed. I also got to dance with Nancy – of course carefully revealing no emotion – who was the opposite of the twins in every way. But overall it was a really awful evening.

I didn't date in high school. By that time I had discovered and immersed myself in fandom and had enough money to cover publishing fanzines but not for dating expenses, plus I had no access to a car. I didn't have girlfriends, but overcoming my awkwardness around women I did have friend girls – the difference pretty obvious. It wasn't until I went on to the university that I did, finally, have girlfriends now and then, plus a car.

Well, that's a major digression! When I was living on the Farm, a couple had a little girl who was born with spina bifida. I never saw her, and she didn't live very long. It was very sad.

I've never been bounced off the internet for as long as you report. In fact, it hasn't happened very much at all. Most of the time the cause has been something in the phone lines, and since it affected more than just me the phone company was pretty quick to fix it. One time it was our ancient modem-router combination dying. We went to the phone company's store, bought a new one, and before long we were back in business. That one is, happily, still working.

I'm not keen on driverless cars, either, for all the reasons and scenarios you cite.

I enjoyed rereading Curt's collecting mania again, and as I've said before about pieces in *Vibrator* that first saw the light of day on InTheBar I'm happy to have it in a more accessible form.

I don't remember much about the house in Cleveland where I spent my (ahem!) most formative years except that it had two stories. It's still there, and can be seen at this link:



Of the three houses in the picture, it's the one in the middle. When we lived there it was painted white, but otherwise it looks exactly as the mental picture I've carried all these years. I don't recall fine points of the floor plan, but I believe the living room, dining room and kitchen were downstairs, with two bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs. Plugging the address into Zillow, it says that its current value is \$44,800 and that it was last sold in 2002 for \$73,000 – well before the housing bubble burst. It's a little hazy, but I seem to recall my father telling me that the house was built in 1941 for around \$3,000 to \$4,000 including the cost of the lot, and that it sold in 1950 for around \$8,000. Whether the ground floor was in any way “open plan” (or “open concept” as they say on the house porn shows) I don't recall for sure – *maybe* the living and dining rooms were separated by a wide arch. But the house in Los Angeles was a “mid-century modern” (before that name was invented) with living room and dining room actually all one big room with a single step down to the living room. The kitchen was separate, though, and had a lovely “breakfast nook” where we took all our meals. The dining room sat fallow most of the year, but at holiday times an eight-place table could be unfurled from a cabinet that sat at one end of it and chairs brought in from where they were kept in the garage. Neither house had a “formally arranged room” or “parlor,” this being before the era of “family rooms” which now seem to be required in anything built after a certain point. And not a bit of flock wallpaper anywhere!

Love your tease at the end of your comments on Greg Benford's letter: “By the way, Elvis was a dirt bag who had no talent at all.” Who will rise to that bait? Me, briefly, for one. I think he was perhaps the key performer in the '50s who took “rockabilly” out of the obscurity of minor, mostly regional artists and into the mainstream. Of course one has to credit canny ol' Sam Phillips of Sun Records for realizing what a monster talent he had on his hand when Elvis came in to record a “two-song vanity record” to surprise his mother. At that time I was closely following rock and blues in Los Angeles, where several disk jockeys made a specialty of playing it/them on their radio shows. My first exposure to Elvis was actually “I Forgot To Remember To Forget,” which I heard on a country music station, but I didn't know it was Elvis until after “Heartbreak Hotel” came out. I ate up his early stuff, but only the upbeat songs. I went so far as going back to find his Sun singles, all of which I loved (and still do – these days I have a cassette of “The Sun Sessions”). I had mixed feelings about his ballads, the first one being “Love Me Tender,” and by the end of the '50s I stopped collecting 45s so much and pretty much left him behind.

Like Nic, I've noticed that Audi drivers seem to have replaced Volvo drivers for The

Absolute Worst in these parts, too. Since I'm *in* California, I can't say much about whether our drivers are the most clueless. But I do recall that when I lived in Sonoma County – and specifically in the Sonoma Valley, where there was a high concentration of elderly drivers tooling around in their Buicks and Chryslers – one much-hated scenario played out often. I would be driving at a more or less normal speed (i.e., about five miles per hour over the speed limit), and just as I approached an intersection where one of those huge cars was waiting to pull out, it would pull out. And not just pull out – dart out really fast, requiring me to slam on the brakes. Then, having done that, they would resume *their* normal speed, which would be 10-15 miles per hour *under* the posted speed limit. Grrrr!

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### **DAVID REDD TAKES A BATH**

The tin bath got me. During my first year of life the house had a tin bath for use in front of the kitchen fire. My Mum had taken newborn me to live with her parents in Nantymoel, a South Wales mining village, while my Dad tried to re-enter teaching life in Cardiff after WWII. Their house remained (except for some dodgy cloth-insulated electrical wiring) throughout the 40s, 50s and 60s as Victorian as when my stonemason great-grandfather and his carpenter neighbour had built their pair of semi-detacheds within the terrace. Both men must have been above the poverty line as non-conformist ministers, and their sons became teachers rather than miners.

As the tin bath implies, comforts were Spartan. Two rooms and a kitchen downstairs, like your house. No central heating. No white goods. No running water except in a little annex built onto the kitchen (a strange smell of old porcelain sink). The toilet was a backyard outhouse with more strange smells, hopefully a local disinfectant. The kitchen centred on a fireplace – the house was full of those open-grate fireplaces you mention. At this kitchen hearth Granny cooked and boiled water (think blackened saucepans and kettles over red-hot coals); baths were taken in front of the fire for warmth and ease of topping-up. Inevitably the kitchen smelt of breadcrumbs and trodden-in coal dust (despite Granny's efforts), also of drying clothes and steamed wood.

Second downstairs was a sitting-room for evenings and guests, with fireplace, radio ("wireless") and a piano. Piano? Yes, my grandparents were both singers, Granny an Eisteddfod-winning soprano and Grampa a skilled accompanist and choir-conductor with a B.Mus in vocal studies, besides being a teacher. Their piano, well. In this tin-bath house without running water or toilet inside, their piano was a

Steinway. It took the family over fifty years from carving a self-build house out of the hillside to being able to afford that piano.

And the parlour. I rarely saw it. To my young nose on visits the parlour had its own particular smells: old curtains, dried flowers and special furniture polish – beeswax? The parlour was “for best”, and for laying-out the deceased of the family before the funeral.

Upstairs were bedrooms (think chamber-pots and water-stands) and Grampa’s study with high bookshelves and a wind-up gramophone for 78s. (TV changed British society very rapidly in the Fifties, but not in this house.) The main view from upstairs was of the mining terraces opposite, the cable-cars dumping waste onto the hilltop, and a mysterious pipe discharging water into the stream. (I hope it was water.)

So no, your calling your old front room a parlour can’t have been exclusively Yorkshire. The South Wales version had the same name and pretty much the same function. Different sectors of life got segregated into different rooms and that was that.

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## ***TALES OF A LAS VEGAS TAXI DRIVER BY NIC FAREY***

### **LET'S SEE SOME SHIFT**

I've got a nice-looking certificate here which says "Congratulations! For outstanding job performance you are hereby awarded a shift", followed by some administrative detail about effective dates and that.

This, as they say in the colonies, is a BFD, or even a BFFD. I've mentioned before that my current employer (Lucky Cab) operates quite differently to my former one (YCS) in a *lot* of ways. One thing in common with all cab companies is that a new driver will start on "extra board", though how this is defined and managed can vary quite a bit. At the larger operations (YCS, Frias) it means you show up at midnight and wait to find out what shift you'll be working (the implication is that you *may* not necessarily be going out, though in practise you almost certainly will), what old clunker they give you to drive, 12-hour shift, 6 days a week. It's entirely possible that you may not start until 3am or so, and the lack of sleep this implies could well explain some of the dodgy driving out there as well as the sales of those nasty "energy drinks". At YCS, which operates approximately 4 billion different shifts, you can get onto a fixed schedule (4 or 5 days) and assigned cabs pretty quickly by bidding on the available schedules which are posted weekly. At Frias I'm given to understand that it takes longer. Bids are considered by simple seniority, kind of like time served in jail : the longer you've been there, the higher up in the pecking order

you go. Lucky, by contrast, operates a very small number of shifts (currently four per day/night) and "promotes" (if that's a reasonable term) pretty much on merit. As far as I can tell, they do a pretty thorough driver assessment once or twice a year (which is feasible since we're a smaller firm) based on a pretty sensible set of metrics: book, number of rides, and paid mile percentage.

Book is the most obvious measure of how well you're doing, but if it's the only measure used it can be misleading. Not relying solely on this number is definitely something that Lucky does right. If you get 20 or more rides on a shift, you'd reasonably expect to have a book of \$300 or more (the average fare being around \$15), but you can have days that go otherwise, for example a couple of weeks ago I had 22 rides for a book of just \$275. On a day where the shift average might have been around the \$350 mark, they'll have a look and rightly conclude that I wasn't dicking around, I just got more than my share of short stuff, so all right then. Paid mile percentage is also a good indicator of whether the driver is actually working to some kind of coherent strategy or just randomly cruising around. Again, it's quite possible that a driver could come in with a low PMP because they had a ride out to (say) Anthem, Southern Highlands or Summerlin and had to deadhead back. A glance at the driver's tripsheet (something the smaller company is more able to do) will confirm this.

That dull chunk of exposition is to allow me to point out proudly that all my numbers are on the plus side of the line. While my performance wouldn't necessarily be described as spectacular, it's certainly solid.

One BFD of getting a shift at Lucky is that I get an assigned cab rather than having to drive whatever random vehicle I'm allocated on a given day. I picked one of the VW Passats, which the mechanics describe as terrible, but for a driver (especially one who is no mechanic) has a bunch of advantages, including pairing up my phone with the car systems (allowing me to belt out my Pandora channel through the Fender speakers, interesting reggae, new ska, old ska and my classic favorite Toots & the Maytals, if you were wondering), plus a heated seat (good for my dodgy back), a roomy cabin and trunk and not least very positive and responsive performance. The BFFD is that I start to qualify for bonus payments, of which there are several, including shift bonus (number of shifts worked, showed up on time), safety bonus (no accidents) and so on. I'll be due to get the first of these in July 2017 (it says here), which I grant you seems a long way off, but there are drivers who took over *two years* to get awarded a shift, but I got mine at six or seven months, so basically, Wahey!

Another bit of goodness relates to Christmas week, generally the slowest time of year (5 or 6 rides on a shift isn't uncommon). If the firm does the same as last year, shift drivers are given the option to take off December 22nd thru 25th (unpaid, though) without penalty. Extra boards still have to show up (as I did last year), but they're okay with you just doing 8 hours or so for the sake of appearances.

Here's another first from the last month: a genuine, actual biohazard that required me to go back to the yard for a cleanup. This probably doesn't count as a Gay Sex incident, even though I picked up the ride from Piranha. It was actually a party of eight (so 2 cabs) going all the way out to the Siena Suites at Russell and Boulder, and just when we got there, as luck (ahem) would have it, the lass on the back seat in the middle was the one who needed to egest the suspicious nosebag she'd got from the taco truck, and not being able to lean over far enough managed to comprehensively fill the cup holder in the door. Not actually the first puker I've had in a cab, but the others have managed to hang it out the window or door sufficiently to minimize (or exacerbate) any resultant mess. It's not that much fun when you're well over the east side of the valley, at least 20 minutes from the yard with spew in the back, is it? I carefully dropped a couple of paper towels over the offending spoo, liberally sprayed some air freshener around and opened the back window for the ride back, even though it was raining. I phoned my dispatch asking if I should stop to gas up (if they were going to switch me out to another cab), and got the affirmative, so that ended up being an extra ten minutes in the company of chunder as it took *three* (count 'em!) tries to find a pump that worked. Then as it turned out, the detail bloke at the yard had a look and said "Oh, this won't take long, give me a few minutes and you won't have to switch cabs", so I walk around to the dispatch room to let them know, and our nice dispatch lady rolls her eyes and tells me "That fucker said he wouldn't do it!". The fucker that wouldn't do it did it, though, worth the \$5 tip I slipped him in anticipation of a future upchucker.

#### **THE LICHTMAN LOG OF RELATED AND/OR UNRELATED FOOTNOTES (AMFO EDITION)**

**BFD** : Quite important.

**BFFD** : Perhaps more corpulently important than a **BFD** (qv).

**BIOHAZARD** : Polite term for a puker in the cab (which it usually is), though technically it can also refer to any seriously fucked-up fare who leaves you with bodily waste of any kind rather than a tip. It's common practise for the driver to insist on levying a "cleanup charge" (\$100 and up) to any guilty party, though that's actually illegal. Most drivers feel justified in trying this scam because a cleanup or a switch of cabs can take two hours out of your shift, although if you have to go back to the yard for any reason you'll usually be exempt from the averages. That doesn't help the paycheck, though.

**BONUS** : Performance-based extra dosh doled out annually, and not an invitation to Dennis Hastert.

**BOOK** : Meter total at the end of the day. A source of friendly competition on occasion between some of the friendlier drivers. Also a source of taking the piss.

**CO** : (qv **PO**) Corrections Officer. To my British reader (Unc, J), a screw.

**DEADHEADING** : The Mighty Rob<sup>t</sup> will surely recall that this means driving back

empty from a drop, and is nothing to do with jam bands. Rich Coad and Jay Kinney may need reminding, however.

**EXTRA BOARD** : New drivers start here. In many cases, the equivalent of being chucked in the deep end to see if you sink or swim.

**HUGO AWARDS** : qv **BIOHAZARD**.

**PIRANHA** : Biggest gay club/bar in town, where the reader might wear his leather trousers with the bum cut out and not cause the slightest flicker of any eyelid.

**PO** : (qv **PROBATION**) Probation Officer. Non-taxi aside: after doing my porridge for Driving While Revoked (the actual sentence was 6 years, part suspended, part ameliorated by "good time"), I was on probation for 3 years, starting with weekly reports to my PO, who turned out to be a very nice lady. Like the COs (qv) in the nick she was a bit startled at the relative severity of my sentence ("Not exactly America's Most Wanted, are you?"), she pretty sharply went through the process of putting me on a monthly report schedule, and thence to unsupervised probation (no reporting in at all). I found out about the latter by turning up on what I thought was my scheduled reporting day only to be told "You don't need to come in any more. 'Bye!"

**PORRIDGE** : A well-known term to my reader (J, Unc), meaning jail/prison time, and the title of a well-loved sitcom starring a lot of good actors who are now dead. For those interested in the possible derivation of the term, one of the best explanations I've seen is a sort of backwards application of Cockney rhyming slang: "Porridge" = "Thyme and borage" = the pun of "Thyme" = "time".

**PROBATION** : "Ah yes, I remember it well!" Not so much like the post-jail version (fuck Maryland!) where I had to report in weekly (to start with) to my **PO** (qv), but in cab company terms a period of time where you're presumably more closely watched until someone decides that the training wheels can come off. At YCS this was 6 months (they fired me 2 days short of this, meaning I couldn't appeal the dismissal via the Union), at Lucky it's four, a milestone I breezed past without incident.

--Nic Farey

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## **THE MUSIC BIT**

### **SURF'S UP**

*(Editor: I've probably said this before in a lot of places, but on the back of Curt's piece last issue on collecting records, this seemed a good time to back it up. Skip it if you've read it all before.)*

Surf music was my first passion when I was a teenager growing up in a sleepy suburb of London about as far from a beach in California as you could get. I just liked guitars and the sounds of American guitars especially, processed through Fender Twin Reverb amps, with the emphasis on \*reverb\*.

When I started buying singles there were monthly release schedules and every couple of weeks I'd go to my local record shop and look through them, looking for groups like the Surfaris, the Chantays, and of course the Ventures. Later this broadened into an obsession with British instrumental combos, trying to find alternatives to the increasingly bland Shadows. Nothing could match the Ventures, though, and I was once star-struck enough to send off a letter to their fan club address in Hollywood. I got a signed photo in return, and was in heaven. Now, the Ventures made a lot of records and it is really impossible to keep up quality over the release schedule they followed, so inevitably they ended up releasing a lot of unimaginative dross.

There used to be a basement in Soho which stocked their LPs on import and of course I bought them whenever I found them, but I think I gave up with Play Along Country Hits which had the lead guitar mixed out so you could pretend to be Bob Bogle or Nokie Edwards. I also once came across a \*Best Of\* CD on an East End Market stall, which had obviously never been anywhere near the real Ventures, and was really a very bland studio group doing elevator music. The Ventures were not above subterfuge themselves and released a \*Live\* LP claiming to have been recorded in Tokyo and in London. But, although big in Japan, they never toured the UK, and the LP has a very obvious \*looped\* live audience soundtrack with the same whoops and hollers coming round every couple of minutes. Like all groups they were obviously at their best when they were young and hungry and absorbing American blues music tropes, as in Ram Bunk Shush.

---Graham Charnock

## **RANDY BYERS ON PRINCE.**

*(EDITOR: Randy Byers was extremely offended by an issue of Vibrator where I expressed a slightly contrary view to the adulation that followed the death of David Bowie. He called my fanzine worthless. I am glad he has got over this (if indeed he has) sufficiently to allow me to reprint his thoughts on the passing of another American Idol, and am grateful to him for letting me do so.)*

## Two Imprints of Prince

I was never a huge Prince fan. I only own three of his albums: Dirty Mind, Controversy, and 1999. But for a decade in the '80s and '90s his music was ubiquitous in my life, and his hits were some of my favorite music that I heard only on commercial radio or MTV. There were two moments of listening to his music that left a major imprint on memory:

1. In 1984 I had just moved to Seattle. I was visiting a gay friend in his tiny Capitol Hill apartment, and he and a friend of his (I thought it was his boyfriend, but in retrospect I think it was someone he'd brought home with him from the clubs the night before) put "Dirty Mind" on the stereo. In 1984 it might have even been the vinyl album. It's the first Prince song I remember hearing, and the two of them dirty danced to "Dirty Mind" in the narrow aisles of the apartment, while I sat paralyzed in a chair wishing in my terrified straight-boy heart that I could shake my ass just like they were doing. It took another year or two before I started joining Denys and other friends on trips to a downtown club called Tugs where a mixed crowd of black and white, straight and gay shook it like we just didn't care to the beats of Prince, the Eurythmics, and of course the old disco hits of the '70s.

2. In 1985 my parents took the family to Rio to celebrate my graduation from college at the end of 1983. One day we went out on a boat, which took us to a swimming spot and maybe a picnic. Later we drank caipirinhas on the boat, and the radio belted out "Purple Rain". The song had become overly-familiar to me by then from overplay on the radio and MTV, but somehow on the deck of that small boat bobbing on the tropical Atlantic almost as far from home as I'd ever been, with aguardente killing the pain and amplifying life's simple pleasures, that song shrank the vast sun-drenched world into one people and one culture and one moment of global connection. I had just started having lines shaved into my short cropped hair and thought I was turning into some kind of funk-punk who was freeing myself from all the hangups I'd been saddled with growing up in a sexually repressed culture. Sorry to say that freedom wasn't quite so easy for me to reach, and I was never able to actually "let my body be free." But for a delirious moment a boy could dream ...

--Randy Byers

## **MAKE MY DAY, PUNK**

We are talking music here, of course. Ted White has told me that the term \*punk\* was originally prison-slang, meaning an inmate who was used for sexual purposes, before later being translated into a term that broadly meant shabby and worthless, with an element of James Dean rebellion thrown in.

In the seventies it became applied to a form of music, perhaps originally exemplified by lo-fi so-called \*garage\* bands, so called because they were formed and rehearsed playing in their parents' garages. Few of them actually expected to get to the point of public performance. They did it because they liked the noise, the racket.

I persist in thinking there is not one punk music, but two, which settles down into a basic difference between US and UK \*punk\*.

UK punk originally began as a style/fashion movement used by Malcolm McLaren to promote his Sex shop in the Kings Road. The Sex Pistols were a group of attractive yobs, pumped full of testosterone, and McLaren \*used\* them, not in a sexual sense (although who knows?) but to promote his store and its goods. It was largely a London movement, and an East London movement at that, where bands like Xray Specs and others used gigs to show off their fashion styles, playing largely for free in small clubs and pubs. When it moved outside of London bands like Buzzcocks picked it up. Bands played with cheap substandard equipment, and in fact the Buzzcocks' name allegedly came from an early gig where, plagued by sound system faults, they asked their roadie "Where's the buzz, cock?"

US punk seems, too, to have a similarly localized origin, around the CBGB's club in New York, but was pretty much a movement of NY intelligentsia looking for some decadent relief from their moderately well-off background. Patti Smith was being photographed by career art photographers like Robert Mapplethorpe and Annie Leibowitz; British punk stars were being photographed mostly by staffers from pop mags like Record Mirror and Melody Maker on a salary. Jonathan Richman was a doorkeeper at CBGB's who managed to blag a gig one day. But he was nevertheless a relatively well-off white kid, as were most of those who made the music.

The US never had a class problem; the UK definitely did and part of the punk movement was a reaction against the UK's plunge into its own demoralizing decay, not surprisingly coming into bloom in 1974 as Britain entered the first post-war depression and the conservative government introduced the three-day week, and Heath paved the way for Thatcherism by being forced to consider forming a coalition government .

Those Damn Americans in the form of the Ramones reared their heads on the the British punk scene too by performing to three thousand people at the Roundhouse in 1975, the size of audience most British Punk bands would probably never achieve during their whole career. Their record company and management backing was also so far in excess of anything corresponding British punk bands could ever hope for.

There is a theory they influenced groups like the Clash and The Sex Pistols, but both were fully fledged groups already who turned up at the Roundhouse gig and managed to blag their way in by climbing in through the band's dressing room windows.

Just as a year is a long time in Politics, a year also proved a year in pop music that seemed longer than it was. The Stranglers mutated into Pub Rock, led by Doctor Feelgood, who were fashioned on American bar bands, and People Who Might Once Have Been Punks like New Order mutated into the synthesized rock of the Seventies. Because by then, of course, we had all never had it so good.

Also the US had more drugs than us, so the music was better/worse (delete as applicable).

--Graham Charnock

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Well, I'm afraid that is all you get this month. Thanks to all those who have hung in with me so far despite the distractions of such things as snooker on TV and the deaths of more celebrities than mankind's consciousness can stomach. Various theories have been floated as to why more and more celebrities seem to be dying these days, ranging from \*all those rockets\* to general conspiracy theories such as chemtrails, but I believe it is just that the older we all get, then so do our contemporaries. Plus social media seem to create more celebrities than they can really handle. When everybody has their Warhol fifteen minutes of fame I guess it is easier to find something to remark upon when they die. However I'm heartened to see the obituary columns of newspapers like the Guardian remain full of people I have never heard of.

I'm Graham Charnock. This has been my fanzine and you are welcome to it. If you want to respond you can find me at [graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk](mailto:graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk)

You know the drill. End of the month will do.

This issue is dedicated to Nigel Rowe and all who follow after him in helping to organize Corflus in perpetuity. It's nice to know that when I'm dead and gone Corflus will still be going on probably in places as unlikely as Atlanta and Amsterdam; wherever fanzines are fans will gather to celebrate them, and get drunk.

This issue was porfread by Pat Charnock, as usual.