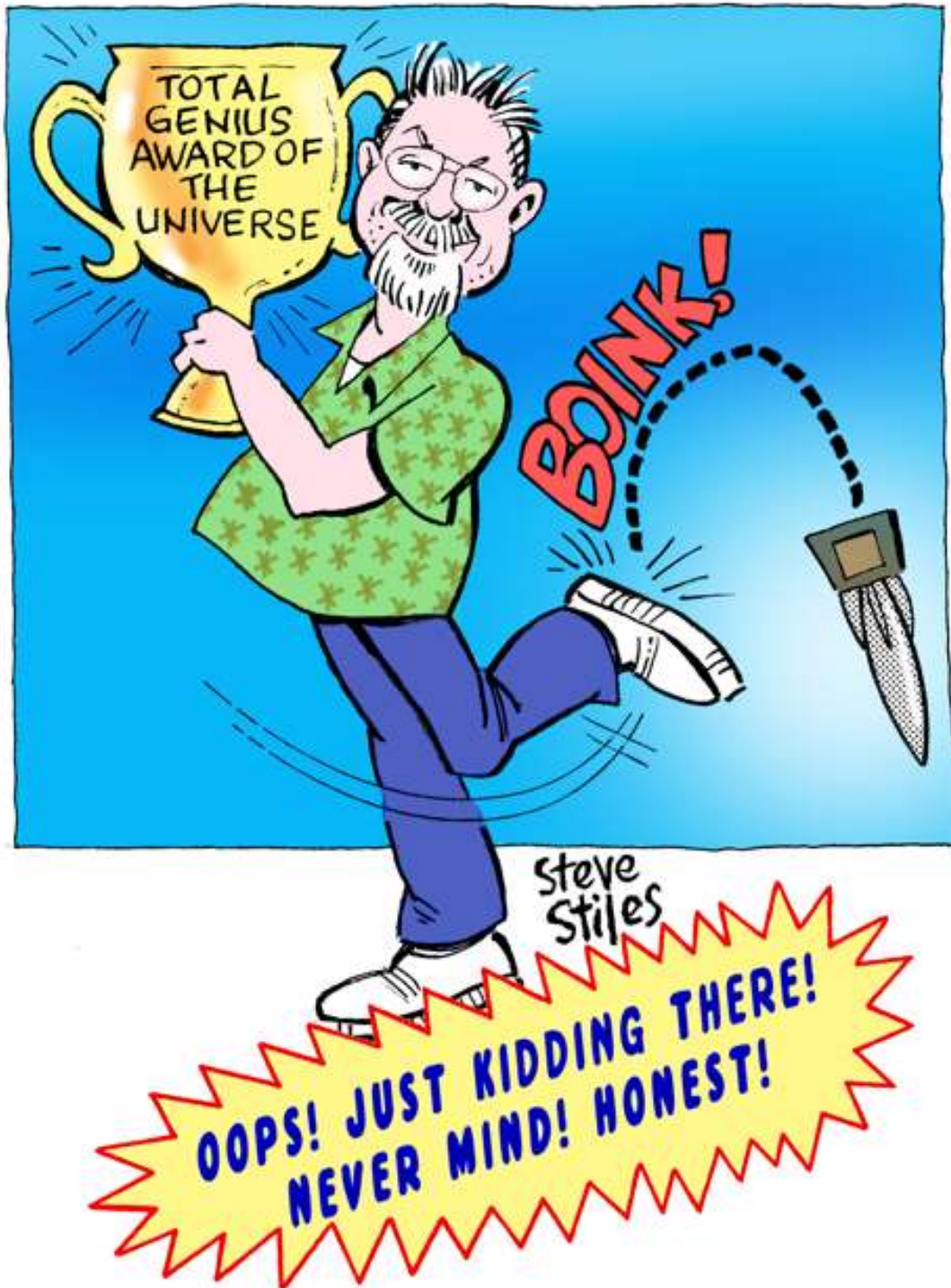




August 2016



So what next for that Nice Mr Stiles? For years he has been dining out on his reputation as Fandom's biggest loser. The number of sympathy drinks he must have been bought in that time on that basis doesn't bear thinking about. Well, now the sympathy will surely dry up, He's a Fannish Hugo Winner for God's sake, almost on a par with the execrable Chris Garcia. If his career follows the path of Mr Garcia it will see an inevitable decline into underachieving and bottoming out of his talent. He may even sink so low as to consider asking other artists to collaborate on his work. Or even go about fathering some twins. It will all end in tears, mark my words.

This is the 31st issue of Vibrator from Graham Charnock, graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk. No sign of the bottoming out of my talent, since it was already negligible anyway.

First an Ooops moment. In my last issue I made the classic gender faux-pas by implying that my correspondent Leigh Edmonds was a woman. This not only reflects my extensive lack of fannish knowledge but the fact that all the other Leighs I have ever dealt with have all been female (Hi, Leigh Kennedy). I apologize to my distinctly butch and manly Aussie pal.

In September an elite group of privileged fans will be gathering in Norwich for a weekend of drinking and sexual debauchery. It's called Barcon and this will be the fourth one so far and it draws its clientele from Harry Bell's elite and privileged Yahoo Group Inthebar (co-moderated by Pat Charnock). You may feel left and out, but I'm sure I can provide a report on it (hot story with pix) which will make you feel even more so.

But if you want to be included in future plans, the answer is simple, apply to join the group (patcharnock@gmail.com) We might not let you in, but that's another issue.

A LITTLE BIT OF CRITICISM

When did sf as the individual novel of ideas suddenly become the serial novel of clichéd action/adventure characters acting out in fantasy worlds? Easy to blame Tolkien, I guess, who successfully transitioned away from the serious intellectual fiction of H.G. Wells into juvenile fantasy fiction, but I think Gene Roddenberry and Star Trek has also a lot to answer for. Create stock characters and let them loose on a host of worlds. Formulae. This was the basic difference between the soap opera approach of Star Trek and previous 'authored' dramatic series such as The Twilight Zone.

Literature soon followed this trend going boldly where no sf writer had ever gone before. For me a tipping point was when Brian Aldiss, the archetypal exponent of the British novel of ideas (An Age, Report on Probability A, etc), suddenly decided to do a Fantasy World Trilogy with Helliconia. I think he was under the pernicious influence of his friend David Wingrove

who, before the Chung Kuo trilogy, hadn't written a worthwhile word in his life and then didn't and hasn't since.

But Wingrove wasn't entirely to blame. Editors and publishers were complicit. Aldiss too fell under the thrall and the tempting advances from publishers who suddenly saw the marketing appeal of stereotyped series fiction, a bit like the publishers of Perry Rhodan and Sexton Blake had done years earlier.

Bob Shaw wrote novels of ideas but his editor Malcolm Edwards soon went on to commission soul-less and idea-less blockbluster trilogies and Bob died soon afterwards with no markets left to him. Speaking of other Bobs, I have to mention consistently great *old-time* authors like Bob Silverberg whose *Dying Inside* was one of the best novels of ideas I have ever read. Remember all those other Golden Age writers who used to write like that? Hal Clement, Daniel F. Galouye, Walter M. Miller, Daniel Keyes, even William F. Nolan and of course not forgetting Philip K. Dick, all turning in significant novels of ideas without being tempted by the thrills of word processing to extend thin characters and plots endlessly into multi-volume works.

Now the novel of non-ideas has reached its ultimate extension in the works of George R.R. Martin and *Game of Thrones* where the only idea is how to best represent death and torture to an audience who are titillated by that. That is not what I signed up to Science Fiction for.

Of course some people may suggest lots of sf magazines published novels of ideas in parts but that is another story, just as many magazine published Dickens that way. I don't actually recall *Pride & Prejudice: The Trilogy*. If Henry Fielding could have split *Tom Jones* into three parts, he surely would.

I regard serial novels as slightly (no largely) different from constructed trilogies. Juvenile novels of course really kicked off serial works through cheap editions. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and more generally Enid Blyton and even Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons*, not to mention Biggles. These had to be cheap because they were bought by Children with limited pocket money.

The trouble is serial fiction seems now really bogged down in the same juvenile appeal which people go for when they don't have fully developed critical ideas but just want their heads filled with fudge. Don't worry Harry Potter fans, J.K. will always write another book for you, until she won't, then she will write a West End play or two. Consume consume until the delight disappears.

Someone suggested Greek tragedies were serial works, but they were presumably performed. There must have been a limit to the torment even a Greek audience could sustain after sitting through three performances. Presumably they came back night after night eating their bags of rabbit legs, popcorn and chitlins. Just like watching a Disney film in fact.

(I feel I may have to add a footnote to this to define exactly what I believe is a *novel of ideas*. An idea is not a gizmo or a McGuffin, or a plot device. An idea is not a world or a universe with peculiar properties on which you can spin out adventures. An idea is not even an intelligent spaceship. An idea is a carefully structured narrative sequence which allows for a

conflict of emotion or ethics or standards and moves towards a resolution on the part of the main characters, often with intervening dilemmas which may tend to derail that resolution. Triologies are often not resolved except in terms of everybody being killed or everybody staying alive. I have spoken. Now don't bother me again with how good Iain M. Banks' Culture novels are compared with Ian Banks' novels of ideas.)

AMERICA THE DAMNED

(Another episode in a desultory series)

THE TRAGEDY OF JACK JOHNSON

Jack Johnson was the most successful boxer of the Twentieth Century whose achievements and exploits and influence might be said to have overshadowed even those of Mohammed Ali. His career was one of the most incandescent of any sportsman and yet he can truly be considered as one of the US's most tragic characters.

There was a distinct black/white divide in boxing in the early years of the twentieth century. In some ways it paralleled the basic divide in society we all know about; in other ways it did not. Jim Jeffries was the white champion at the time and his followers were convinced he could never be beaten, because they were racists who believed in the inherent superiority of whites over blacks.

Well, after Jeffries teased Johnson by crying off a lot of matches, he finally had nowhere to hide, and Jackson eventually beat him, which let loose a tide of anti-black resentment, with blacks actually being killed by white supremacists in response, while earnest journals such as the Washington Post ran editorials which tried to persuade ***niggers*** not to get too uppity about the event and endow Johnson with powers he did not deserve (because he was black).

NEW YORK, July 5, 1910 (UP) - When news that Johnson had defeated Jeffries flashed over the wires last night, riots between whites and blacks followed in a dozen cities of the country, and reports this morning increase the number and add to the list of injured.

Eleven riot calls were reported to police in New York within little more than an hour after the bulletin boards and extras announced the decision.

One negro was clubbed to death and more than 100 were beaten up, while a number of whites are suffering from knife and bullet wounds.

In the Tenderloin a negro was seized by angry whites and strung up to a lamppost. He was nearly dead when the police cut him down.

At 135th-st and Eighth-av in the better class negro quarter a mob of white men stormed a street car, pulled a negro into the street and kicked and beat him. Police rescued the negro. Another mob attempted to lynch a negro buying a paper. The negro drew a stiletto and held the mob off until police arrived.

In the "black and tan" and "San Juan hill" negro sections mobs set fire to a negro tenement house, hurled stones at windows, and tried to keep the occupants in by blocking the exits. The fire department routed the mob.

Smaller riots were of frequent occurrence throughout the night and early morning.

Two fatally hurt, two hospitals crowded with injured, and 236 prisoners in the city jails, summed up the result of the all-night rioting in Washington.

Mobs at times estimated at 7,000 persons rushed through the streets.

In Pittsburgh there were three riots. Street cars were blocked and police had to club their way through the negro section.

At Pueblo, Colo., the entire police force was necessary to put down a clash between whites and blacks.

At Charleston, Mo., serious trouble is expected. Following the lynching of two negroes, slayers of a farmer, Sunday night, the races have been on the verge of war and the Johnson victory increases the chances of outbreak.

At Uvaldia, Ga., near Augusta, three negroes were killed during a race riot and today more trouble is expected.

At Atlanta, Ga., a negro yelled "Hurrah for Johnson" on a crowded downtown street and in an instant half a dozen men were on him. Police rescued him.

A mob of negroes at Wilmington, Del., attacked a white man following an argument over the fight. A crowd of white men then chased the blacks several blocks and bombarded a house in which one took refuge.

At Columbus, Ohio, the entire negro population, numbering 20,000, celebrated the Johnson victory. About 400 men and women paraded the streets with a band. There was fighting all along the line of march. Several were injured, but the police finally prevented trouble and allowed the negroes to continue their march into the negro section.

After his victory Johnson went on to capitalize on it as any previously repressed and disadvantaged individual would do. He displayed a predilection for white women, probably because there were a lot of them fawning over him as a celebrity.

Johnson had been married to a black woman, Mary Austin, since 1898, but their marriage broke up, sending Johnson into a state of depression. They had a brief reconciliation, but Johnson wrote in his autobiography that the troubles he had with women “led me to forswear colored women and to determine that my lot henceforth would be cast only with white women.” This didn’t go down well with predominantly white authorities who obvious saw him as something of a sexual threat. It eventually led to various arms of the authority leading orchestrated campaigns to arrest and prosecute him on morality charges. Interracial marriages or liaisons were not illegal (slave owners had been conducting them for centuries after all) and it may be hard for us today to imagine how much they constituted a powder-keg in the early days of the Twentieth century, especially in polarizing an opinion about celebrities.

In January 1911, Johnson married Etta Terry Duryea. She was a white Brooklyn socialite and former wife of Clarence Duryea, and she met Johnson at a car race in 1909. Their romantic involvement was very turbulent. She criticized him often for his alcoholism and that he would often leave her in his pursuit of drink, and drunken company. Suffering from severe depression, possibly caused by his neglect, she committed suicide in September 1912, shooting herself with a revolver. Johnson was distraught, but carried on drinking.

Johnson was eventually beaten by a young white champion, Jess Willard, so everybody celebrated the resurgence of White Power. No longer a champion, Johnson went on for many years to fight exhibition and other matches (which he invariably lost) into his sixties. But by then the sport aspect of his art had been eclipsed by spectacle, much like modern rock bands moving from obscurity into Stadium territory. He carried on doing this until he was killed in a car crash at the age of 68. A contemporary press report noted that the cause of death was ironic, Jack Johnson having crossed the white line one last time. It is probably safe to assume some measure of alcohol was involved.

There was a play about him on Broadway which Mohammed Ali attended and said "Substitute religion for women, and that's my story."

LETTER COLUMN

(EDITOR: Hot on the heels of our first Australian correspondent, Leigh Edmonds, comes the equally butch and strapping Roman Orszanski.No confusion about his gender. No, sirree.)

ROMAN ORSZANSKI

Nice opening piece by Graham West, discovering fandom at Novacon 45.

Despite the distance, I did recognise a few faces in the bar shot: Dave Langford and Catherine and Greg Pickersgill—though Catherine’s added the streaks to her hair since LonCon. And I suspect that may be the back of Brian Ameringen’s head, but I couldn’t swear to it.

I sympathise with the Brexit vote; while you might make a valid case for leaving the EU, it looks like the racist “keep the foreigners out” option doesn’t exist, as the price of access to the common market will be to allow foreign workers. I suspect any deal Britain does will be of less advantage to the country than remaining part of Europe. (Not sure where this leaves Scotland, who clearly would prefer to remain in the EU. Economically, they may be much better off leaving the union with England and joining the EU as a sovereign country.)

We had our own government shock in Australia, as the liberal federal government barely held on to its majority after a double dissolution. Whether it continues to govern for a full term is questionable, as the recent ballsup over the census highlights its ineptitude. Not to mention heartless and racist comments about the detention centres at Nauru and Manus islands from Government ministers.

Ironically, the changes to the senate voting rules, designed to minimise minor parties, have had the opposite result in the double dissolution: the government has an even more intransigent senate.

Interesting times ahead! I suspect the conservative Liberal government will tear itself apart over the promised plebiscite over marriage equality (ie letting people of the same gender marry), which was to be held this year, after the election.

Leigh Edmonds’ advice re exits from boring panels is trumped, I think, by the advice from one of the podcasting panels at Continuum: since they’re recording, you’re instructed that if you want to leave, do so loudly, declaring “Well I never!” or “damn you sirrah!” so that we all know you had a fine reason (never actually stated) for leaving.

All round, an entertaining issue with some nice photos. Well done!

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BRYN FORTEY

Graham, thanks for continuing to send me VIBRATOR in spite of my long standing failure to send a LoC or to even acknowledge your generosity. For me, on a personal level, I find myself scanning your pages for musical references. I read, with amazement, your put-down of David Bowie. Everybody is entitled to their likes and dislikes, but even if you are not keen on Bowie's voice and/or musical directions, I would have thought you might at least have acknowledged his place as an important factor in the popular music scene of his day. In an attempt to be fair I listened to someone you mentioned as being truly great (name forgotten at the moment) but found just some tuneless and whiny C&W-like nonentity. Graham and I are at different ends of the music spectrum I thought, but then remembered that we both consider "Stay" by Maurice Williams & the Zodiacs one of the best couple of minutes ever recorded. Some things we agree on, others we don't, which is good enough for me. I remember someone else writing in VIBRATOR who claimed to be a big band fan but had never heard of Anita O'Day. Really? That one gave me a laugh or two.

If you have spotted me on Facebook recently, you will have gathered that August is a month I am always pleased to see the back of. I even have a birthday coming up before we slip over

into September, and at my age that is no cause for celebration. I read your Facebook posts, usually with a degree of interest even though I rarely comment. I was tempted to say something when you were claiming to want to die, but it was your platform and I doubt that you really wanted serious discussion, not that I could have offered much. My personal black dog moments were somehow survived, I don't know how or why. On a secondhand level, the last four years of my wife's life were beset by both physical disintegration and acute depression, so I am somewhat aware of the suffering it can cause.

Anyway, I've rambled enough. Thanks again for all the magazines. They are appreciated.

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DAVID REDD

Thanks to you and t'other Graham for G. West's long, illustrated and highly readable "Dad, What Is Fandom All About?" A very engaging mix of reportage and musings. His view of an inclusive if greying Novacon as echoing a fannish heyday c.1985 is arguable but difficult to disagree with on my limited evidence. Excellent stuff, thanks.

Robert Lichtman has interesting long-view comments on the train-wreck that is the struggle for commandship of the USA political-military-industrial complex. Given the current candidates, I'd be tempted to vote Leave. (Yes, my vote in Wales is consistently for independence, although not necessarily for leaving Europe.) I note that Robert's first vote in 1964 was not for Johnson, something of a Tricky Dicky in political methods I'd guess, but "against Goldwater." The latter from this distance seems possibly a split personality; unfortunately his Mr Hyde half has had the more lasting legacy, e.g. the Reagan presidency which people like Gorbachev and Kinnock found impossible to negotiate with, thus derailing their home agendas. Oh well. I must resist the impulse to look further. Enough political train-wrecks at home lately. Self-inflicted wounds took out David Cameron, George Osborne, Michael Gove, even Stephen Crabb (our local MP) all with a glittering future behind them. Quite a recent history to marvel at, now that the initial shock and dismay have faded.

I'm sure Fred Smith is right in calling the Leave vote a general protest. Unfortunately the result gave us an unelected Prime Minister who in her years as Home Secretary oversaw much of what the Leave voters were protesting about. Even I can't dismiss fears about the scale of immigration etc while evidence of a broken system keeps piling up. I was shown a recent Daily Mail article claiming that current human rights and procedures let too many undesirables stay in the UK – predictable Daily Mail content no doubt, but it did mention that London sewage data suggest a million more people living there than official figures indicate. I liked that. I also liked in a scab-scratching sort of way some of the more extreme DM reader comments:

"Just like Iraq and all the strife in the ME leads directly back to Tony Blair, so does the Human Rights debacle in this country. Mrs Blair was a human rights lawyer and it was to enhance her money making prospects that Tony Blair forced the introduction of the HRA. It

beggars belief that the one man who has done so much damage to the planet and the UK in particular is allowed to wander around with impunity. He should be in jail.” (Hartlepool, United Kingdom)

“I happened to meet and get into conversation with an ex border security guard when on holiday two years ago. He had taken early retirement through stress after working in similar positions for over twenty years. The stress he was put under was because he was often ordered to allow people in who patently should not be here (some of the stories he told us were horrific) and was then bullied for sticking to his guns. They often took cases away from him and gave them to more 'compliant' members of staff who, he says, were never British born.” (Oxford, Turkey)

“We are the soft touch of the world and these people damn well know it. They get their feet on British soil and they have found the holy grail of freebies which many of them are only too happy to milk at the expense of the British taxpayer. We are doomed.” (Surrey, United Kingdom)

Wonder if that last one was a Vibrator reader?

Perhaps your editorial said of Brexit “all correspondence on this subject is now closed, so sod off with your rotten locs”, but I didn't see it because p.2 was blank in my copy. (Also p.31, sorry Nic.)

Thanks for the issue. Do those Lulu annuals you mention sell many copies?

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PHILIP TURNER

G. West confronted the truth; people can't write books any more. They can't create some characters, a setting and a dilemma, then move on to something else. It has to be a series now; but who wants to come in at volume x of trilogy y expected to know a whole raft of baggage and context? I know that I prefer to go back to half-crown and 35¢ paperbacks, which can do a story line in 200-300 pages instead of a bloated 600. The full picture of the D. West enigma in a book? I'll believe that when I see it.

Taxi Nic makes an interesting point in his LoC. As in the state of Nevada, our referendum on the EU had a YACD box, only it was labelled 'LEAVE', and the Breainers are claiming that they, as the 'highest-placed actual candidate', won. So it goes in European politics; especially north of the border. Going with the NFP candidate does have a certain attraction on the grounds that he/she/don't-kno could hardly do worse than a professional politician.

Fred Smith's heroine, Wee Burney, the alternative queen of Scotland, is a wee fush in a wee pond, and her star is in the descendant as the period of SNP rule extends and the Scots spot that the Gnats are as crap as other parties at keeping promises and getting things done which are actually useful to the electorate. But, no doubt, she'll be shuffled out of office still dreaming of Scotland being able to sup from the German Horn of Plenty as a member (non-contributory) of the EU.

If Canadians want to go with Taral and redesign their stamps and banknotes to exclude the lady in the tarra-ra, who are we to object? No doubt the close ties of family between the nations will endure. It might be polite to postpone it until our present Queen pops off, though. I'm sure King Chuck, who will be an even older bloke when that happens, would be glad to shed the role of non-playing captain of Canada and his obligation to make a long trip across the ocean to open things or clip your PM's ear when he gets out of line.

I'm not sure that Taral's English-speaking Union could ever be more than a talking shop for failed national politicians. Perhaps the best solution will be to let the United States join the Commonwealth of Nations; on condition that they're not allowed to Hoover up all the medals at the Commonwealth Games. One small quibble: did Germany actually exist in 1870? Wasn't it a Franco-Prussian war that France lost in 1871? Finally, I am aghast to learn that Tarla (sic) has LPs which he has never played! Why on Earth did he buy them in the first place?

I got one of the "security certified" copies of the mag, in which Taxi Nic's comments on page 31 were printed using white ink. But some cunning work with a scanner and a transmoggrater revealed the hidden messages. Get out of that, you censors! Will this lot end up on the white page of Vib 31? Or just the editor's spike. Oh, the suspense.

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DAVE COCKFIELD

Thanks for the latest Vibrator especially as I failed to loc the last issue.

I assume that is the reason for your wonderful innovation with 2.0.30. A blank page, (31), for me to add the loc that I should have written.

I really enjoyed Graham West's report of his visit to Novacon and I'm glad it was such a memorable experience for him with such positive reminiscence about his dad.

My first Convention was a Novacon in 1975 and I felt like a duck waiting for the orange. However I did meet a number of fans that made me think that Conventions were the place to be, and who could ever forget the experience of a Brian Burgess sweaty pork pie for the first time.

Weirdly this issue and the previous one, whilst enjoyable, have not particularly stimulated the brain cells sufficiently for me to comment. This could also be due to the depression that has hit me in unexpected waves over the last couple of months.

Unlike a number of friends Brexit has not contributed to this. I consider Britain to have many social, financial and political problems but I think that we have the resilience to eventually find solutions whether we are in or out of the EU.

I find it interesting that voters who wanted to leave the EU are generally castigated as being racist or at worse intolerant of other nationalities. Many Asians, and in my area Africans voted to leave in the hope that immigration will be put back on a level playing field for all nationalities. We are a nation dependent on immigration so I don't think it will actually change much.

Thankfully we have not yet become as xenophobic as France.

The media certainly does not help anyone cope with depression.

Deaths at the beach, murder on holiday, political and religious massacres all over the world. Donald Trump, Nigel Farage, the suicidal lemmings of the Labour Party rushing for the cliffs. Thank God for Countryfile to calm the mind.

Lately my door has been assaulted by legions of Jehovah's Witnesses. I'm always polite but they do wear you down with their sanctimonious messages. I've often found them be to totally intolerant of other religions and homophobic so I give them my version of God with both barrels.

Organised religion is not needed. God created us in his own image. Not as a man, considering how different men appear all over the world. His image is likely to be the "immortal" soul. People often ask why God allows such terrible things to happen in the world. Well, God also gave us free will to make our own decisions. So just like God we can be good, kind, tolerant people or, again just like God, intolerant, sadistic, vengeful bastards. Without the ability to screw up our own lives we would just be sheep.

And the great get out clause is that when we are about to die we can repent and genuinely regret the terrible things we may have done. An easy decision if the alternative is an eternity being tortured in Hell.

The old Hellenic and Roman Gods were much more fun. Gods of love and war were much easier to understand.

My apologies if I offend anyone who has genuine religious belief. I admire you and will defend your rights to your beliefs as long as you do not forcibly try to impose them on other people.

I was technically born a Catholic, baptised Church of England, raised as a Presbyterian when young, and as a Methodist when a teenager.

Perhaps because of this varied Christian background enduring faith in a religious belief is something I have never managed to achieve.

My Creed is simply to live as good a life as possible with respect and tolerance for others.

I'll face whatever is to come when I die when it happens with no regrets.

This probably makes me sound even more depressed but actually with this good weather we have had recently I'm actually in good spirits, especially Jim Beam. Keep the Vibrators coming!

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PAT CHARNOCK

I was surprised to see that I fit your definition of the perfect fan. What did you say? - "One who doesn't read science fiction, but is attracted by our peculiar social conventions." I have to admit that I've gone off the straight and narrow a couple of times over the years and read a handful of SF books, but I've never made a habit of it.

It was good to hear from Graham West. I must have met him when we stayed at the West house back in the 70s, but I have as little recollection of him as he probably has of me. It was also good to hear that he's planning to do a book of D's work - there's a lot out there, and we've used quite a few pieces ourselves.

I see that you've added a few captions to Graham West's photos, but I could have done with more. (But that's sort of proof that I did proofread *Vibrator* cos I suggested captions. As I think I've said before, my proofreading tends to be quick and dirty, so yeah, people will still find some errors.) But I could also have done with more of your writing.

(EDITOR: It seemed to me that with a lot of Graham's photographs the people in them were obvious from the context of the article.)

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JOHN NIELSEN-HALL

I couldn't think of much to say about the enjoyable contents of *Vibrator* 2.0.30. Taral has floated that idea of a Canadian Republic before in his own zine. I pointed out to him that the alternative to that nice old lady is another politician who, as a class, are not held in any higher esteem in Canada than they are here.

I was a bit confused by that photo you used on the cover and on page 16 which is credited to Rob Hansen augmented by Graham West on the cover, but on Page 16 is credited to Rob Hansen as being a photo of D West but Vince Clarke is credited in brackets and the year is given as 1984. There is no doubt Graham looks a lot like his Dad. At first I thought Graham had been inserted into a picture of a 1984 Novacon. Then I thought it was actually a young Don West at the 1984 Novacon. Then I wondered if it was a 21st century Novacon as described by Graham into which a young D. West had been inserted from a photo by Vince Clarke. I think its that last. But please enlighten me.

(EDITOR: As Harry Bell might say, it is what you want it to be.)

Re your latest trumpetings about Science Fiction and Fantasy that I have just seen ITB, I have some sympathy for your views, but if you will not read the new stuff, you cannot possibly actually know if the ideas part of SF has actually been subsumed by character driven saga's or not. Ann Leckie's Ancillary series has a big idea at the heart of it (and many good smaller ideas floating about) but you wont read them so its useless to point that out. Also you have by passed many of the works of Peter F Hamilton, some of which are massive sagas of a galaxy linked by wormholes and high speed trains, which certainly seemed like a great idea when I

first read them. Other works by him have the dead returning to repopulate the human controlled galaxy, contrary to the wishes of the living. That was a pretty original idea, I thought. (Please note the dead are not zombies but more or less indistinguishable from the living until they get near electronics which tends to go on the blink when they get near.)

You are quite wrong about George R R Martin's oeuvre. True, I have only seen the TV version, without trying to read the actual books (For expert opinion on that you need to ask Mr R Coad of Santa Rosa CA) but there is an underlying theme about how greed and ambition always brings people to grief, so in its way, you could argue that his works, like Tolkien, have a quite a moral message.

I'm sorry I am not holding my end up of the fnz editor / readership bargain at the moment, but dialysis sits on my life, crushing my energy and leaving very little space for anything else. I very well remember my last entry on The Other Side Of The Wood blog wherein I vowed not to write anything until I could find something better to write about than my health. That was years ago, and I still can't. Boring.

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ROBERT LICHTMAN

I echo your “RIP Joyce Katz”! It’s very sad that she died as the result of what appears to be a case of serious misjudgment on the part of the staff at the rehab facility where she was recovering from her stroke. I haven’t heard anything further via the e-lists about Arnie’s situation, but in an e-mail to me early in August he wrote that his situation was covered for the immediate future but that in the long run he was going to need at least a part-time care giver. As you write, “Las Vegas fandom is a tight-knit group,” but most likely the majority of them have full-time jobs and how much extra time they’ll be able to devote to helping Arnie is probably something they’re collectively figuring out.

So far as I can recall, none of my four sons have ever asked, “Dad, what is fandom all about?” Few of them have had much exposure to fandom in the raw – i.e., being at a convention or fannish party – but at the very first Corflu back in 1984 my ex-wife brought a couple of them around to the Claremont Hotel to hand off to me after she had them for the weekend so I could go to the convention. They arrived just as Terry Floyd and at least one other fan were running off copies of a convention one-shot that was mimeographed on black paper with white ink. That fantisted them, and they’ve mentioned it a few times in the years since then. I’ve been giving them copies of *Trap Door* as they’ve been published. I don’t mail them, but if I remember when I see them I hand over copies. Their response rate, however, is close to zero. One of these days I should ask them, “Son, do you have any idea what fandom is all about?”

Graham West definitely Gets It. Even before he attended the Nicholls’ talk, “What Is Fandom For?” he wrote in the first paragraph of “Behind Closed Doors”:

“A shared interest or passion with lots of the usual suspects and characters turning up. You

were surrounded by like-minded people. Some took it seriously and wanted to win, whilst most just went to get pissed and have a good time.”

He was talking about “American pool 9 ball tournaments” (I had to look that one up!) but he might as well have been talking about *Us*. Further on, he lists a bunch of now commonplace “futuristic” inventions and thinks that fans of the ‘60s and ‘70s might look ahead to the year 2015 and “hoped these extraordinary technical marvels would exist. Although, we’re still waiting for a bus to the moon.” I hadn’t thought of that last – I’m still waiting for those flying cars we were promised in early ‘50s *Popular Mechanics* magazines and other places.

He also gets it about how it’s too easy these days to express one’s views. No longer are people chained to their typewriters and mimeographs, getting their hands dirty and whether to slipsheet or not (plus dealing with the inevitable crudsheets). (I wonder how many newer fans know what slipsheeting is?) Thanks to the internet – Facebook, blogs and more – “It’s now easy to express a view, regardless of how good or bad it might be. ... The level of wit or insight isn’t the same. The world is about instant gratification, everything wants to be fast and of the moment, with no real thought for the quality or decency.” Indeed, writing such as his father was doing back in the day is rare these days, practically non-existent on-line, and certainly not painstakingly collected, retyped, mimeographed and stitch-bound the way *Fanzines in Theory and in Practice* and *Deliverance* were done (a total of 325 pages of close typing!).

Perhaps it’s because of the small size of Novacons, but I think Graham’s a little off the mark where he writes, concerning our shrinking numbers, “The fandom that my dad knew probably has a scattering of a few dozen left.” I would guess we are at least a couple hundred when you consider English-speaking fandom (I really don’t know much in any detail about the other languages’ fandoms) spread across two continents and a few islands. Unfortunately, though, too many of us are hidden away in places like Trufen where we mostly lurk. (An afterthought: perhaps he’s thinking only about British fandom.)

In the conclusion Graham describes his father as FIAWOL in fairly unique terms – as “professional” because he “stayed at home and looked after the children” while his wife went out and held a regular job. Because of this, Graham confesses, “I did feel a slight resentment of Fandom. It felt like he gave so much more of himself to it than he did to his family, until it really mattered towards the end of his life.” But it seems that from the wake and from attending Novacon – and talking with the people who went to one or both – he got a clear idea of what his father was about: how his connections with fans, fanzines and fandom gave him focus and were appreciated by everyone. I love his closing idea of a “definitive collection of his art work and some writing in one place,” and hope it comes to pass.

I found myself reading through the letters without encountering anything on which I *simply had* to comment, and reading Nic’s column I find myself mainly feeling great sympathy for his having to work during the Vegas summer. It has to be a serious challenge to remain cool, especially given the opening and closing of cab doors causing any built-up coolness within to dissipate – and that’s assuming the air conditioning in whatever cab he’s driving is adequate to the task of cooling. I remember being in Vegas during Corflu where although the full

awfulness of summer heat hadn't quite yet struck – it was “only” in the 90s – it was necessary to run my then-newish car's aircon at full blast all of the time and even then it was often uncomfortable.

(EDITOR: My own two sons have been exposed to fandom. As you well know they both accompanied us on our first trip to Seattle/San Francisco and hung along with us with various fannish luminaries, such as John D. Berry, Randy Byers, Bruce Townley, Rich Coad and also including a certain Robert Lichtman and Carol Carr. While James also attended Dan Steffan's Portland Corflu, along with Shell and Eloise. Both of them are also quite keen sf readers, but the social clubbable aspect of it has never really attracted them. They have their own circle of friends who they obviously prioritize. Growing away from and becoming independent of your parents is really a normal social process.)

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JACK CALVERT

I've been out of the room for rather a long time, or maybe just out of it, but your warning klaxon managed to rouse me out of my drunken stupor, so here I am, sitting up and peering blurrily around. I see that a whole lot of water has gone under the bridge [some good, some not]: Britain has cut loose from Europe and is drifting out into the Atlantic [beware the bump when it hits North America], poor Dougal is gone [hail and farewell], Vibrator is now an Award-Winning Fanzine [Yay and congratulations]. I'm not even going to try to catch up, except to say that I've been enjoying the Vibes, and thanks for sending.

Graham West's article in number thirty was particularly fine. I've never been to a Novacon, but the energy and feeling that he describes strike a familiar note. I've given up beginning sentences with the phrase “Fandom is...” because someone will always say, “No, it's this other thing.” But “small town” seems about right. Maybe one of those small towns that appeared often in “Twilight Zone.”

Cathy Palmer-Lister fired a secondary light bulb in my head with the comparison between e-books and CDs. E-books looked like a great idea, and I tried a few of them, but have gone back entirely to print. The e-books seem, uh, bloodless. I do listen to CDs, though.

Nic Farey's comment about politicians and plumbers is dead on. But good plumbers are hard to find, and expensive. “None of the above” should be on all ballots, and if it wins, the party in question should be obliged to go out and find another guy.

Regarding your editorial teaser/prequel, your list of writers of novels of ideas is certainly evocative of an era. I am so going to find and re-read “Dying Inside”. I do a lot of re-reading these days. “Golden Age” is, of course, a slippery term: I think of it as the Forties with Heinlein, Asimov, van Vogt, and others. I'm sure some folks think of the Thirties pulps that way. I think you're right about Star Trek (you don't mention Star Wars, but that was another push in the same direction.) I haven't read the Heliconia books, and probably won't, or Game

of Thrones: life short, art long. That said, I do enjoy a long, baggy novel once in a while. I thought that "Evolution" (the novel) was great fun, and not without ideas.

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FREDERICK SMITH

On the cover of this focal point zine you feature a photo (and on page 18) of D West, whom I take to be the gent in the light jacket standing by the table in the foreground. Fine, and he appears to resemble Graham West (naturally) from the photo on page 11 where the cutout also looks very like Graham. His (G's) impressions of Novacon 45 are interesting but short of captions for some of the photos who, to me, portray unknown people! Who are the four folk on page 5, for example?

(EDITOR: Graham didn't provide captions, although most of the people are obvious from the context, except on page 5. I think the lady in the greenish top is Hazel Ashworth, as captioned in the photo on page 11, but I don't know about the rest. Possibly Graham doesn't know either. He was only there for one afternoon and I'm sure he wasn't introduced to everybody.)

Taral Wayne is right when he once thought (as I did) that a punk was a small time thug. However I don't remember Sam Spade (Bogart) in The Maltese Falcon using the term. It was maintained by someone or other some years ago that the relation between Gutman (Greenstreet) and Wilmer (Elisha Cook) was homosexual but the name that Spade used for Wilmer was "gonsel", originally a "young homosexual male in the company of an older man". So, the same meaning as punk, dating back to the 19th century, it's apparently Yiddish for "gosling" and was used by Dashiell Hammett in the original novel in 1929 I haven't read the book but it seems that the homosexuality was made fairly clear. It could only be hinted at in the movie in 1941, of course, where it was all right to kill people but not mention SEX. Actually there are subtle hints in the film like when Gutman says that Wilmer is like a son to him but quickly agrees to make him the fall guy for the murders when it's pointed out to him (by Spade) that the police will need to pin the killings on some one. In more recent years "gonsel" has come to mean gun-carrying hoodlum, of course.

Robert Lichtman mentions the Ken Burns series "The West" and wonders if it has been aired in the UK. The answer, which you've probably given him, is that we do get PBS on cable (and possibly satellite) and "The West" was shown years ago. I've seen some episodes but not the whole thing so must watch out for it appearing again. Very good it is!

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MILT STEVENS

In Vibrator #30, Graham West expressed many familiar sentiments. One struck me particularly, "The SF fandom that my Dad belonged to never felt mainstream, it felt intelligent, cultured, bookish and almost high-brow." Yes, that's how fandom impressed me when I

joined. I also knew it was a shabby bohemia. There might be shortages of cash, but there would never be any shortage of ideas.

I think the IQ of “fandom” has been going down for some time. The demand for recognition of YA books is related to this. I’m not sure whether the dumb science fiction came first or the dumb fans came first. In either case, we seem to have a bunch of marching chickens on our hands. I read regular SF when I was a teenager. I steered clear of anything labeled “juvenile.” I didn’t even read the Heinlein juveniles until I was in my thirties. These YA fans want to pretend they are like traditional fans but don’t want to wrap their brains around any actual ideas. I suspect YA fans and traditional fans are going to go their separate ways, but I don’t exactly know how that is going to happen.

Taral’s letter suggests an English speaking common market. That reminded me of something. Back when I was first prowling used bookstores, I encountered a book titled something like “Union With Britain Now.” There wasn’t just one copy of the book. There were two or three copies in every used bookstore. The book was published in the thirties and proposed a merger of the United States with the British Empire of that time. Somehow, the author had concocted a system where the United States would get 51% of the vote in the combined union. The plan assumed that places like India would never get a vote in the overall organization.

Speaking of India, I suppose India should be included in Taral’s proposed English speaking union. After all, English is their national language. The Indians have a lot of potential. As a side note, the Indians are now the per capita wealthiest ethnic group in the United States.

I noticed Robert Lichtman’s comments on numbered fandoms. I hope Robert is well enough to make it to the next Corflu. I need some people with ideas on fan history for the program.

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MEMOIRS OF A LAS VEGAS TAXI DRIVER

By Nic Farey

STEREOTYPES

We've often had the image of the traditional London cabbie (thanks in part to *Private Eyes passim*) as "Ron Nobber, Cab no.76542", an effusively ignorant bigot not shy of regaling the riders with a warm stream of discontinuity about the issues of the day. Not me, sunshine; with most fares (and if I had ten bob for every time I got asked about Brexit, or the upcoming US elections, I'd be able to take a week off) if I think they're going to be argumentative I bottle it by claiming that I don't and didn't have a dog in either fight, not being allowed to vote in either the UK or the US. This is of course tincture of pure bollocks (since you lot know I am a man of Opinions), although the part about the voting is true. It's occasionally amusing, though

more on Farkbark than in the cab, that when I mention not being able to vote, most assume that I must be a convicted felon, a notion that I wickedly do little to disabuse. If I judge (usually correctly) that the ride is of a similar philosophical bent, I will quite happily pontificate, which to summarize comes out more or less as: Brexit, a political move by Cameron which went utterly tits-up because he is a clueless toff; US election, Hillary may well be a trifle bent (what politician isn't?), but that baby-carrot-fingers bloke is a clinically insane danger to shipping. One bloke of a clear Libertarian persuasion managed to bring the likes of the parasitic Uber into the conversation. My usual point I make with the punters (most of whom agree about the dodginess of it all) is that the generally woefully underpaid drivers for rideshare companies don't have the commercial insurance they should, so any incident will get them cancelled with whatever they even have. Few of their drivers are going to get the more expensive commercial option since they pretty much can't afford it in addition to their other expenses, so my argument is that they're basically uninsured, and of course don't get me started on the background check issue - their lot get approved to drive and that's that, whereas we have to renew our permits annually in the same process as the original application, not a rubber-stamp job. That, and we have to keep up our DoT physical exam every two years. So this bloke's argument was in part that the insurance was a governmental imposition and shouldn't be needed for anybody. As a basic philosophy, he does actually have a point, since legislated insurance requirements (for vehicles, health ect) pretty much came about at the behest of insurance companies, but when you live in a country where a graze on the arm can parlay into a tens-of-thousands hospital bill, it turns out that a whole industry can be created from this to (a) take your hundreds of dollars against the possibility of grazes, and (b) negotiate the \$20,000 bill down to \$19.99. Somebody is quids in on that scam, and you can almost sympathize with whichever bonkers teapot over here publicly longed for the old days when you could pay your doctor bill in chickens.

Driver stereotypes: The Ethiopians will take you on a 15-mile tour for a 3-mile journey while playing whatever their equivalent of bhangra is very loud and pretending not to speak English; the Eastern Europeans (Russians, Ukies, Armenians & that) used to have a similar reputation, presumably while playing Stalin-era martial tunes, although I have to say that the ones I know personally are much more honest in their plying of the trade; we have a couple of Cuban ladies working at our firm, both of whom are prone to the scenic route, one in particular being described by me (*sotto voce* to other drivers) as "no knickers and twice round the beltway"; the American drivers (usually but not entirely those of the Caucasian races) are bitter and often racist, but you'll never hear a tirade more comprehensive than an African-American driver of my acquaintance railing about getting stiffed by fucking worthless niggers who apparently often consider that they should get a cheap or free ride just out of a misguided sense of racial solidarity.

Passenger stereotypes: One of our favorite complaints is not unexpectedly those who do not tip, given that the tips can be half our income. This list includes, but is not limited to: black people, orientals, Canadians, hookers. So if you get the black Canadian hooker wearing a kimono you'll pretty much be expected to make the coin change for the ride (something we do not do, much to the enragement of black Canadian hookers in kimonos). Business people,

when in for any convention, conference or such, will give a \$2 tip no matter what the ride, since that's what their accountants will allow, or sometimes only \$1 if they are foreign, and if you are lucky, and remember the "thank'ee zorrr" and forelock-grabbing. The black hooker is the combination of the above shitlist that we'll most often get, and to be honest it depends where you get the ride from as to whether they're going to be angry or just tired. Prostitution is *still* illegal in Clark County, to the surprise of many visitors, but unsurprisingly there's a whole lot of wink-and-nod that goes on. The Aria in particular lets them in as long as they're classy-looking and discreet, and more often than not I'll end up taking working girls of all colors home. The clue tends to be where they're living; if it's one of the nicer condo places and further out of town, you can expect her to be quite nice, as long as you treat them with a bit of respect. Any Siegel or Budget Suites destination will be angry, complaining, and may not even have the fare. As one of my driver pals told me he commented to one of the girls when all she said she had was \$8 for the \$11 fare, "You must be shit at your job".

You just have to bring your best game, be entertaining and informative (if needed, some people don't want to chit-chat), and hope that your manner is reflected in the tip, which it is maybe half the time.

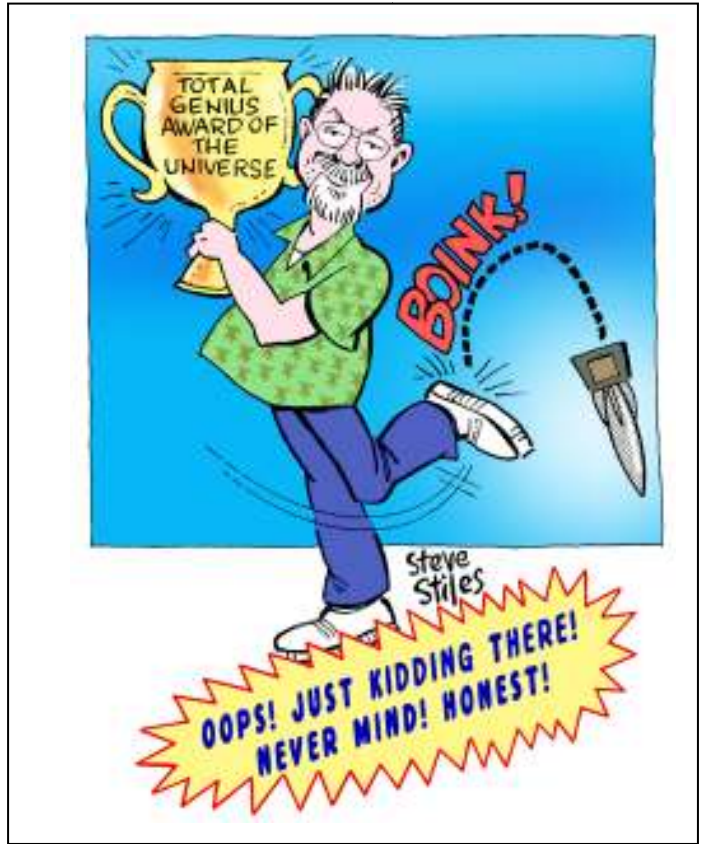
I've been working downtown on occasion, particularly around the California hotel where the Hawaiians typically stay. With stereotype radar full-on, I picked up a Hawaiian bloke with a somewhat wizened Oriental wife, going to Hawaiian airlines at Terminal 3. Our normal run is to take the freeway all the way (for T3 which is at the back, south side of the airport, and this usually doesn't get questioned, although it does run out more money; for T1 I'll exit at Tropicana for the north side). The wife proclaims "You take Paradise parkway, ok!", meaning the street route (actually Paradise Road), which runs out around \$25 rather than the \$35-40 the freeway would come to. Most people are ok with the freeway route since it really is a lot quicker, the street route having at least 20 sets of lights as opposed to - er - none. I cheerfully respond "certainly ma'am!", and as the trip proceeds in stony silence, resign myself to the likelihood of little or no tip. We get there with \$25-something on the meter, and my usual "here we are, Hawaiian Airlines, let me get your bags out", and before I even get out to open the door, the crone thrusts over the bills with a stern "Here thir'y fi' ok?", an almost ten dollar tip, which just goes to show. Fact is, there's any number of "exceptions" to any given stereotype every day on my trip sheet, and you really never know what you're going to get. Except for Brazilians. They always have huge amounts of luggage and don't tip either. In Portuguese. Bastards.

This is a useless space. Treasure it

THE TWO FACES OF STEVE STILES



BEFORE



AFTER

This has been Vibrator 31, a slimmer issue than usual (which many might say is no bad thing). Delays in my scheduling of V30 might have cut short some people's time for response, or it may be that it is holiday season and some people have better things to do, like laying on a sun-kissed beach drinking Margheritas in Magalouf. Alternatively some people might just be getting as fed up with Vibrator as I sometimes am.

The September issue should be out (lethargy notwithstanding) on September 30th, so plenty of time for you to stop gazing at your holiday snaps and concentrate on the important things in life. *"Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled locs yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

I'm Graham Charnock, graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk. Either Pat Charnock proof read this or she didn't. You be the judge.