



November 2016



A NIGHT ON BARE MOUNTAIN

Hey hey we're the Monkees. Well, of course we are not, although sometimes we behave like them and bend down and scratch our behinds and try desperately to find people to vote for, before realizing they are all bigger monkeys than we are. I liked The Monkees. It never bothered me that they never played their own instruments. Mike Nesmith wrote some good tunes and Davy Jones was cute. Now I know political monkeys do the same, (not write good tunes) or don't do the same, they send out tweeted messages purporting to be from them but are really from paid hired helps. Did you know Stephen Fry died years ago and is only on a life-support machine in Hammersmith Hospital which is programmed to send out tweets in his name? How would you ever know any different?

Mice in Boots? Who would have believed it? For some time now we have suffered from mice. Occasionally I glimpse them out of the corner of my eye as they scuttle in their greyness from one corner to another. We have put down various types of mouse trap, but so far to no effect. Normally they do not bother me that much, except when I am laying awake at night and suddenly comes an immense noise of something shifting far out of proportion to a mouse's size or its ability to inflict damage on the architectural substructure. I know there is a phenomenon when during near-sleep auditory stimuli are amplified beyond their natural range. I am hoping that is the case, because I do not like the idea of mice wearing hob-nail boots and wielding sledge-hammers.

This is Vibrator 33, dated November 2016. It comes to you from Graham Charnock, 45 Kimberley Gardens, London N4 1LD UK, but you might prefer to email me: graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk. Whatever, don't stay a stranger.

DEAD TIME

I thought I might talk about death. I don't know why. It's a not unpleasant mild morning in autumn, and I have no immediate life threatening conditions, unless you can count life itself. I am in a degree of pain, (bursitis, since you ask) but that is transient and will pass. Still, the older we get the more extensively death seems to caste its pale cloud over us, and perhaps the more we feel compelled to talk about it.

It was Graham Greene who said "In childhood we live under the bright light of immortality". He meant that a sense of our own mortality comes slowly upon us, as we refine and develop our sense of self, and is not an immediate priority when we

are young. Some creatures of course never develop a sense of self, and are thus immune from fear of death forever.

Most of us, however, need to be taught what death means, so often by the passing of family pets, cats, dogs and hamsters, and even then we may be subverted by being told they are only sleeping or have gone to some mythical farm.

First hand experience of death was largely absent from my upbringing. There were never multitudes of relatives hanging around just waiting to die, at least none of them who were close enough to me to matter. It was sort of accepted that grandfathers and grandmothers would die, but at least quietly and geographically removed, and not in your face. And that is what usually happened. News of deaths were received by letter, rather than telegrams, or even more usually by assiduous scanning of public announcements in local newspapers. My parents got the Keighley News years after they moved south and relocated in London and the first thing they looked at was the Public Announcements.

The first dead body I ever saw, as I expect is the experience for many of us, was that of my father. He died of bowel cancer in his bedroom at our family home, where he had been cared for by my mother. I sat with his body for a few minutes, and touched his cold face. I was aware then that the wardrobe in the same room held as much life as did this person I had once known.

None of my friends in my immediate peer group were abruptly taken from me. Possibly the first significant death I came across was in grammar school. We had a replacement PE teacher called Mike Nelson. He was an ex-army paratrooper, and a thoroughly nice down-to-earth guy who did his best to encourage even physically awkward specimens like me to achieve their best. One summer he was hired by the production company which was making the film of John Hershey's *The War Lover*. They shot a sequence where paratroopers jumped over the English Channel. The shoot went okay but Mike got entangled in the chords of his parachute upon landing, and was dragged down and drowned. The thought that death could happen accidentally to someone you knew was a small shock to my system, Thereafter I would spend a lot of time looking around not only my own back but those of my friends.

Like many young adolescents I flirted with death by imagining situations in which I might commit suicide. Goth had not yet been established as a fashion movement in those days, and neither would I had subscribed to it if it had, but there was something of the gloomy doomy aspect of living that appealed to me. Basically, I was just a miserable self-obsessed bastard. And suicide was never more than a sort of intellectual exercise for me. It puzzled and taunted me as a concept. I'd read existential texts by Sartre which had had their required effect in undermining my ontological security, and making me question the *meaning of life*, (I thought my background reading might enable me to impress girls, but I never seemed to meet

the right kind of girls...) and the public death of a well-known figure such as Hemingway genuinely disturbed me. I read an account by the Italian writer Cesare Pavese who offered many intellectual ideas supporting suicide, and also *Death of a Man* in which Lael Wertenbaker had written about her husband Charles Wertenbaker, a man with terminal illness who had decided to abrogate his right to life. I had a very puzzled time. To be or not to be, indeed. In the end I made a pragmatic but rather unadventurous intellectual decision about suicide, formulated as "You can decide to die, but then after you have done it, you cannot decide anything at all."

I've already written at length about the more recent deaths of various close friends (as you grow older there seem to be more of them) like Graham Hall, and John Brosnan. I've written about Rob Holdstock too, but recently I saw a film about the death of George Best and it brought home by some of the similarities. George had had a liver transplant and was on immune suppressant drugs. He contracted a fairly minor chest infection but his autoimmune system was unable to respond to it. His blood refused to clot, and he contracted septicaemia which eventually caused total organ failure. These symptoms more or less mirrored Rob's responses to his illness.

One interesting thing is that the closer the proximity of death the more fanciful some people's interpretation of what it means when it happens becomes. I know otherwise sensible people, lifelong atheists, who still manage to come up with bizarre justifications for prolonging their lives after death. These are often increasingly metaphysical. Some believe if the Universe is really a hologrammatic representation we will all live forever. Some involve Buddhist ideas of continuation allied with poorly conceived principles of quantum stuff like string theory. I await someone coming up with the idea of a Quantum Undertaker. They will make a fortune. These theories all basically come down to some method of cheating death. Charles Platt used to believe cutting peoples' heads off and freezing them would work, but I believe he has sobered up now.

The rest of us just believe in the end it's a wink of an eye.

Oh, to hell with it. Death where is your ding a ling?

AMERICA THE DAMNED

An occasional series by Graham Charnock

SACCO & VANZETTI

This begins, like many American horror stories such as the Mafia, in Italy. Anarchy in Italy before the First World War could be said to have its roots, as many other anarchist and communist movements throughout Europe did, in the International Workingman's Association which was founded in America in 1869. It operated on the same principle which guided groups such as The Tolpuddle Martyrs in England, who were agricultural workers who felt their own livelihood threatened by technological advances in the face of the Industrial revolution, and what was seen then as the repressive nature of class privilege. In Europe Anarcho-Communism established leaders such as Bakunin, Calfieri and Malatesta. One should not be confused by the most literal definition of Anarchism; no one expected there would be a true absence of rule. Rule was accepted as the right of the working class to structure and order their own lives, and to receive what was due to them from the efforts of their own labour. In fact, a very strict and rigorous rule.

Sacco was born in 1891, and Vanzetti in 1898 when the principles of violent reaction against class oppression had already become well-established in Italy.

The IWA was eventually disbanded as a viable organization in 1872, but when S&V arrived in the US in 1908 its historical significance still held some clout, especially the slant Bakunin had put on it as requiring armed uprising and violence to achieve its end. Sacco & Vanzetti were all too familiar with its principles, its ethics, and its grudges. One should make no mistake, they were men not unused to considering rarefied political debate in their local bars and cafes but were probably more satisfied by the prospect of direct action. They were also immigrants into a country which seemed to hold spell-binding opportunities for development, but which at the same time marshalled the disadvantaged into ghettos just as much as any corresponding society did in those times.

Sacco & Vanzetti met at a Unionist strike and soon became followers of Galleani who, after the lines of Bakunin, advocated a particularly violent response to their repression by the ruling classes.

The Slater-Morrill Shoe Company factory was located on Pearl Street in Braintree, Massachusetts. On April 15, 1920, two men were robbed and killed while transporting the company's payroll in two large steel boxes to the main factory.

Sacco & Vanzetti were arrested and charged with the crime and murders involved. The forensic trails from the guns used in the murder were long and complex and never very convincingly tied up, but the Italian Anarchist community obviously held lots of potential suspects for the police, and it turned out Sacco & Vanzetti and other anarchists had been long under the surveillance of the Bureau of Investigation, without any grounds other than the general paranoia which seemed to be present at the time.

If you want to draw modern inferences with certain politicians demonizing immigrants, go ahead.

After they were arrested and indicted for the Braintree robbery, Galleanists and anarchists in the United States and abroad began a campaign of violent retaliation. On September 16, 1920, two days later, Mario Buda allegedly orchestrated the Wall Street bombing, where a time-delay dynamite bomb packed with heavy iron sash-weights in a horse-drawn cart exploded, killing 38 people and wounding 134. In 1921, a booby trap bomb mailed to the American ambassador in Paris exploded, wounding his valet. For the next six years, bombs exploded at other American embassies all over the world. It goes without saying that this activity did not help Sacco & Vanzetti's case. Guilty by association, the inevitable fate of any Anarchist.

The trial that eventually accompanied the Braintree murders was frankly a shambles but is a model for how juries can be manipulated by clever attorneys.

On July 21, 1921, after deliberating for three hours, then breaking for dinner, the jury returned guilty verdicts.

The verdict and the travesty of the trial provoked an immediate response from the supporters of Sacco & Vanzetti of course. A Defense Committee was set up to exhort support and provide funds for a review of their case. Writers and intellectuals such as John Dos Passos rallied to their cause, reviewing their characters rather than the acts they were accused of: Passos concluded it "barely possible" that Sacco might have committed murder as part of a class war, but that the soft-hearted Vanzetti was clearly innocent. "Nobody in his right mind who was planning such a crime would take a man like that along,". Needless to say the Bureau of Investigation, (or the FBI as it was later to become) were not to be concerned with such pleading. Several people moved for a new trial but this was refused in 1924.

1924 was the year Herbert Hoover was appointed Director of the Bureau of Investigation which he was later to shape into the FBI. He was not a man to tolerate political dissent, as would be demonstrated in his later years with his involvement in the House of Unamerican Activities in 1938.

In November 1925, Celestino Madeiros, an ex-convict awaiting trial for murder, confessed to committing the Braintree crimes. He absolved Sacco and Vanzetti of participation. Still, he was ignored and the machine for official retribution chundered on. A clemency appeal was also denied.

Sacco & Vanzetti were executed on August 15th, 1927. 20,000 people protested on the green outside the prison. This was perhaps the closest the US had ever come to a political state execution.

Will H. Hays, head of the motion picture industry's umbrella organization, ordered all film of the funeral procession destroyed. Not his finest moment.

Sacco's ashes were sent to Torremaggiore, the town of his birth, where they are interred at the base of a monument erected in 1998. Vanzetti's ashes were buried with his mother in Villafalletto.

What can we take from this? There s never any hope for justice from the wheels controlled by the megaliths of state and bureaucracy.



OWEN WHITEOAK

I've been enjoying reading the relaunched Vibrators (is that what you do with vibrators? re-switched on? re-flicked? Yeah, that's it, re-flicked) on The Blessed Bill Burns's efanzines but haven't got around to LoCcing before. But I found a comment-hook I couldn't resist in Robert Lichtman's missive (hi, Robert!). Whenever I see things like his ironic "I'm still waiting for those flying cars we were promised..." I just imagine the traffic chaos. There's a reason that aviation authorities require Air Traffic Control. Think of the aerial equivalents of traffic lights, junctions, staying in your lane... road hogs. Spend a few minutes watching the way drivers behave in a major city -- say London, Paris, Rome (or, I assume, Las Vegas, New York, LA, Chicago) and try to picture all of that up in the skies above. Failing to signal, cutting

off, hasty u-turns... Air Rage. The pedestrian in me stumbles and falls in a twisted heap.

(Hello Owen. Flying cars don't seem to have any problems in any of the sf films I have seen from Bladerunner to Fifth Elements or even Futurama, oh, but wait that's a cartoon isn't it. If SpaceX can launch and re-land a space vehicle using thrusters, I'm sure a flying car is only a minor leap of the imagination away. But then the European Space Agency couldn't manage to land one on Mars, so where does that leave us?)

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MILT STEVENS

In Vibrator #32, you write about using a smart phone. Some of them actually seem to be smart. One LASFS member has a talking smart phone which seems to be able to access all human knowledge. It's almost as good as a Junior Woodchuck Manual in Donald Duck comics. I've seen him use the device to find out who sang the male lead in a musical that opened on Broadway in 1937. Of course, using such a device can be habit forming. Why talk to people when your phone is smarter than anyone else you know?

Recently, Samsung has been having great success with weaponizing smart phones. Their most recent models melts when you least expect it. Future models will probably be able to explode outright. This development may have been in response to continuing North Korean nuclear tests. For a complete weapon, Samsung only needs to add six legs to their smart phones. Then they can send millions of exploding smart phones scuttling off to Pyongyang.

Usually when people ask me what I think it's only an excuse for telling me what they think. In the US, we have things called push polls. During election season, someone calls and says they are taking a poll. The questions take the form of "Did you know that candidate X has sex with aardvarks and supports Cornish Vegetarian Nationalism?" If you don't register revulsion at that, they have a whole list of loathsome things which they attribute to candidate X." At the end of one of these exercises, I told one of these pseudo pollsters that I was voting for candidate X anyway. At least, he didn't call me at home and interrupt me in the middle of a movie I was watching.

Some politicians send questionnaires by mail as if they actually cared what the voters thought about anything. There is only one question in these questionnaires that the politicians actually care about, and it is always the last question. "How much are you going to donate to my campaign?" My father warned me against ever giving money to a politician. He made the mistake of doing that once. As a result,

he received a barrage of gimme letters from that political party for the next 20 years.

(Hello Milt, I don't trust technology you can talk to because that means it will only be a matter of time before it starts talking back. These so-called smart personal assistants will soon be admonishing you on your dress-sense and eating habits: "You can't seriously be thinking of eating that slice of cheese-cake..." In Another place, we were recently talking about smart technology extending into household utensils (a move pre-envisioned by Thomas Disch in his story The Brave Little Toaster) and, being able to communicate with other, rapidly developing their own social circles and even fan groups.)

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GREGORY BENFORD

Robert Lichtman remarks, "during much of the time "everybody in fandom" was writing to Cry of the Nameless, they were also writing to Ted White and Greg Benford's Void." -- and that's true, though I thought then that nearly everyone got both. Fandom is a running conversation that spreads wherever the talent goes.

Nic Farey's taxi reports fascinate me. I keep think there's a good short story lurking there.

Milt Stevens nails it: we're a "shabby bohemia. There might be shortages of cash, but there would never be any shortage of ideas." That's what drew me to pub fmz and even help put on 2 cons in the 1950s.

Graham West too is a welcome surprise. "I recall D saying, 'there's no money to be made in publishing unless you are one of the handful of top authors.'" Not quite, but too many sell novels for \$5000 now. I was lucky and got into some top slots many decades back (well, 5). My royalties on books written half a century ago pay me a good living, not that I need it.

He remarks, "The SF fandom that my Dad belonged to never felt mainstream, it felt intelligent, cultured, bookish and almost high-brow. A place for academics to let their hair down..." Um, guess so, as an academic. I often translated physics work into fiction, especially on galactic jets, black holes, etc when I was working on that. "But over time they have been superseded by thousands of online groups, Star Trek, Dr Who, Star Wars, Red Dwarf, Marvel superheroes, Lord of the Rings etc..." Yes, and Loncon showed that--hordes of students got cheaper m'ships and wanted to know where the Dr Who stuff was. Silverberg eyed this and said to me, "Moron fandom--a new low."

Still, as G says, "The golden days had faded but were still well documented." Yes, fmz fandom persists because we have our libraries--and now can visit them on fanac.org. I laughed at "My mum Ann lived in a place called reality" because I have two condos there but seldom visit.

His "I was determined to showcase his work in a book somehow" pricks my interest. I'd pay for a copy!--digital, of course.

(Hello Greg, I'm heartened to hear you no longer need a good living, which means you are presumably satisfied with a bad one, involving no doubt copious amounts of wine, whiskey and wild wild women.)

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ROB HANSEN

Many thanks for VIBRATOR #32. Even before peering inside I knew this would be a fine fanzine because it has me on the cover, in a photo taken by an amazonian lesbian no less. 'Lesbian', as you know, is an anagram of 'Ansible'. This probably means something.

Enjoyed your funny report on Barcon. I promised Rob Jackson a report on the con that incorporates bits recycled from the Loncon 3 report I started but never finished. Really must get on that.

Right, back to bed. It's 3.40pm in the morning and I only got up to take a pee. Wonder if there will ever again be a night I *don't* get up in the middle of to take a pee. Probably not. Getting old sucks, but it beats the alternative.

(Hello Rob, thanks for getting up in the middle of the to share your thoughts with us. I presume having a pee was just an excuse. I get up often in the middle of the night to pee, but I admit it has never occurred to me to turn my computer on while doing so. Thereby lies a risk of electrocution, I suspect.)

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NIC FAREY

The Nic Farey impersonator you got to write the taxi column in #32 actually did a pretty fair job, except for trying to pass off Vodka (qv) as some kind of preferred tipple round here, when as any fule kno I'm much more partial to Newky, Bulleit Bourbon, or if that's run out, any old bottle of wine lying around, or if there isn't any of that... Well, ok, but vodka (qv) isn't necessarily the first choice, all right? The concept of getting langered on it as an honor and tribute to your multiple-award-winning self, however, I did find rather charming, even though the author either by accident or design did somewhat overdo the drunken ramble style.

I should also mention that quite often, currently, the drink may be accompanied by the conspicuous consumption of one or two Dunsford Concrete Chocolate Donuts. We dubbed them "concrete donuts" because, excellent though they are, a side-effect seems to be epic Martin Luther levels of constipation. Like you, oh dearest brother Grah, I do sometimes wonder if it's worth it. But then I have another donut with the anticipation of having to sit on a different one for a bum-numbing length of time with only smartphone games for distraction.

Historically, the 'Pussy-Grabbing Glossary Son of The Mighty Robt' hasn't appeared in several issues, and its resurrection here was also a nice touch.

The impersonator also fucked up the Vegas odds a little, perhaps also showing that Charnock (P) may not only have slipped up on that bit pf prufrede, but is also obviously not employed as a fact-checker. "Killer" Kaufman's odds against "Man Mountain" Hooper would have been more like +155 (or even +255), meaning that it's *this* amount that you'll get for a bet of \$100. So minus numbers represent the amount needed to bet for \$100 return, plus numbers the return on a \$100 bet, see?

"Desert Island Discs", or "Desert Island Anything" come to that can often be seen as shark-jumping desperation to fill a few pages, although Rich Coad being himself, it's a well-explicated list. I will forever disagree with the inclusion of 'Never Mind the Bollocks...' on a best list of anything. Like a bloody duped fool I rushed out to buy the thing on the day of release only to discover that it was a load of tosh with only one good track on it ('Bodies'). The rest of the list was decently acceptable.

(Hello Nick. How is Las Vegas. You have everything I want and lust after, an attractive, intelligent wife and presumably a regular sex-life, a job bring you a regular income and the ability to walk in a straight line for more than ten metres. Also you are frequently too funny for your own good, but somehow I find it in myself to forgive you for that.)

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IAN WILLIAMS

So I sit at my computer desk wearing a hooded cloak of cats, parting squirming fur so I can actually see the screen. I've already skimmed through the current issue to find the loc I sent on the previous issue (and don't we all do that?) but finding nothing. It must have gone astray in the ether as I deem it impossible for Graham to find my pearls of wisdom too lowly, ill-thought out, badly written, or incoherent, to print. Surely not? Surely not.

In the early 80's I was into people like Bruce (no surname necessary), Echo & the Bunnymen and Julian Cope. Nothing much else springs(teens) to mind. But by the early 90's I was waist deep in the blues and getting deeper and deeper as I explored

further and further until I became completely submerged. Blind Willie Johnson was (and still is) an early favourite. The 2-disc *The Complete Blind Willie Johnson* (Columbia) with its extensive annotated booklet by Sam Charters is one of my favourite -treasured even- records. I did eventually emerge, dragging lots of great stuff with me (Muddy, Albert & BB, RL Burnside, Lightnin' Slim, Luther Allison, and many more) and climbed back onto the great road of Rock. Unlike Rich, Country music has never held much appeal for me. Maybe being American helps.

But that's just a preamble to an odd coincidence in Rich's piece and the coincidence is called Captain Beefheart. A couple of weeks ago I picked up a 60's compilation which included a couple of Beefheart tracks that, after a few plays, made me decide to investigate further -patience, I'll explain more on why it's taken me so long in a moment. After checking Amazon and All-Music (AMG) I realised there wasn't any decent sampler of significance. (Actually there is but any copy is horrendously expensive.) After doing some checking I decided on Trout Mask Replica* (which I ordered on Ebay and hasn't arrived yet. Reading Rich's comments on *Safe As Milk* yesterday lunchtime I thought I'd take a punt on that, found a copy on Amazon Prime for £3.99 (remastered with 7 unreleased tracks and a good booklet) which arrived this morning, has been played and not found wanting.

*Back in the early days of the Gannets (say maybe 1971 or 2), I'd gone through to South Shields where Ritchie Smith and Thom Penman were playing Trout Mask Replica. I'd never heard of Beefheart before and completely misunderstood what I was hearing, thinking it to be a piss-take of Bob Dylan, said as much and started laughing. Smith and Penman were, with hindsight understandably, quite irate at my glib put-down of a clear work of genius. Oh well, better forty-four years late than never.

Nice to know that Andrew Stephenson is still around. A fine writer and artist and large genial gentleman of whom I have fond memories. Should you encounter him again, please give him my regards. Otherwise an engaging con report.

It's difficult to disagree with what you think, Graham. The world is a bleak and depressing place. It is also one of great joy and many pleasures. While there are things I get angry about, and many more if I'd allow myself, I prefer to focus the last years of my possessing mostly reasonable, if nevertheless inevitably declining, physical health and mental faculties to focus on what I enjoy doing, be it rescuing cats or watching stuff like Luke Cage on Netflix. That's what I think.

Difficult to disagree with anything Joseph writes because he's so sodding intelligent and articulate and I'm not. If I had an email address like his (**excellence in gardening@**), it would be **minimalistgardenandpaysomeoneelsetothework@**

I notice that Bryn Fortey mentioned Dune as one of the progenitors of the massive trilogy/series/whatever. I did too in my loc but you'd never know as it wasn't printed.

I didn't mean to end on that note but going through V page by page that's the last thing to mention. Time to go back to my life, such as it is, my 8 cats and the two cute kittens in my bedroom.

(Hello Ian, I don't think you need to feel intimidated by Joseph Nicholas. He just steals Judith Hanna's ideas and recycles them. She's the real brains of the partnership, you know, and also a better gardener. I'm afraid your last loc went into the Must Do Better pile. Dune as a progenitor of the blockbuster series is hardly any justification for it as literature, in my view).

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PAUL SKELTON

A word to the wise about those "really smooth new plastic five pound notes"; I picked one up in change from a charity shop and they said they'd had trouble with them sticking together. Their till was £10 down and it turned out that what they thought were two new plastic fivers were really two sets of two-stuck-together-by-static fivers. Obviously something we will get used to over time and be able to spot, but initially, unless one is aware of the potential problem, one could end up literally giving money away.

Barcon...Bah Humbug! I'd really been looking forward to it. Folk would ask us where we were going for our holidays this year and we would tell them we were having a weekend in Norwich in September. There would invariably be a strained silence as they waited for the joke's non-arriving punch line. Then 5K of essential building maintenance/Bestie's medical bills meant we couldn't even afford that.

One thing that does puzzle me though is the booze business. It has always been my understanding that anyone can take what booze they like into a hotel room for private consumption therein. You want to get quietly smashed in a hotel room you don't have to buy their booze to do it. Blatantly consuming your own booze in the bar area would obviously be a no-no. If you are going to refresh your glass with non-hotel alcohol (and obviously you are going to do that) then a degree of circumspection goes without saying. It seems bizarre that someone as intelligent as Allison Scott should not realise this. Or am I missing something?

There's something else I may be missing too, in that I don't agree with you about corporate space exploration. There is a whole solar system out there full of the most fabulous natural resources. Sadly they are too far away for them ever to become economically viable within any technology that we can currently envisage. So I see

space exploration at the moment as a monumental waste of money and, if money is going to be wasted, I'd rather some corporation wasted theirs than some Government wasted ours. Of course when some brilliant new development means we can get out to the orbit of Jupiter for the equivalent of spare change then I will gladly change my tune.

However, your thematic point... "People often ask me what I think. I say fuck off." ...is all well and good, but you must be careful never to respond like that if you're in an art gallery and they're asking your opinion of a particular piece of artwork. Why not? Well then they'd say it's just another example of what comes from putting the art before the coarse.

What's really worrying about that pun is not how bad it is, but that WORD kept trying to get me to change it to 'cart' and 'horse', without any apparent guide from context.

So Graham, what do you think? Ah, I thought you might say that.

(Hello Paul, well what I think is you are absolutely right that anyone can take booze into their own room at a hotel and get smashed. I know I have several times. But getting sixteen plus people into a hotel room these days to enjoy of perfectly legal room party is increasingly unlikely these days given they shrinking size of hotel rooms and their according lack of accoutrements. Alison wasn't concerned with getting drunk on her own whilst watching the porn channel but enjoying her own preferred tipple in convivial company. But I agree she was silly to do it so blatantly.)

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JOHN NIELSEN-HALL

Your What I Think article put me in mind of that character in V for Vendetta, played by Roger Allam in the movie, who has a TV Show where invariably the camera goes into close up when he says " I tell you what I think....." and you know some grotesque remedy or concept is about to issue forth. But I expect you hated V for Vendetta. You can usually be relied to hate anything the common run finds good. You really should make an effort not to be "an angry barrel of hate". Its bad for your health, which you have established is pretty poor to start with.

I enjoyed Rich Coad's article, even though I disagreed with most of it. I could write you an article like that. I expect most of the Vibrator readership could. It might be worth inviting further contributions of the same type. Though it could get boring.

Nic's explanation of Vegas odds was very instructive, but I can't help but prefer the British/Irish system. I can't see the use of a system based on what you need to do to win a \$100. Its easier to calculate what you need to do in hope of winning any

amount. Making the amount \$100 just adds complexity, I think. Still if I ever go back to Vegas, I shall be better informed.

Great to hear of all the fun at Barcon. I wish I had been there.

(Hello John. We wish you had been there too, along with the lovely Audrey. I certainly missed your acerbic comments on which rock gods I should now be following based on my historical comments on totally different rock gods.)

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PHILLIP TURNER

A slight correction to your glossary: his name is Roger Good4Nowt; that alien who's pretending to be the NFL Commish.

I hope your smartphone wasn't made by Samsung as acquiring one of their exploding personal devices seems tantamount to signing up to a voluntary euthanasia project aimed at reducing the number of 'uman beans on our overcrowded planet. Although, the idea that someone has spent hundreds of quid on a pocket barbeque does appeal to my inner Luddite. Rich Coad and I have a point of contact: Arthur Lee's band *Love*. And maybe another half-point for Captain B. Fart. As for the rest, he's welcome to them.

"Hey, Graham, what do you think?"

"I am not accountable to you, mate, so why don't we play a game of fuck off and why don't you start?"

Actually, human life could go on for a lot longer than you seem to expect. It will be another 5 billion years before the Sun turns into a red giant and swallows up the Earth. Depressing thought, isn't it? Another 5 billion years of pointless arguments?

I'm somewhat surprised that you are not delighted that the UK waved a bunch of twin-fingers at the pillockracy of the EU, whose staff are so crooked/incompetent/*you can't touch me, I'm part of the Union* that the Court of European Auditors has declined to sign off on the EC's books as a true and accurate record of expenditure for the 22nd year in succession. But maybe you have a soft spot for failed politicians, spivs and scroungers. Personally, I would suggest the Great Grimpen Mire.

Robert Lichtman's comments about his voting habits reminded me that in the late 1960s, which I was doing photochemical research for Imperialist Chemical Industries, we were visited by an American academic, who mentioned during post-work socializing that he had voted for Goldwater rather than Johnson because he'd rather vote for an honest idiot rather than a crook. Looks like our American cousins are faced with the same choice in November. Plus ça change, etc.

Wishing that someone would abolish the ulnar nerve, which is giving me gyp at the right elbow, I shall sign off now.

*(Hello, Phillip. Please keep your minor ailments to yourself in future. There is no place for such stuff in a fanzine of this calibre. Meanwhile I congratulate you on the coining of the word *pillockracy* which I shall be dropping into my conversation very regularly now.)*

You can contact Phillip Turner at farrago2@lineone.net

LEIGH EDMONDS

Thanks for the latest *Vibrator*. Good, as I have become used to.

I don't like the cover. Not that I object to it, covers are always good on fmz, it's just that I object to the photo. I can go down to the happy hour in our retirement village and see people who look like that - which is why I don't go. One of the reasons, anyhow. There are many in this photo that I've never met, and those that I have I wouldn't have seen them for twenty years or so. You've got used to seeing each other get old and wrinkly, I haven't. I've got entirely different mental pictures of you folks and I'd like to keep them if you don't mind.

On the other hand, I liked your convention report. It left out all the dull bits and included only the fun and entertaining bits. It's also a reminder of, for example, Justin Ackroyd dragging Valma and I and a couple of other fans to an Indian restaurant somewhere in Brisbane. I remember that we crossed a bridge at some point, and lots of roads and traffic lights. It seemed to take an eternity to get there, 'just around the corner and we're there...' though the food was almost worth it. Unlike you now, I've never had the pleasure of pleasuring Roy Kettle (I seem to have jumped to the letter column here) but it's something I can look forward to. And when I came to the bit about having sex with a defribulator I burst out laughing. Other people in the train carriage looked up from their smart phones, annoyed that I had disturbed their studies (or whatever it is that you do with a smart phone). I was terribly embarrassed, so I hope it was worth it for you.

Old Rich Coad's piece was interesting. You'll have to find out what he is thinking these days. I used to be an opera fan in my youth, but no longer. Too much warbling, too much rich romantic writing in things like *La Boheme* and *Lucia de Lammmoor*, for my taste anyhow. I could go a good *Nixon in China* or *Einstein on the Beach*, even a *Wozzek*, but I once sat through the entire *Rosenkavalier* and it's taken years of therapy ... On the other hand I'm in furious agreement about *Never Mind the Bollocks*. After the death of Hendrix and Joplin the music business went soft, and this brought it back to life. For Australians, of course, it was The Saints and *(I'm) Stranded*. Suddenly music was back. I recently came across a CD of *(I'm)*

Stranded in a shop for a mere \$7.99. Having previously only had an old cassette I bought it. It still sounds amazing. This CD has 'bonus' tracks but I can't bring myself to listen to them yet because they come after the last track on the LP, and if there is a better track to end an LP than 'Nights in Venice' I have yet to hear it.

Lots of interesting stuff in the lettercolumn, but where did all this serconism come from? If I want sercon I'll turn to *SF Commentary*. But if we're going to be sercon let me add a comment to Joseph Nicholas. I know he is a fine and upstanding fan but I have to disagree with his phrase 'dusty days of old'. I'll have him know that I am currently reading my way through the Lensman Series and there's nothing 'dusty' about it. It's a ripping yarn full of all kinds of excitement and galaxy smashing adventure. They don't write stuff like that any more, not that I know of anyhow. And, as for 'characterisation is ... fairly minimal'. Who needs characterisation? What that means is that the main characters in books have personal problems, and we've all got those. Who wants to read about them in books too? Kinbal Kinnison has the character of ... let me think about this ... a dog chasing a ball (perhaps) but I can't imagine that he'd save the galaxy from the evil Eddorians if he spent his time obsessing about his fantasies about his mother or mother in law. Which was the one with fabulous red hair in *First Lensman*? Well worth obsessing about, apparently.

Finally a comment on Nic Farey's attempt to instruct us about betting odds. Having been brought up as a good Methodist boy I was never instructed in this matter, and I have to say that I am none the wiser now. Run it past me again?

(Hello Leigh. I don't know really what to say to you because you are an Australian with a confusing gender name. But, here is a tip, do not tell any fanzine editor that you don't like his cover. I am now going to vote for Trump just to spite you. It was taken by an Amazonian lesbian after all. Have you completely taken leave of your senses?)

You can contact Leigh Edmonds at hhandc@hemsleypark.com.au

ROBERT LICHTMAN

Great group phoot on the cover of *Vibrator* 2.0.32! Thanks to Glamorous Natalie for taking it – a good job of framing everyone perfectly and providing enough grotty detail (especially that golden light fixture above everyone's heads) of the less-than-perfect surroundings in which it was taken. I agree with your critique of the hotel, that 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." However, from the general tenor

of your account it sounds like that despite this shortcoming everyone managed to have a good time.

I'm very sorry to read of the family crisis that greeted you after returning from Barcon that took over your attention, but heartened to read that "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." And of course I agree with your Trump comment. His ICU trip will no doubt follow his complete breakdown after the voters fire him on November 8th.

As for your smartphone, I'm pleased to read that you've got one and that it served you well, especially after you discovered "its primary use, quite apart from phoning people, is it is a fine thing to fiddle with whenever there are longueurs in conversations." Although Carol has had a smartphone of her own for a year or so now and does spend a certain amount of time on it, I haven't yet succumbed and continue to use a Nokia pay-go mobile that I bought back in August 2005 when I retired, so that Carol and I could keep in touch during that month when I was making daily trips back and forth between Glen Ellen and Oakland. It's only capable of making and receiving calls – a "traditional" cellphone of the era (although trendy flipphones were available for those willing to pay a little more, which I wasn't mainly because the keypad was too small for my fingers). When I take it to a T-Mobile store to add minutes (\$100/1,000, which is expensive but can take me a year to use up), some of the clerks are amazed to see it. One even offered to buy it from me – it's apparently become a "collectible."

Rich Coad is right on in his article when he write, "As far as I was, and still am, concerned, the decade of the 1980s was a low point for popular music. It all seemed like watered down corporate versions of music that was cutting edge in the 1970s." Aside from what various bands on the Farm were doing, which was pretty much retro '60s/Dead fare, my exposure to pop music during the '70s was pretty much limited to what I heard on the radio when I was out doing business (about which I've written in other venues) and it was pretty much standard rock (with an emphasis on "Southern rock" to the point where I could have gone the rest of my life without hearing more Allman Brothers and Lynyrd Skynyrd). I left the Farm in 1980 and went to work with Paul Williams on his small publishing company. As you might expect from "the founder of rock criticism," Paul was keeping up with at least some music, so I got up to date with the bands and solo acts that he liked. But other than that, I continued to be dependent on what I heard on the radio. So I got into early B52s, Pearl Harbor and the Explosions, and other stuff from groups whose names I no longer remember – but not in a big way. And because I was pretty poor for most of the '80s, I wasn't buying music to play on the big stereo boom box that my sons gave me one Christmas.

So I'm not really familiar with most of the music Rich surveys in his article. I do, however, definitely resonate with his comments about Sly and the Family Stone, about whom Rich writes, "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." I was an avid listener to Sly's show for just those reasons. I had mixed feelings about "Dance to the Music" when it first came out, though. At the time I was working for the San Francisco sales office of the record label on which it appeared, so my first introduction to it was a two-sided single (one side stereo, the other mono) of the title song that was for sending out to the local radio stations (and big record stores such as Tower) to get airplay. When we unpacked the box full of them and threw one of the records on the office stereo, I didn't particularly like it. "This will never be a hit," I blurted out to the promo guys. "Wanna bet?" one of them said. Fortunately I didn't take the offer because I was so wrong. And after a few more plays, I changed my view and really liked it.

He also mentions Love and their "Forever Changes" album. This was one I really liked – and one that I'd missed back in the '60s, but Paul tuned me on to it. Rich is right on when he writes that "The stunning thing about this album is that Arthur Lee and the band managed to add such catchy tunes to such insane lyrics." Yowsa! Best listened to, I found, when very stoned.

In your "What I Think," it pissed me off when you wrote that "The effects of climate warming are not likely to affect me before I die." Yeah, well, maybe so – but what about your sons? What about your grandchildren? Elsewhere in the article you write, "I know I am probably alone in counseling against the commercial exploitation of space." No, you're not – I raise my hand in opposition to that, too, and for the same reasons you cite.

In Joseph Nicholas's rant about the unwonderfulness-in-retrospect of "Golden Age" writers such as Hal Clement, I definitely agreed with his characterization of that author's signature novel, *Mission of Gravity*: "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." I remember it being a major slog when I read it as a teenager, and although I managed to finish it I immediately forgot everything about it. Years passed, and I even forgot that I didn't particularly like it. So when a copy of the British hardcover came up on eBay cheap, I went for it – though as much for the cover artwork [***scan attached and reprinted on the cover of this issue-- GC***] as the sanctity of the *classic* novel. I haven't tried to reread it.

Congratulations to Nic on winning the prized 5-5 cabbie shift, especially given that it's a reward for "long-serving drivers who's proven reliable and solid" – which apparently even his smoking violation warning didn't affect. Sorry about having to drive a crappy Malibu, though.

About Roger Goodell, Nic writes: “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.” And the stick in these parts is what Oakland is going to do to try to keep the Raiders in place – a task made more difficult by the city’s unwillingness to put in public money (especially since part of the \$95 million borrowed to be used for stadium renovations that got the team to come back in 1995 is still being paid back). In the last day or so, a new wrinkle has developed. The *East Bay Times* reports, “With the Raiders with one foot out the door, Oakland and Alameda County officials are reviewing an 11th-hour pitch from a money-management firm with deep pockets and ties to a group led by Hall of Famer Ronnie Lott to keep the NFL team here.” And the same article continues, “Complicating the Las Vegas deal, casino mogul Sheldon Adelson said Wednesday he could walk away from his commitment to help finance the Las Vegas stadium with \$650 million if the Raiders don’t adjust their terms, according to a Reuters report.” Stay tuned, Nic!

You close by noting that in your room “There are boxes I haven’t opened for twenty years.” I can’t quite beat you there, but I’m working at it. I have boxes sitting unopened for a mere dozen years. Some of them are well-marked so I at least know what’s in them, but there are a bunch marked “miscellaneous” that are what I scooped off table- and desk-tops and out of drawers and I have no idea. Chances are pretty good I’ll continue clueless.

TALES OF A LAS VEGAS TAXI DRIVER

By Nic Farey

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE NUMBER 2, AND TRAFFIC

One bloke I used to work with on the buildings was Billy, the kind of prat that made you want to slash your wrists after a day with him, he being a combination of the worst traits of Eeyore and Marvin the Paranoid Android, his favorite expression, elucidated in a very Eeyore/Marvin tone, being: "Aaaaah, it's all a bunch of shit...". His contagious depression was all the worse for a tendency to follow you around, since he was usually incapable of being given a job to do and being left to do it, despite our best efforts to give him simple tasks that were as much in the general direction of away as we could conceive. Which has nothing to do with taxis, but does have some parallels with the Private Frazer-like pronouncements of some of the cabbies on the stands (*passim*).

We complain (*passim ad nauseam*) about the increasing number of cabs the

companies are shoving onto the streets, which is supposed to combat the encroachment of the shady rideshare operations, but in reality makes it more difficult for the drivers to make a living, as detailed in the previous "numbers" column. The Law of Unintended Consequences has come into play, however. I've also previously noted that the tenure of many people who start driving a cab can be six months or less, for reasons including an inability to work the long and unusual hours, general disillusionment, or just being crap at the job. You're mostly thrown in the deep end to start (although I had some help because of the training policies at YCS), and of course there's a learning curve, one which isn't really swiftly negotiated. After eighteen or twenty months on the job, I *still* consider myself to be learning stuff, even though I mostly seem to do all right. The companies are constantly hiring, and more aggressively than ever. Our little monthly free mag, 'Trip Sheet', includes details of the Taxicab Authority (TA) meetings and monthly statistics, one of which used to be "blown shifts", a stat that hasn't been reported in many months (and will not be in the foreseeable future). We cynically surmise that the reason for the removal of this information is that the numbers look highly embarrassing. My mate Brad, whom the reader (J, Unc) will remember from his charming wanker story, drives for one of the Frias companies, and estimates that there may be 200 or more blown shifts *per day* in their fleets. This is actually advantageous to those of us who are out working, since the true number of cabs on the streets is somewhat less than the potential number, which is how many medallions the TA has issued. Brad's also observed (probably accurately) that it's now almost impossible to get fired, unless you're consistently booking numbers not far north of fuck-all, or do something mildly egregious like plowing through a bus stop full of people (and perhaps not even then).

Another thing that's been very noticeable since I went on the 5-5 is that the traffic becomes more of a consideration later in the shift, whereas that was less the case on the 2-2, given that you'll be avoiding the parking lot that is the Strip whenever possible. We'll be having a time of it round about when the reader (Unc, J) is perusing this, since the hugely attended SEMA (100,000 plus automotive trades convention) will be running the first week of November, which hits everybody at peak movement times and jams up Paradise Road to the convention center for anything up to a mile in any direction. Paradoxically, although there's a ton of action going on in town, we don't always (or even) book too well, since we're spending so much time at a standstill. Even with the meter running while stopped in traffic, the reward for the ride taking longer isn't close to what you'd make if you were in motion, the distance element being more lucrative than time by about double. This is how my colleague Shirley can outbook me this last Wednesday (\$380 meter to my \$375), despite logging 14 rides to my 24 - she typically works the airport exclusively, and tunnels every ride possible, whereas I work a different strategy based on looking for a load based on where I've dropped the previous ride. That's sometimes

but not necessarily at the same property - I mentally divide the valley into "territories", and in each area I'll have a favored stand or stands to work from. This works out for me more often than not. You're always going to get "those days" when most of the rides you get are midgets, though I'm quite often lucky in getting the better ones. For example, Saturday before last (as I write), I booked 21 rides for a gross of over \$400, good rides almost all. This last Monday I did the same number of rides for \$290, and on Tuesday 21 again for a little less! The 24 rides on Wednesday were mostly decent, and as I point out to Shirley, I get 24 tips (actually 23, one stiff) to her 14, although she observes that her tips are usually good, which I counter with the fact that I have to work harder for mine, since she's pretty and has some quite impressive arthritis to boot.

Special events <koff> like the occasional Presidential Debate also make traffic interesting, usually due to road closures required for both motorcades and security perimeters. The perimeter they established around the UNLV Thomas & Mack Center was, well, yuuuuuge, not that there's anything like a book depository anywhere near, and it seemed like the case that various bits of Metro police, NHP and Secret Service were located at strategic points for fuckin' *miles* around. With everyone taking exceptionally round-about routes, it took me a bit longer to get home than usual, but I was domiciled in time to watch baby-carrot-fingers trot out his usual dacha-load of ordure and Hillary practising restraint for the next night's Alfred E. Smith dinner (note to sub, check actual event name). Speaking of which, old orange gropey boy managed to get booed by a roomful of priests, perhaps not a good sign. Also unheard (due to faulty microphones, no doubt) was the UNLV audience reaction to "No-one has more respect for women than me", which according to those who were there can only be described as "howls of derisive larffter, Bruce".

It just now occurs to me that the election "result" may well be known by the time this award-winning fish-wrap reaches you, and cotton-candy-piss-hair man will be suing everyone. Probably.

Back to the traffic issues, then, which are going to be well exacerbated for anything up to the next three years, as they're having a major remodel of the "spaghetti bowl" which we'll have to work around. That, and other seemingly eternal road work, and aforementioned traffic-clogging events, are naturally the time that the TA decides to have a clampdown on long-hauling, making our lives even more miserable and desperate. There are certain rides from the airport that I'll tunnel, but in most cases the preferred (and cheaper) route is the streets rather than the tunnel and freeway. Because of the configuration of the meter, with its emphasis on distance rather than time, the shorter route is almost always also the cheapest. However, the shorter route mostly takes longer due to the traffic and the number of traffic lights, not to mention any road closures or diversions that might

be happening. If I think it's legit, I'll offer the fare the choice of tunnel/freeway or streets, making sure to point out that the quicker way is actually more expensive. Regular visitors are often our friends in this respect, since they'll usually tell you which way they want to go, more often than not the freeway, and are quite happy to tell TA to fuck off if you get pulled over for a potential long-haul. One nasty trick TA is trying on lately, though, is that even if you offer the longer, more expensive route, telling the fare that it's quicker, that's considered "coercion", also a ticketable offense, and they're prone to dispute whether the tunnel/freeway route is even quicker at all. Sometimes they're right about that - before the traffic gets bad I won't even offer the "faster" option, since at those times of day it actually isn't by more than a couple of minutes, if that. Of course, if the customer says "feel free to take the highway", I'm happy to oblige - the fare difference to, say, Treasure Island or Mirage is around \$10, ka-ching!

No Vodka(qv) was harmed during the composition of this column.

THAT LICHTMAN/TRUMP DEBATE GLOSSARY IN FULL:

Arthritis : In-yer-face knockers. (For the US reader, a nice rack.) The derivation of the term can be demonstrated by curling ones hands into a severely arthritic shape and holding them a foot or so in front of one's chest.

Blown shift : A scheduled cab that doesn't make it to the streets, usually because the driver didn't show up.

Frias : One of the big players in the Vegas taxi business (YCS is the other), they operate five different companies, which back in the day used to be more-or-less regional to different parts of the valley per agreement and regulation with the TA. Since the end of last year all medallions have been unrestricted.

Good ride : The definition depends on who you ask. In typical jail-style understatement, many drivers would consider a "good ride" to be over \$40 or \$50, though for me it's more like \$25-30+. I've started referring to these more as "solid rides" lately.

Gross book : Meter plus taxes (+\$2 every ride from airport property, plus 3% on top overall). Usually referred to as the number "on top".

Long-haul : A reminder - unless specifically instructed by the fare, we're required by regulation to take the shortest distance route to the destination. Anything else may be considered a "long-haul" and subject to a nasty ticket.

Medallion : Basically, a permit to operate a taxi, signified by a color-coded metal plaque affixed to the free pickle showing the company letter(s) and a number. Mine, for example, is blue, "L10". In cities like New York, medallions are privately/individually owned, and each used to be worth a ton of money (pre-rideshare), often handed down from father to son. In Vegas all medallions are

company-owned.

Midget : A short ride, under \$10, sometimes well under.

Nasty woman : Anne Page.

Stiff : A ride that doesn't tip.

Stiffie : Something quite different.

Tunnelling : Exiting (or entering) the airport via the bypass tunnel, rather than on Swenson Street or Russell Road, usually considered a long-haul (qv) but in several cases a legitimate route, depending who you ask, as long as it's not TA.

Well, that was painless, wasn't it. Another Vibrator under the belt, if you'll excuse the expression. This time next month America will either be in the hands of either the World's most evil criminal genius, or else Donald Trump. I should, I suppose, put forward the next issue of Vibrator as a Special Presidential Issue and solicit all your thoughts on the outcome, but only when it has happened, mind you.

On the other hand we could just natter inconsequentially amongst ourselves as we normally do.

This has been Vibrator 33, without, you may have noticed, a single mention of Bob Dylan winning the Nobel Prize for Literature. Ooops.

How's my health? Well the bursitis has calmed down and now my freakishly lumpy elbow only needs to shrink accordingly. Oh, and I have just fallen down and gashed my forehead. Still others have a much worse time, preferably my doctor who is even now having sleepless night about all the poison pen letters I am sending her.

I am Graham Charnock at 45 Kimberley Gardens, London N4 1LD. Pop by if you fancy a cup of tea any time. Otherwise email me at graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk

(I love giving mundane people that address and watching their look of puzzlement.)

(I was joking about popping in for a cup of tea. Please phone ahead for an appointment, when you are unlikely to get one.)