



October 2016



Group photo
By roy_kettle

Group Photo Barcon 4 Norwich September 23-26th 2016

Left to Right: Pat Charnock, Rob Hansen, Harry Bell, John D. Berry, Eileen Gunn, Pat Bell, Graham Charnock, Brian Parker, Rob Jackson, Alison Scott, Steven Cain (back), Sandra Bond, Roy Kettle, Mike Meara, Nigel Rowe. (Missing in Action: Pat Meara)

Photo courtesy of Pat Bell, taken by the Glamorous Natalie

I do like a nice Camembert, left to mature at room temperature for several days until it is soft and runny, and one can dip one's finger into it occasionally. Perhaps that is the way you might like to handle Vibrator. Leave it lying around and poke into its sticky innards from time to time. I can't promise you will pull out any plums, but that is an entirely different fairy story.

This is Vibrator 32 from the mug who bought you the other 31 copies. September was a good month right up to and through Barcon 4, which you can see reported here. On return after Barcon weekend however we experienced a family crisis, and the world seemed to fall apart. I won't go into details except to say it resulted in daily visits to the the Whittington's Intensive Care Unit, and things are thank goodness slowly returning to as normal a world can be under the threat of Donald Trump (now there is someone I'd like to see in an ICU). Pat bore the brunt of this and understandably became ground down and depressed herself.

However, onwards and upwards as they say. Neither wind nor storm nor admonishments from Nic Farey shall stay the producers of Vibrator from the due and diligent execution of their duty. Now I must just go and move a huge CRT television down two flights of stairs. Pray for me.

I'm Graham Charnbokc, graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk. If Pat has the energy she can proofread and amend that, but I wouldn't count on it. Send your messages of sympathy and condolence but preferably some of those really smooth new plastic five pound notes to 45 Kimberley Gardens, London N4 1LD

Through Darkest Norwich with a smartphone in search of Barcon

Things you need to know: Barcon is an annual wife-swapping party held for members of Harry Bell's Yahoo fan group Inthebar. Actually swapping wives is optional and in fact hasn't been known to occur in the four years of the event, (unless somebody has been having more fun than I have). Previous venues have included Lincoln, Leamington Spa, and Peterborough.

Norwich was Roy Kettle's fault. He'd been there once and had had a nice pint of beer so that, as always, seemed sufficient recommendation for the rest of us.

Some people have complained recently about the did this/did that level of trip reporting. Well, fuck you, there will be quite a lot of that in this report. Skip read as much as you want. Much of Barcon is about convivial dining, so you aren't going to avoid reports of that. No way.

But what about the smartphone?

I carried around a smartphone at Barcon. It was the first time I had done it. It was the first time I had had a smartphone. I bought it primarily because at previous conventions under various flags I usually managed to lose track of where Pat was when I might have wanted to have been in the same place or at least know where she and Rob Jackson were canoodling. Nice word canoodling, nothing to do with canoeing, of course which is frankly beyond Rob these days with his gammy knee. I'd programmed a few game apps into my smartphone, and even downloaded Mike Moorcock's new novel, feeling they might come in handy. but I hardly used them the whole weekend. What the smartphone did come in use for, and which I have now determined is its primary use, quite apart from phoning people, is it is a fine thing to fiddle with whenever there are longueurs in conversations. Instead of finding things to talk about it's far easier to pull out your smartphone and fiddle with it, especially when the people around you are doing exactly the same.

Diversion One

We all worried about what to do with our cars in Norwich, those that had them. There were peculiar arrangements in the immediate vicinity of the hotel (which had no dedicated car park) relating to parking for only two-hours at a time (with no return). Rob Jackson and myself opted to park for four days in a near-by long-stay park. When we first took our car down there we were greeted by a very friendly local outdoor cat which lived across the road. A very young black and white who did all the rolling over tricks for us. It seemed a good omen, although we were slightly worried by the way it launched itself across a busy road when it saw us. I watched out for the cat on several occasions when I visited the vicinity of the car park, and saw it a few times. When it came time to leave I looked out for it again, but it obviously had business elsewhere that time.

The Stracey Hotel

Rob Jackson chose this venue for us. We won't be employing him anymore. Actually the Stracey was a good hotel, small but with rooms which Trip Advisor reported as unfussy. It had friendly helpful staff, although not many of them, and apparently it emerged they were not so friendly amongst themselves. Our main contact was the glamorous Natalie who was a six-foot plus lesbian amazon with holes in the knees of her jeans and she was fine although she seemed to have been assigned most of the locking up and turving out duties. Its main problem was that the bar area connected with the lounge area which connected with the kitchen area, which connected to the office, and the hotel hadn't devised any way of splitting them all off and securing the areas individually, so when it came to shutting down the bar it also shut down the residential lounge area. Not a good idea for any hotel in my book. Putting a shutter on the bar and a lockable door to the kitchen would have solved it all. Perhaps I will write to them and suggest it. Alternatively perhaps they just don't like the idea of their guests milling around having fun when all the staff have left and gone home.

Diversion Two: The What Happened When Bit

We all gathered on Friday afternoon. My room was the first inside the front door and I saw Nigel Rowe arrive and he saw me through the window of my room. I was displaying myself naked as I normally do, but he didn't seem put off. Soon he was knocking on my door demanding to know where everybody was and congratulating me on the size of my dong. I didn't know but I took him to the lounge (ten feet away) and we sat and waited for fans to be attracted to us, which eventually as is a universal law of congregating fandom, they soon were. Nigel had been unable to get into the main hotel and was staying in the Holiday Inn near the main Norwich City Carrow Park entertainment complex. He told us how some of the rooms overlooked the football field itself (not his) and some residents were issued strict directions about what they could and couldn't do in those rooms. Nigel never got hold of these but it would have been fun to see them, and was even more fun to speculate on what they might have included.

Apparently certain selfish self-obsessed people who didn't want to venture far from the hotel the first night had booked into the nearby Coach and Horses for a pub meal the first evening. When the rest of us tried to climb on board the ship had sailed so Rob Jackson manfully led us on an exploratory expedition to visit a far and distant Indian vegetarian restaurant, which he assured us was only ten minutes away. The ten turned into twenty and the twenty turned into thirty, whilst Rob consistently assured us it was *just up here*. I believe it was during this walk that Rob suffered some sort of altitude induced oxygen starvation because after that he proved unable to recognize or remember who had been in his expeditionary party. Eventually we found it and planted our flag. It was pleasant enough, and served dosas which is all you can ever ask (mine was a spicey paneer). Those present were John D. B. and Eileen Gunn, Me, Nigel, Rob J., Sandra and two other people whose names escape me. There are always two other people, aren't there?

The trip to the restaurant had involved us walking up Prince of Wales Street, which we realized when walking back was also the venue for most of the raunchy night life in Norwich. Nigel insisted we stop at several venues which advertised *Genuine* American-style table dancing, including one which falsely claimed to be in Chicago, but we soon realized we were the ones who were expected to dance on the tables, so we made our excuses and left. I quite enjoyed following young girls in tight skirts down the street, and someone has reported how one of them launched themselves on Nigel Rowe, brought him to the ground and raped him mercilessly, although I didn't witness that myself.

The Compleat Angler Conjection

On Saturday morning I was determined to sleep as long as I could whilst remaining alive. Pat woke me up by phoning me to tell me Jim Mowatt and Carrie had arrived. Although she insisted in calling Carrie Corrie. Then I got messages from Jim who said they were down by the river at the Compleat Angler. Now I sort of appreciated what smartphones might be useful for. That is for waking you up. By the time I got there Nigel

Rowe had also arrived. We had a pleasant time and sent out tentacles to others through these new-fangled smartphone thingeys. Eventually people turned up, even Alison Scott. Well, there always has to be a downside. The pub was one of two nearest the station so naturally it was a Mecca for visiting football fans on this Event Day: Norwich City V. Burton Albion. The Burton Albion fans we interviewed were even convinced they were on a hiding to nothing. I remember lots of beer was spilled over lots of people's personal devices, but we and they all seemed to survive.

The Great Alison Scott Conjunction

Nigel and I had bought wine at a local off license to take to the Namaste on Friday Night. Four bottles. A considerable residual was left over at the end of the evening, so I chose to return to the hotel with them in a plastic bag. Immediately I entered I was leapt on by Pat and Roy Kettle and warned not to open or drink anything I may have brought in. Apparently there had been some Terrible Incident involving Alison Scott. She had been caught smuggling in drink (shock horror!) and a dire warning had been issued by a particularly observant member of the hotel's staff. Roy had also brought in drink back from the Coach & Horses too, but I didn't hear he ever got round to drinking it. People at major conventions seem to think they have a right to flaunt the regulations of larger venues, but I was frankly disappointed that certain members of our party chose to go up against a small hotel and somehow tarnish whatever reputation we may have had. I later sat in on a conversation when Alison was trying to argue with the long-suffering Natalie that the hotel's response should be to provide good ales. All this time she and Steven were still funnelling booze under the table into their glasses, but obviously by then Natalie didn't give a shit. At some stage Alison broke a glass into her handbag, although I don't know whether it was under the influence of legal or illegal ale. She seemed to spend the rest of the convention complaining about it though, as if it had not been her fault.

I had an interesting conversation with Alison about cosplay. I said I thought cosplay and costuming were two different things. "No." Alison said. Alison then monosyllabically intoned "No..." for several minutes, before coming out of her fugue and explaining to me what the exact differences were between Cosplay and Costuming and something called LARPing. I give up.

The Andrew Stephenson Visitation

Somehow Pat managed to drag from her memory the fact that Andrew Stephenson lived in Norwich. Andrew is a fan and writer from the seventies. A talented artist he produced the cover for the first Seacon Eastercon and was associated with zines as diverse as Zimri, and that other one. We arranged to meet him he promised to take us to the Ribs of Beef pub where the Norwich Group had held regular meetings back when there had been regular meetings. I chose whitebait for lunch which was mistake and I realized I didn't really like whitebait. Andrew and Rob both chose a roast, which was fine except Rob's had potatoes on it and Andrew's didn't. A certain lack of quality control in

the kitchen, I thought. It turned out Andrew had spent the last twenty years working on his latest novel, and the last ten building a new house. Don't hold your breath. Andrew is an immensely intelligent and well-informed man, especially on the subject of German home heating systems and willingly shared his knowledge with us at some length. Thank you Andrew.

The Way Home Conjection

Incidentally a peculiar juxtaposition of incidents occurred the day we left Norwich when our smartphones proved totally useless and Pat and I had to resort to Semaphore. On the way back from Norwich we decided to stop off at Audley End, a classic Jacobean country house near Saffron Walden. After a troll round the house (nice but sort of mix of Jacobean later demolished and rebuilt as Victorian) we went to visit the parterre gardens we had previously glimpsed from the house. I found some garden seats on one side of the garden while Pat wandered off and found some diametrically opposite about four or five hundred yards away, i.e. the entire length of the house. After a while I decided it might be time to visit the Gift Shop as we had previously agreed. I waved at Pat. She waved at me. But neither of us moved. I rang Pat on my smartphone, only five hundred yards away mind. Bizarrely she could not get a signal where she was sitting, and they came through as missed calls. She made a shrugging gesture and I pointed where I was heading off to. Thus we eventually managed to decipher each others' intentions. Who says conversation is dead?

OLD COAD'S RECORDS

Rich Coad gets back to his roots

I was rooting about in my file system, as one does from time to time, when I ran across this article I had written for Sharee Carton's RIGHT UP THERE number 3, back in 2004. Seeing as how there were 20 years between RUT 1 and RUT 2, perhaps I'm being premature in sending this to VIBRATOR, but what the hell. Sharee is at sea, so I am safe from her wrath. For now.

In the dozen years that have gone by since I wrote this, perhaps too little has changed. But in terms of music I have learned about a thriving worldwide underground movement of neo-psychedlic bands. Groups like The Black Angels from Austin TX, La Hell Gang from Chile, Temples from Kettering UK, Tame Impala from Perth Australia, and, most of all, for me, GOAT a bunch of crazy Swedes from Gothenburg who wear outrageous masks and costumes, evocative of some pagan past, while making a droning trance inducing noise that makes me want to take hallucinogenic drugs and spin around rhythmically until I fall down. Great stuff! None of these groups seem to get much radio or TV exposure but clearly there is an audience that supports not only those I've mentioned, but dozens of

other bands from all parts of the world. Anyway, as for what I was doing in 2004, read on.

Write about what you were listening to 20 years ago and what you listen to today - compare and contrast, said Sharee. For someone who often can't recall what he was doing 20 minutes ago, this could be harder than it sounds. But I'm willing to give it a try; after all, it's not too often that a twentieth anniversary AND a second issue come out together.

Let's think back to 1984 and how different it all was. The United States was run by a cabal of neo-conservative ideologues who described our enemies as evil. Islamic terrorists bombed planes and the US responded by bombing Arab countries suspected of links to the terrorists. Plans for a missile defense shield were hotly debated. The president insisted that government should be smaller and the budget must be balanced while racking up the largest deficits the nation has ever known. Yes, things have certainly changed a lot since then!

But of course popular music, which changes styles so swiftly, must have been all different. A quick review of the top 100 from 1984 reveals a whole bunch of shitty songs and no rap. So I guess we can safely say that over twenty years rap has become more popular. Although it was certainly around in 84 it hadn't yet become the mainstream music it is today. Christ, it's become so mainstream that on NPR I heard about a radical/nationalist French group who rapped about the history of the Celts in Brittany. Don't think it was a hit but in France you can never be sure.

Anyway, Sharee was asking about personal growth and differences between what we listened to in our twenties and what we listen to in our forties. As far as I was, and still am, concerned, the decade of the 1980s was a lowpoint for popular music. It all seemed like watered down corporate versions of music that was cutting edge in the 1970s and all very tailored to MTV - bands with a lot of visual image were the hit-makers of the times. Instead of punk bands like The Ramones or The Sex Pistols we got new wave in the form of The Cars or The Police (small anti-Sting side-rant here: you know how sanctimonious he is about saving the planet from global-warming and other catastrophes? well, Mr. Gordon Summers, if you want to save the planet why don't you give up your fucking private jet! Asshole!); glam was no longer T. Rex, Gary Glitter, and David Bowie, but Duran Duran and Culture Club (okay, I'll admit that CHURCH OF THE POISON MIND was a good single). It seemed like a decade of one-hit wonders, although several groups had more than one hit. Meanwhile, the groups from the late 1970s that I really liked, the NYC punk bands and many of the UK punk bands, seemed to have no commercial appeal in the US whatsoever. Now THAT is something that has changed. These underground bands that were appreciated by the cognoscenti are now the old-school mainstream. I think I first realized that when I heard the Ramones BLITZKRIEG BOP blasting out at the start of the Bay to Breakers race in 1996. Somehow or other, an Iggy Pop tune about copping heroin has become the background music for Carnival Cruise line commercials. Weird, indeed.

So in the 1980's I was listening to lots of 1970s punk rock; now, in 2004, I listen to lots of 1970s punk rock. That's not all, though. As with many other listeners, punk rock ended up opening gateways to whole new genres of music. Hearing The Cramps led to an interest in learning more about Rockabilly; Gun Club begat an interest in country blues; these new interests led to other interests and, before I knew it, I had far too many albums and CDs. I can't say my musical tastes have changed that much over the years - they have broadened but the basic themes of liking a bit of melody, a song that tells a story, and an emotional intensity and honesty in the delivery, that and a few handclaps will win me over every time.

Having just moved the thousands of records and CDs accumulated over the years, it's somewhat tempting to think about paring it down to a top ten. The temptation is to cheat and choose only anthologies, box sets even. After all, if I had the Rhino Big Box of 60s Soul with me I'd always be able to listen to The Intruders sing COWBOYS TO GIRLS and life would certainly be less pleasant if I could never hear that again. But that would be cheating, so I will attempt to pare my selections down to archetypes of the genres I listen to most and hope for the best.

PUCCINI La Boheme - RCA Victor Orchestra conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham with Victoria de los Angeles as Mimi. Twenty years ago I did not listen to opera. Occasionally I might be in a North Beach coffee shop that had 45s of opera arias on the jukebox and I'd hear one that somebody else had chosen and enjoy it. But I had no clue which opera it might have come from or what the song was about. Then one day my brother asked if I wanted to come with him to see Lucia de Lammamoor at the San Francisco Opera. I did and was immediately entranced. While the arias had sounded good, with the whole presentation of staging, costuming, soap-opera type plotting, the opera became something to see as well as listen to. I try to get to a couple each year now. This recording of La Boheme is from 1956 and is mono but Victoria de los Angeles' astonishing singing makes it rise above any other recording I've heard. During a visit to NYC, Stacy and I saw the Met stage La Boheme. I kept hoping they would do the happy-ending version, the one where Mimi gets better and Rodolfo's plays are produced and become hugely successful, but it was not to be. As Bugs Bunny once said "You weren't expecting a happy ending, were you? It's opera!", or words to that effect. Apparently, there has been enough cross-over between punk-rock fans and opera-lovers that the trend has been noticed as a "movement" by NPR and the New York Times. Odd but true.

SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE Dance To The Music - I have a feeling that people have forgotten what a great band Sly Stone put together in the late 60s. Others point to George Clinton or James Brown as the creators of funk, but for my money it was Sly who did it first and best. Nowadays, unfortunately, Sly Stone seems to be mostly known for periodically saying he's going to do a comeback that never materializes. Before he put the band together, Sly was a DJ on Oakland's soul radio station KDIA. His show was not to be missed as he played the best music and had the best patter on the air at the time. When the record came out it was like nothing that had come before it - mixed black and

white musicians, mixed rock and soul idioms, horns and wild guitar and deep bass, shouts and screams and an overwhelming sense of joyousness in bringing this new noise to the people. Put it on today and it still sounds as fresh as ever. A truly great record that seems to have been forgotten over the years.

CAPTAIN BEEFHEART AND THE MAGIC BAND *Safe As Milk* - Others may point to *Trout Mask Replica* as the definitive Captain Beefheart record, but this, his first record, shows that Beefheart had much much more than a stoned strangeness going for him. With Ry Cooder providing his incomparable guitar stylings, the band rips through an early psychedelic version of blues music. *Zig Zag Wanderer* deserves to be a major hit, even today. This is really proto-psychedelia - bands that were still essentially garage bands, similar to ? and the Mysterians or the Count Five, but starting to incorporate the acid-inspired imagery that took over a couple of years later. Very early Grateful Dead has the same feeling but lacks Cooder's guitar and the Captain's gruff, Howlin' Wolf like, vocals. Another shamefully forgotten record.

LOVE *Forever Changes* - The epitome of psychedelia to me. Without the benefit of LSD, I think it would be impossible to write lyrics like "Oh the snot has caked against my pants/it has turned in to crystal/there's a bluebird sitting on the branch/I guess I'll get my pistol/because he's on my land". The stunning thing about this album is that Artur Lee and the band managed to add such catchy tunes to such insane lyrics. "We're all normal and we want our freedom", *yesireebob*. The Damned covered *Alone Again Or* in the late 80s or early 90s and shot a great spaghetti western style video, complete with width compression for TV that makes everybody look about 10 feet tall. I have the feeling that this record was much more successful in the UK than in the US since many Brits seem to be familiar with it but far fewer Yanks.

CHARLIE PATTON *Screaming And Hollerin' The Blues* - This is a bit of a cheat, I suppose. Revenant Records put out this collection of all of Charlie Patton's recordings - both his own and those where he appeared with others. Robert Johnson is often the country blues singer that white aficionados most highly praise and deservedly so for his haunted songs of true alienation and existential despair and terror. But I find myself returning to Charlie Patton more often than Robert Johnson. Patton sang about actual events - *High Water Everywhere* tells of the great 1927 flood of the Mississippi; *Boll Weevil Blues* about the devastating boll weevil infestation that wiped out cotton crops and livelihoods throughout the region - with an extraordinarily powerful voice

while putting them to toe-tapping danceable melodies. Yazoo has a good selection of Patton available also.

BLIND WILLIE JOHNSON *Praise God I'm Satisfied* - On one or another of the fannish mailing lists we had a thread going about gospel music some time ago. Ted White averred that he listened to the music but ignored the lyrics. To me, however, the lyrics really add to the whole - although I have no religion I was raised as a Christian and went to Sunday school and the stories and imagery still retain their potency. Blind Willie

Johnson sets these biblical stories to a thumping blues guitar and delivers them in just about the rawest voice ever recorded (I notice a theme of liking very rough and raw singers coming through here). Listening to God Don't Never Change or Nobody's Fault But Mine makes even little old atheist me feel moved by the spirit of the lord.

VA Harp Of A Thousand Strings (Southern Journey Vol. 9) - Talk about making a joyful noise unto the lord! These are recordings made by Alan Lomax at the 1959 United Sacred Harp Musical Convention in Fyffe, Alabama. What happens is the congregation is divided into four parts, each against one wall of the church. They are handed hymnals with a simplified music notation. To get everybody in synch they sing a few Do-Re-Mi lines then launch into an amazing massed four part harmony which raises the hairs on the back of your neck and makes shivers run down your spine. The lyrics are generally incomprehensible but oh that sound! This is some of the most remarkable singing I have ever heard and if it wasn't for Alan Lomax and his portable tape recorder it probably would have vanished as the South urbanized.

STEVE EARLE Train A Comin' - The album Steve Earle recorded after he got out of prison for heroin possession is nothing short of a masterpiece. Using a mix of material ranging from some of his earliest written, but never recorded, songs to brand new writings to Beatles covers to reggae covers, Steve Earle assembled some of the finest acoustic musicians (but, he says, "This ain't my unplugged album. God, I hate MTV.") to put out an album that simply refuted all of the naysayers who believed Earle had wasted away his talent with the needle. There's not a band song in the bunch; Peter Rowan taking over lead vocals for Rivers Of Babylon always gets me; Earle sings of mercenaries, lost love, the civil war, and gunslingers with equal conviction throughout. Since then, Steve Earle has gone on to consolidate his position as one of Americana's or alt.country's foremost songwriters and has been performing near constantly. Keeping busy, he claims, keeps him from looking for dope again. This is definitely one rehab we all benefit from. But before leaving Train A Comin' I have to relate how it led to the single best concert I've ever been to and probably ever will. Steve Earle travelled with the musicians from the album - even the normally reclusive Norman Blake was on the tour - playing small clubs with no opening act since there was little corporate support for the expenses. The tour stopped in at the Great American Music Hall on Earle's birthday; we not only got two and a half hours of excellent music, but the whole crowd got birthday cake, too.

DOCK BOGGS Country Blues - I first heard this about five years ago and it was one of those moments when you realize that even in middle-age there are still amazing things in the world awaiting discovery. Dock Boggs recorded a dozen or so sides in the late 1920s, then got married and went to work in a coal mine to support his family for the next 35 years or so. In the early 1960s he was rediscovered as part of the folk revival and, since his wife had died along with her religious objections to his music, was prevailed upon to do some new recordings for Folkways. This set has all of Boggs' 1920s recordings and its all stunning. His songs are straight country blues but sung by a white guy with a hillbilly accent playing a banjo instead of a guitar. Many of the songs are old folk songs and

mostly deal with bad things happening to people although oftentimes they bring it on themselves. Death, despair, and deprivation - who needs more for good songs?

SEX PISTOLS Never Mind The Bollocks - This record still gives me shivers. Hearing Johnny Rotten's sneering vocals for the first time was such a contrast to the placid soft-rock that was on most of the radio at the time. At the time, it seemed like something that had never been done before to be so sarcastic and confrontational in pop music - but go back and listen to some of those first rock albums by Bob Dylan and you will see that Rotten was truly building on what had come before. The palpable sense of anger directed almost everywhere adds to a driving, but very melodic, wall-of-sound propelled by Steve Jones' guitar and the solid rhythm section of Glen Matlock and Paul Cook. There was a lot of absurd hype about this band and they didn't last long but, boy, did they have an impact. As I remember them, the pre-punk 1970s were ones where people played lip-service to individualism and open-mindedness but this was within very proscribed limits. Post-punk things started opening up more - it took a while but it's possible now to have tattoos and work at an optometrists or have magenta hair and work at a big and tall clothing store (don't ask why I know this last one - I'm trying to slim). Of course, nearly 30 years on, none of this seems like a prelude to the end of civilization as we know it any more. Since then civilization has withstood such dangers as Ice-T, Sistasouljah, Marilyn Manson, and Eminem. It's always a good thing, in my view, when pop music causes a furor. It's rare, Elvis Presley, The Beatles, The Sex Pistols, and Eminem are the only ones who come to mind, when the furor is over something worth listening to.

Ten records I'd definitely like to have with me on a desert island. They might change next week or next year. In fact, I look back now, and I realize I have no Ramones! Where is The Dictators Go Girl Crazy? And The New York Dolls? Can I really live without any jazz at all? No Dizzy, no Mingus, no Louis Armstrong, no Billie Holliday? What about some Beastie Boys? Or Eminem? Or some Mozart or Arvo Part? In the end I realize there are only two choices for a desert island - a 60 GB iPod filled with the best available songs or that biggest of all desert islands, Australia, and easy access to the record shops of Sydney or Melbourne or Perth.

WHAT I THINK

By Graham Charnock

So, Graham, what do you really think?

People ask me that question all the time. They ask me while I am shopping down the High Street. Hey Graham, what do you think? They ask, and by the way can you spare a pound. The Social Services have repossessed my children and I need to drink to forget them. Well, fuck off, I normally say, whereupon they knee me in the groin and help me to the ground. People are so kind.

When I go to the doctor, she asks me Hey Graham what do you think?

“Well, I say, I think you are a quack who can’t see beyond my alcoholism. Alcoholics are real people you know, Dr Haas, who have real things happen to them totally unrelated to their alcohol intake. As soon as I walk through the door you want to give me blood tests and blood pressure tests and liver biopsies all because you believe it will sustain your warped prognoses.” Well, actually I said, I believe Lloyd Penney should win the FAAn award occasionally perhaps in those years when Ribert Lichtman has a bad time. She looks at me blankly as if she can’t imagine what I’m talking about and I must be drunk. Would you believe it?

Hey Graham what do you think? people ask when I go on Facebook and then they decide they don’t really care what I think anyway, and especially if it contradicts any of their views. My page, my rules, they say. Yes, I know i invited you to be my friend, but I didn’t mean *real* friend, like someone who could actually talk to me.

So what do I actually think? Here is a column with a few of my personal opinions. Tell me to go away and crawl under a truck if you want. But not that truck on Youtube which was trying to reverse onto a pontoon and only succeeded in sinking itself. You don’t know what I am talking about do you?

Climate Warming. Well you all know what I think about that, at least you do if you have been following me on any level whatsoever. But to hone it down, my opinion is I Don’t Fucking Care. The effects of climate warming are not likely to affect me before I die. So the rest of you can happily go on having the same futile arguments for decades and decades, until you too die. Human life will go on to survive until the sun dies, possibly in 300 millions years time. Maybe tiny bacteria and tardigrades which survive on airless asteroids will be having the same argument years after that.

Here’s my view on Brexit. You fuckers know who you are. Not everyone who voted brexit is a racist, but all raciuts voted Brexit and all things being equal, that tipped the balance. Okay let’s concentrate on racists and why they are suddenly now such an influence of both local and national politics. Can we not put down people like this at birth

or at least upon the first occasion they display racist tendencies. Every person you put down in those circumstances prevents another innocent Polish person being kicked to death. Think about it.

Bloody Hell. Private exploration of space. Good idea eh? Except it is not exploration. It is incredibly rich American millionaires like Elon Musk funding satellites which equally rich entrepreneurs like Mark Zuckerberg can use to propagate Facebook in Africa. Look, Facebook is an addiction for many, it is also a way for disassociated psychopaths to spread their poison throughout the world. Yes, I'm sure this was not Zuckerberg's initial wish, but it is how it has worked out. Hate people? Feel self-important and that you are better than anybody else. Don't bother employing a psychiatrist, go on Facebook to tell them so. Spam them. Facebook makes it so easy for you without accepting any responsibility. Simply troll people. Oh that is a somehow cute concept, which can lead to people devaluing themselves and doubting their own self-worth.

I admit sometimes I am angry. I am an angry churning barrel or hate perhaps directed as unintelligent people who don't know better. But should we make concessions for unintelligence when it is wearing the rest of humanity down.

People often ask me what I think. I say fuck off. They won't listen to anything I say anyway. I once worked for a boss who would visit our island outpost of his empire occasionally and ask people how they were? On one occasion a member of my staff took him at his word and let off a mouthful of invective and criticism mainly directed at his management style. This was in a crowded shop amongst customers. Later the boss took me aside and tore me off a strip for allowing this sort of behaviour. That is, it wasn't his fault, it was my fault. So I know you can't win when you express your opinions. Fuck off.

I know I am probably alone in counselling against the commercial exploitation of space. National governments are generally accountable (unless they are North Korea of course) which commercial corporations are not and will do anything to satisfy their shareholders, even it involves morally or ethically questionable things. It is certainly a far fetch for instance to imagine a commercial organization accepting a contract from a third party to put a nuclear missile in orbit, but it is not technically beyond the bounds of reason, and reason so often breaks down when money is concerned.

So I say, Fuck off to corporate space exploration. Why spread our poison to other galaxies?

--Graham Charnock



NIC FAREY

You, Charnock (G), have privately excoriated me for the genuinely complimentary feedback I inevitably provide for any given issue of your Sex Toy (Not Charnock (P)) on the utterly tenuous grounds that the word count is insufficient, and you don't WAHF, never have and never will. I therefore choose to exercise the YACG (***sic***) option and needlessly blather on rather than trouble you with anything resembling succinctness. This does not imply any kind of cessation of complimentary remarks (see below) or, I assume, any kind of hiatus in our usual genial exchange of insults (***qv*** YACG ***passim*** ***ad nauseam***).

The Compliment: On Aldiss, you write, "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." I consider this to be one of the best sentences written by anyone, ever, but I'm sure you'll manage to surpass it somehow.

Much as it's always enjoyable to be privileged to read such great finds as G West's Novacon adventure, it's also good to see your own words in what is probably still at least nominally a perzine, walk-on appearances by black Canadian hookers in kimonos notwithstanding.

It was a slimmed-down ish to be sure, not that ***Vibrator*** could generally be accused of bloat, made slimmer for me by my tendency to skip to the next section any time I see the words "Taral Wayne".

The Otherwise Mighty Robt Lichtman (locs) buys into your previous comment about "tight-knit" Vegas fandom, which as I'd subsequently informed you would be an adjective that would give rise to reactions ranging from mild bewilderment to howls of derisive larffter in this desert valley we call home. There are several distinct "fan groups" of varying sizes and interests, naturally with some degree of overlap, and it's not inaccurate to suggest that "The Vegrants" were/are one of the least of them, although certainly the most "fannish" as you, I, and the readers of this rag would understand that term. Joyce

Katz will be sorely missed as the true anchor of fannishness here, especially so by those (including myself) who had the privilege and pleasure of interacting with her. Everyone I know who had that privilege seems to have a "Joyce story" which seems to inevitably include moments of welcoming inclusion and encouragement. Our friend Brenda ("Brender") Dupont, for example, I'm sure won't mind me relating that it was Joyce who encouraged her to resume writing, something she enjoyed but hadn't really done since high school, a reminiscence she shared once again as she, Jen and I and James and Tee Taylor met last night at Carlito's Burritos for a small celebration of James and Tee's 9th wedding anniversary. What's been unstated but implied in the genuine, deserved and heartfelt tributes that have been written is that while we can sympathize with Arnie's tremendous loss, Joyce expressed the best qualities of us and sought to find those qualities in others, whereas he has often been a polarizing and divisive presence.

"Tight-knit"? More like dodgy macrame if you ask me.

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PAUL SKELTON

'Baffled of Mile End Lane' here. Don't get me wrong; I agreed with much of *A Little Bit of Criticism*, but your initial complaint, of losing "...sf as the individual novel of ideas...", foundered for me at the end with your personal definition of an 'idea'. It sounded to me more like the definition of a 'novel'. Now I know I don't have my finger on the national pulse, nor even on the skiffy pulse, but I have the feeling most people would expect to find your definition exemplified in any well-written novel, whether it be considered one of ideas or not.

In *The Tragedy of Jack Johnson* I loved the lines...

"There was fighting all along the line of march. Several were injured, but the police finally prevented trouble..."

A somewhat innovative usage of the word 'prevented' there. Wikipedia states that Johnson was married three times, always to white women. In *Papa Jack* Randy Roberts wrote (and I will chop out irrelevancies)...

'Johnson's biographers insist that he was married by that time to a light-skinned black girl...Mary Austin. Their source...is Johnson's autobiography. Certainly a woman named Mary Austin did travel with Johnson for a few years, and he did introduce her as his wife. But they were never legally married. Further, when Johnson applied for a marriage licence in 1913 he asserted that he had never been married. The confusion probably originated in Johnson's habit of introducing female travelling companions as his wife. Whoever was living with him at a given time became "Mrs. Jack Johnson".'

Quite possibly Jack considered her to be more a Mrs. Jack Johnson than any of the later ones.

Of course the other tragedy of Jack Johnson is that, even whilst writing about him, he made such an impression on you that you changed his name to Jackson towards the end of the first sentence of your third paragraph. Ah, *FAME* - such a fickle mistress.

I'm less certain than Roman Orszanski that the EU will be able to insist on foreign workers as a price for a trade agreement. The fact is that without a 'free trade' agreement international law would require tariffs on certain goods (eg. cars) and as the EU sells more stuff to us than we sell to them this would seem to be a cutting-off-nose-to-spite-face exercise.

I'm still baffled, this time by David Redd telling us our Prime Minister is unelected. How did she get into Parliament if she wasn't elected? How did she become the leader of the conservative party, if she wasn't elected? It is true that she didn't win a General Election as Prime Minister, but General Elections are for electing Governments, not Prime Ministers, as Churchill discovered post-war.

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PHILIP TURNER

Not an instant reply on the day after your mag hit the doormat because it got itself hidden under my PDF tablet, which is exactly the right size for concealing an A5 mag. Oh, well. Let's kick off with a quibble. There ain't no such animal as an "unelected prime monster". This country elects 650 stooges (until the rotten boroughs are expunged) and the biggest gang of them provides a head stooge. And if that stooge is scrapped -- Brown in for Blair, Callaghan in for Wilson -- there's no breach of contract with the electorate. Boring but true.

Dave Cockfield's explanation for the unsullied page 31 of Vib 30 is muy excelente! A conscience page where LoC-laggers can scribble a few words to make themselves feel better. Mr. Charnock deserves some sort of humanitarian award for making this possible. And he sort of made the bottom part of page 19 in Vib 31 available as well.

People. Don't you just hate them? Taxi Nic's piece makes a strong case for ID cards with an encoded personal profile. Everyone wanting to take a taxi ride would have to tap the card on an exterior reader, and if the potential punter has been given an asshole rating, the door won't open and the asshole either has to get a bus (assuming he/she/don't kno' is allowed on buses) or walk.

Let me close with some good news for Pat the Prof: [see attached cartoon + cutting] pigeons can be taught to do this job, so you might be excused the responsibility in 50-100 years' time.

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JOSEPH NICHOLAS

Thank you for */Vibrators/* 30 and 31, and apologies for my failure to respond to the first of these. I blame all the very warm, sunny weather we've been having for the past couple of months, inculcating in me an overwhelming desire to lie about in the back garden wearing not very much. Or, if not lounging around on the lawn scrutinising an interesting history text, enjoying days out visiting various properties, gardens, towns and walking trails -- Audley End, Down House, Wrest Park, Winchelsea and Rye, Folkestone, the Colne Valley/Grand Union Canal, parts of southeast London's Green Chain Walk. Lots of photographs -- lots of exercise -- lots of things ticked off the Hanna/Nicholas travel programme -- all now brought to a crashing halt by the late onset of the true autumn, finally driving me indoors to engage with the laptop keyboard and the various things stacked up for me to deal with. Including, of course, your latest two issues.

"When did sf as the individual novel of ideas suddenly become the serial novel of clichéd action/adventure characters acting out in fantasy worlds?" you ask in */Vibrator/* 31. One could of course utter similar whinges about the alleged decline of other kinds of fiction: for example, how dull and dreary it is to be lectured by Mr Dickens about the condition of the urban poor, doubtless influenced by the wicked continental ideas of Freidrich Engels and Karl Marx, instead of being entertained with more of those genteel comedies of social manners in English country towns which Miss Austen used to write. (Although you say that you "don't actually recall */Pride & Prejudice: The Trilogy/*", it was originally published in three volumes. As were all her other novels except for */Northanger Abbey/* and */Persuasion/*, which were published jointly in four volumes. And as for Henry Fielding, "if [he] could have split */Tom Jones/* into three parts, he surely would": it was originally published in four volumes.) As one or two people have already remarked, it's rather difficult to take seriously your complaints about the state of contemporary science fiction when you don't appear to have read very much of it -- you cite as the standards to be admired such "Golden Age" writers as "Hal Clement, Daniel F. Galouye, Walter M. Miller, Daniel Keyes, even William F. Nolan", who may have elicited a gosh-wow-boy-oh-boy response in the dusty days of old but are hardly cutting edge in the here and now (and when held up to the piercing light of modern critical standards -- or just critical standards, fullstop -- are exposed as rather creaking and unreadable). In any case, these writers' works hardly satisfy your definition of a novel of ideas as one with "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". */Mission of Gravity/* (for example) is a what-if there was an alien planet shaped like a disc instead of a sphere, in which the plot is fairly trivial and the characterisation insignificant; while */Counterfeit W//orld/* (for another example) is a what-if we were all living in a simulation and how could we tell, in which pretty much everything is subordinated to the desire to escape from it and the characterisation is again fairly minimal. They're the sort of novels which one can read once, but never again, because there's nothing more to them: no

depth beyond the central conceit. They are in fact novels of "a world or a universe with peculiar properties on which [one] can spin out adventures" which you expressly rule out as ***not*** novels of ideas.

Additionally, you seem to be overlooking how modern publishing actually works. Where once editors were in the driving seat, competing with each other to find and nurture new and individual talent, the driving seat is now occupied by the marketing department, whose principal concern is the bottom line: what made money in previous years, and what should therefore continue to make money in future years. Publishing is no longer dominated by the quirky, disparate entities that characterised the post-WW2 decades (Gollancz, Faber, Jonathan Cape; you know the list) but conglomerate, corporate, multinational concerns driven on -- like all such -- by the search for profit. (Where the old publishers' names still exist, they are mostly imprints used by the corporations to distinguish one line of fiction from another.) If the shelves of the nation's bookshops are therefore chock-a-block with what John Clute labelled as "extruded fantasy product", it is the corporate marketing departments which are to blame. Or possibly the readers, for buying the stuff in the first place, thus proving the accuracy of the corporate marketing departments' publishing decisions. (But then if there's little else, what choice do they have?) As P T Barnum didn't quite say, no one ever went broke misunderestimating the taste of the public.

Those first three paragraphs were written several days ago; I thought then that I might want to come back to comment on Graham West's take on Novacon, but have discovered -- after a weekend devoted to vacuuming the carpets and cleaning the kitchen and conservatory floors -- that I don't think I usefully can add anything to what others have already said. Additionally, it's a good many years since we last went to a Novacon -- we were at the 25th anniversary convention in 1995, but didn't go again until 2003 (a date I can readily recall because, as with the Newcastle Corflu last year, we knocked out a one-off fanzine for it and of course still have our file copy of the thing) -- and therefore have absolutely zero recent experience on which to draw. Once Novacon ceases to be a regular event in one's personal calendar -- once any convention ceases to be a regular event in one's personal calendar -- it is lost from it altogether, and one has to make a real effort to remember that it's even happening, never mind register for it. Although mention of registration reminds me that I have an entry in the Things To Do list in my Filofax which reads "Join Finnish Worldcon", something I really ought to get around too sooner rather than later given that the convention is now less than a year away....

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DAVID REDD

Starting 31 at the back means I begin with some gems. Jodge, latest variation on an inexhaustible theme. The two faces of Steve Stiles. Another terrific Nic Farey column (this is the 21st century all right: frantic, appalling, surprising. And an appreciation of

humanity which to me is up there with Mae Strelkov's.) And so on, eventually to "A Little Bit of Criticism" about which I feel, well, critical. But then I would, wouldn't I?

I agree with your general views on sf "serial novels" vs. the late lamented "novel of ideas", but not with your supporting details. You ask possibly rhetorically "When did" [it all go wrong]? Perhaps when Megan Lindholm, author of the truly wonderful Wizard of the Pigeons, became Robin Hobb. Or perhaps when Robert Silverberg, author of Dying Inside, became author of the deliberately dumbed-down Majipoor blockbusters. (They both remain good writers, but now seem to produce a lot of amiable words for a lot of amiable people rather than a few well-chosen words for a few well-chosen people.)

You point the finger at Tolkien. I suppose it did begin with his Lord of the Rings – a work for adults, I insist, not a juvenile. But the ensuing avalanche wasn't his fault. The real culprit was Lester del Rey, who noted the commercial appeal of the LotR format and expertly trained a bunch of new writers to clone it – people like Terry Brooks, Stephen Donaldson, etc. And so the fantasy multivolume sequence was born. (I nearly typed "multivomit sequence", I see, but the software has saved me.) In the Dune books you can actually observe Frank Herbert's original "individual novel of ideas" mutating into your "serial novel of..." Like L. Ron Hubbard's fiction going from Fear to the Mission Earth dekalogy.

Length isn't necessarily bad. John Nielsen-Hall usefully points to Peter F Hamilton's massive works, which are always interesting and readable, or would be if I could face reading anything that long these days.

I think some clearer definition of "series fiction" and "serial fiction" would help your argument. Seems a bit confused as it is. "Trilogy" is a slippery term too. Novels used to be published in three volumes for circulating libraries who presumably charged three times the single-volume loan fee. (You paid a lot for wide margins!) Lord of the Rings I think was written as one long story and only split into three for publication, inadvertently reviving the old three-volume idea. However with its clear beginning, middle and end volumes LotR does work as a genuine trilogy. The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy trilogy became "increasingly inaccurately named" as commercial pressures begat sequels. Whereas Jon J Deegan's less well known Corridors of Time "trilogy" is clearly series fiction, being simply the first three volumes of a story-arc infinitely extendible before a final resolution, the same format as E C Tubb's later series about star-roving Dumarest. As for Brian Aldiss' Helliconia Spring etc trilogy, I suspect he got a bit tired and wrapped it up quickly; surely he could have squeezed in a fourth season if he'd tried. Then he could have called it a respectable quartet.

Wouldn't agree about juveniles either, in particular those of Lewis and Ransome. These were hardcovers for the library and Christmas-present trades – not many kids could afford them – and they weren't the series-character formula fiction of Biggles, Famous Five etc. Lewis' "Narnia" books were an exploration of his invented world which, in their original published order at least, bore less and less resemblance to a continuous

narrative. "Swallows and Amazons" as one long rite-of-passage "serial fiction" again doesn't seem to be on the family tree of the David Eddings or George R R Martin commercial formats. (Ransome's twelve-part novel sequence explores imagination vs reality as the children grow older, and should have culminated in the final such confrontation of the unfinished Coots in the North. Should it be compared not to "Chung Kuo" but to "A Dance to the Music of Time"?)

Perhaps I over-simplify, but your bunch of comment-hooks masquerading as an article really needs greater length and organisation to explain how our reading got ruined. Or you could just leave it with Philip Turner's excellent four-sentence summary in his letter. (As an old-timer, my preferred novel length is still 160 to 192pp, no more.)

Lastly, your preferred Golden Age decade – not the same as Jack Calvert's, I see – is a nostalgic view of a thrilling time when people had at last discovered or rediscovered the full possibilities of the sf form and were exploring them. Can't happen again. For the same reason that the beloved Fifties musical explorations of Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and Buddy Holly can't happen again in today's culture of Everything That Ever Was, Available Forever. Also, we need some tolerance for antique prose to read much of Clement and Galouye etc today. I have found myself unable to recommend even John W Campbell's "Twilight" for an unprepared modern reader, despite its short length being almost an entire "novel of ideas" in content and impact. You had to be there. Oh well, looks like the comment-hooks worked...

Daring of you, mentioning sf in a fanzine. Will be interesting to read the other responses.

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DAVE COCKFIELD

The cover was very informative. Steve deservedly has a Hugo. I had to buy my Blu-Ray copy on Amazon but it was good of Martin Scorsese to award him one.

Vibrator was enjoyable as usual but I was especially taken by your piece on Jack Johnson.

A favourite black sportsman of mine is Jack Robinson the legendary baseball player.

With the advent of great figures like Martin Luther King and Muhammed Ali it seemed that Race Relations improved immensely over the years. Now we have many ethnic people in all walks of life and especially sport and the entertainment industry. They are not always recognised as well as they perhaps should be, but their achievement is something to be proud of, and they help project our Multi – Cultural Society in positive ways. Or so you would think. Unfortunately as a society we seem to be taking a retrograde step with racial prejudice now rife and it is very troubling.

The area where I live voted overwhelmingly for Brexit and I'm horrified to say that the mix of white English, Irish, Polish, and Romanian, plus black Somalian and Nigerians voted, I suspect, for racist reasons.

When I was young I remember my mother remarking that "nobody could dance as well as a darkie".

We had been watching a musical on the television that featured a pair of tap dancing brothers.

I never considered this to be a racist comment as she meant it as a compliment and many local people tended to talk that way. Many years later she met my cousin Colin's girlfriend, Rose, who was African-American and a member of the US Armed Forces. Rather embarrassingly my mother informed her that she was the first darkie that she had ever met.

Rose actually laughed this off and very tolerantly explained to my mother why such a term was racist. I never heard my mother say anything untoward again and she got on so well with Rose that they corresponded for many years even after she split with Colin and returned to the USA.

Much casual racism back then was due to ignorance but that excuse can no longer apply.

"Political Correctness" and "Positive Discrimination" if applied correctly can be beneficial, but when it becomes an overriding factor that is used without great thought it just creates mistrust and division and fuels all of those Right Wing Racist Groups. I think that a perfect case is the English Heritage "Blue Plaque" scheme. This is to recognise great people who have been deceased for at least 20 years and at one point lived in a property in London for at least 2 years.

12 new plaques are created every year. To date there are about 900 of these. Recently there were complaints that only 33 were devoted to black or other ethnic minorities so there is now a drive to create more for these groups.

This is a small percentage but giving the fact that the individuals currently with plaques date back hundreds of years it is not surprising. One of the existing plaques is for Paul Robeson who lived in Chestnuts House in Hampstead where I lived when I first came to London. I was quite chuffed at the connection at the time. I can't see anyone getting uptight about that.

A new plaque has been commissioned for Laurie Cunningham, referred to as a BME or Black and Minority Ethnic player, who played football for Wimbledon when they won the FA Cup and was the second ever BME to play for an England football team at any level. Thank goodness they did not refer to him as a BEM. I'm not sure that his achievements actually warrant a plaque. The only other footballer to have one is Bobby Moore, something that a number of people in my local pub have pointed out.

A much better candidate, whose selection would also have identified racial injustice, was Jack Leslie. He was of Jamaican descent, born in Canning Town where he lived for many years. He had a successful footballing career with Plymouth Argyle, was a prolific goal scorer, and at the time was the only professional black player in England. He was called up for the England team in October 1925. Unfortunately he was later deselected when the England selectors realised he was a “man of colour”. Jack told a journalist that “They must have forgotten he was a coloured boy”.

Nominations have to come from the public but my above recommendation suggests that there is a case for the committee to put forward nominations.

One person who was refused a plaque was Anthony Burgess because he was not “well known” enough to the general public. I suspect that they just did not want to honour the creator of “Clockwork Orange”. I guess that he really was a BEM.

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ALISON SCOTT

Sometimes, when working from home, inspiration just fails to strike. So I always appreciate having a ***Vibrator*** to fall back on. I thought I could maybe whip off a quick note before Barcon, where while I do hope that sexual debauchery and drinking will be the order of the day as you suggest, I suspect that there will be rather more of the one than the other. But it will be my first Barcon, so what do I know? Perhaps there's something you're collectively not telling me.

I'm very glad to see that Stiles finally got his Hugo, proving that the puppies are good for something after all.

I share your general dislike of series, though I don't mind so much if the second and subsequent volumes build on the first in terms of taking ideas in interesting new directions. I've been told that Ann Leckie's novels do this; I've only read the first so far. Bujold's Vorkosigan series did for quite some time, and I think too Pratchett's Discworld books do a lot of this. And you've said not to mention the Culture novels, so I shan't. But them too.

And then I got stuck because there wasn't anything else interesting in the entire fanzine. I blame your correspondents.

(EDITOR: I was pleased that there was both so much sexual debauchery and drinking at Barcon, Alison, and I hope you enjoyed it too. I was a bit disconcerted when Steven got out some small Japanese figurines and insisted I fondle them, but I soon got over it and changed positions and went on to pleasure Roy Kettle. He showed me the celebrated Naoji position which he had learnt from his son Nathan, and insisted I owed him 20 million yen for doing so, but I wasn't falling for that. Was that you who knocked on my

door at 1.30am suggesting we share sex with a defribulator you just happened to have about you? Oh, no that was Nigel Rowe.)

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BRYN FORTEY

Your Jack Johnson piece was interesting, though you did give a wrong impression that he took the title off Jim Jeffries. What actually happened was that Tommy Burns had won the vacant title when Jeffries retired undefeated. Johnson chased the Canadian all around the world, looking to challenge him, finally catching up with him in Australia, where he handed Burns a cruel beating. A black champion would have been extremely unpopular anyway but he inflamed the situation by flaunting his relationships with white women.

The search was on for a Great White Hope who could dethrone him and when none of the current heavyweights were able to do so, Jim Jeffries was tempted out of a six year retirement as the one man who could do it. The years spent farming had not been kind to Jeffries though and Johnson scored a convincing victory.

There were a number of good black heavyweights around during Johnson's time and he fought them all in 'coloured championship' fights prior to winning the World Heavyweight Title, but Johnson himself instigated his own colour bar by refusing to defend his big title against any of them, claiming a white audience would not pay to see two black men contest the championship.

He was a complex man and a true innovator in the art of boxing skills and techniques, but was so unpopular that it was not until Joe Louis came along that a black man was again allowed to fight for the World Heavyweight Title.

I was surprised your piece on sf series made no mention of Asimov's FOUNDATION or Herbert's DUNE. I liked your mention of Silverberg's DYING INSIDE though: one of my favourite novels ever.

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ROBERT LICHTMAN

Somehow the month flew by and during the course of it my copy of *Vibrator* #31 got read (early), checkmarked, and then buried in a pile of other fanzines – out of sight and, given that I'm writing on the penultimate day of September, out of mind. At this point let me see if I can remember what I had in mind when I did the checkmarking.

Well, yeah, a big whoop and holler for Steve Stiles's lovely cover cartoon. Needless to say I disagree with your writing, "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.” I seriously doubt that. Chris was never an artist, and while his writing improved somewhat over the years of his publishing *The Drink Tank* (a fanzine so unmemorable except for its frequency that – can you believe it!? – I had to google for its name just now) it was never on the level that Steve routinely achieves with his prose (I’m always happy when I have one of his articles to publish in *Trap Door* along with his artwork). So, no tears, please.

Not being a follower of trends in either SF or fantasy, I had to do a little research to address your question of “When did sf as the individual novel of ideas suddenly become the serial novel of clichéd action/adventure characters acting out in fantasy worlds?” I don’t know the specific date, but I have to beg to differ on your assertion that Brian Aldiss was “under the pernicious influence of his friend David Wingrove” when he launched the Hellconia series. The dates don’t work out. My friend in all such matters, the good ol’ Internet Science Fiction Data Base, informs me that Wingrove didn’t start the Chung Kao trilogy until 1989, while Aldiss’s Hellconia began in 1982. No, I think it’s more likely that he was influenced by the commercial success of Bob Silverberg’s Majipoor series, which began with *Lord Valentine’s Castle* in 1980. (But I stand ready to be corrected by more well-informed readers.)

I had only the dimmest recollection of Jack Johnson – name recognition, mainly – so I appreciated your short biography of him.

David Redd notes that my first vote in a presidential race “was not for Johnson, something of a Tricky Dicky in political methods I’d guess, but ‘against Goldwater.’” Looking ahead from that 1964 vote, I’d say that in races where there wasn’t an incumbent *all* my votes have been cast to keep out the undesirable candidate, always (of course) a Republican. Thus I voted against Nixon in 1968, against Gerald Ford in 1976, against Reagan in 1980, against George H. W. Bush in 1988 and his son in 2000, and against McCain in 2008. I suspect I’m far from an isolated case of such voting, and that the same parallels probably hold for you and other British readers in your own elections.

Milt Stevens hopes I’m well enough to make it to the next Corflu: “I need some people with ideas on fan history for the program.” The prospect of being on a panel just might be a disincentive – never my favorite thing at a convention – but I don’t rule it out (relax, Milt!). If I am able to make it, it will be a mini-vacation with Carol and we’ll likely do some touristy things while down in Southern California (like we did in Portland), where we haven’t been for quite a few years. On a more practical level, that would probably include a trip to the part of Fairfax Avenue in the main section of Los Angeles where we would stock up on baked goods at the Diamond Bakery and perhaps eat at Canter’s. With two of us in the car, we would get to be in the diamond lanes reserved for car pools, for what that’s worth in terms of speeding our progress along the L.A. freeways.

If I was a cab driver, I would tend to avoid conversations in a political vein unless like Nic I was very sure my passenger would be receptive to my views. He raises a good point

about rideshare drivers probably not carrying commercial insurance so that if I was taking a trip with one of them and was injured in an accident I would be stuck with whatever their coverage limits were – and if that was insufficient then good luck trying to collect from the company under whose umbrella they were working. (I'm not sure if my own auto insurance would extend to me as a passenger.) They would probably wave their "he's an independent contractor" flag.

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TALES OF A LAS VEGAS TAXI DRIVER by Nic Farey

PRECIOUSSSSSS

In honor of that Charnock (G)
I'm writing, drinking Vodka (qv)
What effect might that have on this column?
I'll end up sounding like that arseface Gollum!

(That's terrible, worse than Meara - Ed.)

I've also just lit up a smoke while I still had one going that was sitting in the very adjacent ashtray, after I'd rather promised myself to cut down to one at a time, but the travails of the inveterate chain-smoker are many. Well, they're really not are they, just the one pertinent travail, which is not being able to chain-smoke.

Despite the fact that Las Vegas is still one of the few smoker-friendly cities in the US, Lucky Cab, like every other company, prohibits drivers from smoking in the cabs, and requests (through the usual signage) that passengers also do not. This is one of those little rules more honored in breach than observance, but for some reason there are Roger Goodell-sized sticks up the arse with some of the office people right now on this topic. Just after I'd punted the previous column off to the multiple-award-winning and Hooper-invisible Charnock (G), I went in to the office to pick up the piece of scrip laughingly described as "the paycheck", only to be also served with *two* written warnings for smoking in the cab. Three strikes means a suspension, so I am now being a good boy and leaping out of the free pickle at any given opportunity to get my nicotine fix by the traditional methods, rather than from those clunky ape machines. Supervisor Joe (who will also appear later in this instalment), likes to sarkily comment, as we bullshit in the airport pits, that if I'm *not* smoking it makes him nervous, as if to imply that if I weren't I might snap from the withdrawal symptoms and go on a killing spree among the unsuspecting drivers (also more of which later).

The news since last month is that I've got myself on a different shift, 5-5 (am to pm), which is interestingly usually reserved for much more senior (years in) drivers than me. Now with the 5-5 (day shift) you're pretty much giving up the chance of strip club side

money (which I didn't ever get tons of anyway) in favor of working something more like "regular hours", at least hours I'm more used to from working all them years in construction, and potentially actually having a social life, something which cannot be overstated to the banks of fucking idle retirees who comprise the readership of this exemplary award-winning fish-wrap.

Being on the ball, I'd heard that our driver Tony (boyfriend of Shirley and brother of Joe, who I told you would be back), had got a shot at a decent business opportunity, which we'll call pimping, and so would be vacating his 5-5 shift. I well fuckin' leapt in with the office to put my name in the frame for taking his spot, to be told by the informed and on-the-ball Desiree (who is in charge of such things) that there might well be someone ahead of me there, but I'm in the frame, if...

So obviously, after a couple of weeks of persistence, I got the shift, and the advantages are apparent. There are few (maybe 8 or so) drivers on the 5-shift, so it's an easy in (and out) not fighting the crowds of the 2 or 3 shifts, and having the same oppo on the cab. The downside for me, in part, has been that my old shift cab (the Passat) is allocated to the 2-shift, so now I'm in a Chevy Malibu which does drive nice but compared to the VW is a fuckin closet on wheels.

Here's a nice thing: I got a call a few days ago, can you bring the cab back in early because the shop wants to service it. No waiting is also good. So I got back, probably only about 10-15 minutes early, had a bit of a chat with head mechanic Dan (lovely bloke), first question he asked me was "So you miss 947?" (the Passat). "Fuck yeah mate, wish I still had it, but this'un drives all right and I like the 5 shift". "How long you been working with us now?", Dan asks. "Just over a year".

He looks well impressed. "You must be doing good numbers". The 5 shift is normally for long-serving drivers who've proven reliable and well solid. And I got there in about a year. Yippie-ki-yay motherfuckers. You can interpret this as me being well set (smoking notwithstanding), as long as I keep my numbers up. It's a hell of a job sometimes.

One of the things about being on the 5-shift (only 8-10 drivers), is that we're in and out faster, and also that we overlap the day and night shifts. Of course I know all the day shift supervisors on the radio, but I've yet to properly learn the night shift guys with whom I overlap several hours.

I'm recalling a couple other drivers who'd told me that the night shift can be a bit vicious, and that turns out to be correct. As I write, the night supervisor has put out an alert on the radio advising drivers to stay in their cabs, since there have been 5 fist-fights in the last 3 days in the airport pits.

But don't worry, lads, in the first place I seem to be never around when that shit happens, and in the second place I wouldn't fuck with me anyway, eh? Learned a thing or two...

RETURN OF THE SON OF THE LICHTMAN FARM TRUCK GLOSSARY, PART 6 (THE RETURN OF THE KING)

Free pickle : Pseudo-rhyming slang for "vehicle", from a radio ad for something I forget where it's very noisy and one person has trouble hearing the other.

Point spread : (*See also Roger Goodell*) For the edification of the non-American reader (Unc, J), possibly also for Americans who are not sports fans, but probably not since they won't be at all interested in any of this (aka Meara Syndrome), the point spread is one of the more significant sports book bets, particularly in football and basketball. For example, in a fictitious American football matchup between the Croydon Fishlifters and the Haringey Harpists, Croydon may be quoted at -7 1/2 (meaning they are expected to win by more than a touchdown); bets will be placed on whether the Fishlifters will cover the spread (win by at least that much) or fail to cover (win by less than that, or indeed lose). (*See also Vegas Odds*).

Roger Goodell : Commissioner of the NFL (American football, Grah), considered hidebound and useless by most independent observers. The stick up *his* arse is a topic of current interest around here, whether the NFL will allow the Oakland Raiders to move to Las Vegas if we build a stadium, since, shock horror, we have casinos. As less deranged commentators have pointed out, (1) there's hardly a location in this country where you can't bet on sports, legally or otherwise, so what's the problem with somewhere where gambling is monitored and regulated, and (2) if it wasn't for the point spreads, over/unders and other creations of the sports books, the NFL wouldn't be anywhere near as popular as it is. Probably.

Vegas Odds : Those few, or none, of those still reading (J, Unc) might be more familiar with the British/Irish odds system eg 20/1, 6/4, 2/7 etc etc which is the common expression of the likelihood of winning money, and does express a likelihood or expectation of the outcome. Vegas odds are expressed in a different way, but one that once you're used to it is actually clearer once you understand what it means. A minus number indicates the favorite in a matchup, so the Fishlifters bet at -7 1/2 might be quoted at -115; what the number means is the amount you have to bet to win \$100. So in this example you're betting \$115 to win \$100. If the Fishlifters win by 8 points or more you get back your \$115 stake plus your \$100 winnings for a total of \$215. Perhaps boxing matches are a more straightforward simplification of this. Let's hypothesize "Man Mountain" Hooper vs "Killer" Kaufman (a match which actually occurred, albeit wrestling), in which Hooper would be, let's say -275, Kaufman +55. So in this case Hooper (the clear favorite), would require a \$275 bet to win \$100, whereas the overmatched Kaufman supporter would get that amount for the bettor by a mere \$55 investment. You know it makes sense.--- Nic Farey

I look around my room. There are places I haven't been to for twenty years. There are boxes I haven't opened for twenty years. Same with my life. Areas I haven't visited for twenty years; gardens I used to roam in which I have neglected and closed off. Plants I once loved have died off, to be replaced by sports and weeds. Now it is sometimes hard to find the way back to them. Convoluted pathways turn me around in circles. My compass spins directing me everywhere and nowhere. I daren't disturb the edifices of the past unless the whole crumbling architecture collapses upon me. I daren't disturb anything these days, tissues on the floor, piles of bottles. I should hire a man to come in and clean my life up, to tidy me, brush me down and turn me out shining and spectacular, a robot image of what I used to be. Meanwhile crusts slough off my skin and decay and I burn from the outside in. I conjecture novels about living deep in closed stone environments, deep underground. When I was a child I used to read books about cave exploration and burrow down in my bed, imagining myself trapped under rock, wriggling through cracks but eventually immobilizing myself in the stone's comfortable warp. Now I feel just as immobilized although nothing confines me, except sleep. I have just spent a weekend socializing with friends, so I do get out, I do have a sort of life, but always I return to that which ultimately confines me. My own mind.

Ooops, sorry got a bit philosophical there. Must be suffering a late life crisis or something. Still they can't burn you alive and castrate you for it. Look on the bright side.

I am graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk. Write to me so I don't die of loneliness.

Deadline for the next issue is the end of October, whenever that is.