



December 2016

Dear America

For many years we outside your land have sat back and watched your parade of Presidents, always believing them to be motivated by ideals and principles of public service. Some have proved flawed in their jobs, and have fallen from grace with a mighty clunk whilst experiencing tortures of self-doubt, but very few have demonstrated while in office that they ever really wanted to put themselves above the public who elected them. Many have had noble careers in office, some leading their country to painful resolutions of difficult problems, some effecting great programmes in their names and creating monumental works in their memory. But they have always seemed to have been guided by a supreme lack of self-interest. This has always seemed the most honest expression of American honesty and integrity. Now you are about to raise to honour in office a man who has demonstrably put his own welfare above all others, who has demonstrated only one allegiance, which is to his immediate family and the accumulation of wealth. He is a man whose biggest Lie is to himself because as a millionaire he sees himself as a saviour of working and middle-class America. We will view the progress of this comical self-aggrandizing comedian with interest, but do not expect our faith in you as a country to ever be the same again.

Graham Charnock

Hey ho and away we go, another year don't you know. George Michael is dead. When one queen dies can another not be close behind. But hey guys, if you thought 2016 was bad, you haven't seen 2017 yet.

Well, soon it will be upon us. I'm writing this on New Year's Eve. I used to feel lonely on New Year's Eve when there were no parties to go to, then I got invited to parties and it still felt a lonely time. Now I'm no longer invited to parties and wouldn't go to them if I was. New Year's parties are for young folks who still believe there will be a future.

Well it seems there is an elephant in the room we have to discuss, and he goes trumpety trumpety trump. I started thinking along the lines that Trump could end up being the most honest President in history, simply because he will be under such scrutiny, and there will be hoards of journalists and others just waiting to entrap him in an indiscretion. But then I started thinking he is such an egotist he probably thinks he is immune, or worse, so clever that he will have no difficulty covering his tracks as he continues to bilk people. And the fact is he isn't clever. So, yes, I agree impeachment somewhere along the lines is certainly a pretty safe prediction. That may not particularly trouble him if he has already made a lot of money from the operation.

Once upon a time and long ago there was a small town in the American mid-west. Its citizens were possessed of the normal range of human frailties; they swore and cursed, coveted their neighbours wives, and were intolerant of the sexual behaviour of some of their fellow citizens, some of whom they also perceived as socially inferior. But they were kept in check not only by the moral guidance of the local pastor, but of their elected sheriff, a strong but benign man wearing a white hat. The local landowner was a thug who had no moral compass; of course he wore a black hat. Once a month, usually on payday, his equally thuggish henchman would get drunk and shoot up the town but they were generally dull and clumsy in their liquor and were usually given short shrift by the sheriff. One day the local landowner organized his men and they rode into town. They called a public meeting and scorned the citizens for keeping their baser instincts in check, telling them they should be free to express the feelings they had for so long been called upon to suppress. The sheriff tried to intervene of course, but this time he found himself outnumbered; he was tarred and feathered and run out of town. Freed of their constraints the citizens who had aligned themselves with the thuggish landowner, turned upon those who had maintained their dignity and composure under the influence of the pastor but now reacted just as violently to protect themselves. This fable did not have a happy outcome.

After a long period flames of insurrection burned the town down. Eventually only dust blew across the plain where it was situated.

MORE TRUMP

Why Trump will not complete a full term. First of all put aside fantasies of him being assassinated. Trump's downfall will come from within not without. Trump is used to power, control and domination (bullying). He will discover the President's job is about moderation, negotiation, bargaining and compromise; all skills he has never had cause to develop. He is used to employing members of his family to help run his business; as President he will not have access to such familial control. He will appoint people who are as greedy and self-centred as himself, not realizing this will only remove his control and hand it to fellow opportunists and he will find it hard to rely on their loyalty. And they in turn will not defer to his self-perceived *nous*. He will become a political Caesar but not to the extent of being all powerful, but instead constantly looking over his shoulder to see who is about to stab him in the back. I suspect this situation will prove increasingly intolerable and burdensome and he will, as Obama and Clinton themselves predicted, turn out to be, in the end, constitutionally incapable of being President. That being said, I think he has not enough perception to recognize his weaknesses and too much pride to resign. But he will feel impotent, become flustered and increasingly liable to make mistakes and some of these may eventually catch him out.

LESS TRUMP

Okay, on this day old Sir Ken Dodd not only didn't die but was awarded a knighthood. Also Ray Davies because Sir Ray Davies. He's not like everybody else you know.

MORE TRUMP

As I speak Trump reports Putin is very smart not to retaliate against Obama dismissing Russian Diplomats. Putin's new bum-buddy will obviously re-instate them as soon as he is inaugurated. And Sarah Palin has been touted as science and technology consultant. Well, as Robert Earl Keen said, the road goes on forever and the circus never ends, or as my old mate Mike Meara might say: We are all doomed.

GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS PAST AND PRESENT

I was born in November 1946, which means my first Christmas was a month later in that same year (I was always a whizz at maths). As Bob Dylan, or somebody, probably said, I didn't feel much that year. But my parents had given me a fork and knife, albeit a plastic Tommee Tippee one, so I had cut something, although probably not meat. Maybe we are all born vegetarians, but if that is so why do we all hate Brussels' Sprouts, except at Christmas when are forced to like them*.

*(*EDITOR: Actually I quite like sprouts, especially now they have apparently genetically engineered them to leave out the sour component. Fry them with bacon or some lardons or even a few slices of cured pork, and they are delicious.)*

The cold outside might have been frightening but I'm sure I was wrapped up in the suitable swaddling clothes, just like an alternative Baby Jesus, except with possibly better job prospects. Our house was an end of terrace in a quiet dead-end in Alperton, which in those days and for a couple of decades to come was a bastion of white middle-class right wing values. In fact we were so middle class we didn't even call it a dead-end, but a cul-de-sac. I put white into that last but one sentence, because of course now we are not. Some of us are black, some brown, and some distinctly grey.

We had a garden, in which we kept rabbits, and a coal shelter into which coal was delivered from a horse-dray. The rabbit hutch was next to the coal shelter and sometimes the rabbits got an unexpected delivery, leading to rabbit stew the next day, I knew none of this at the time of course, being possibly less than a year old.

History dictates that my first real Christmas, must have been 1947. But the winter of 1946-47 has been officially described as the worst winter in UK history. What can I say? I didn't feel very cold, except when my parents left me in the outside loo for eight hours. The rest of the country however was freezing and by all accounts ready to collapse into the equivalent of a deprived socialist state and somehow spontaneously succumb to Communism, as if it was a disease equivalent to getting pregnant. I'm seen newsreels from the time. There was a lot of snow but apparently we all pulled together, because that was the only way to move the snow ploughs.

Christmas 1947 was probably better, although I didn't remember it because I was only two years old (or one year and one month as I would later pedantically claim) and two-year olds' don't remember anything.

By the time I was three, I knew my father was a speedway engineer who worked for Wembley Lions, a major speedway team of the time. He led a glamorous life you might not immediately expect to be associated with a grease monkey. He went abroad with the touring team to venues as exotic as Sweden and Norway.

One year he bought me home an electric car toy, made by Schuco. It may have been at Christmas, it may not, but that is one of my most-remembered gifts. On another occasion he bought home a Swedish Racing Bike, a crude machine with a fixed wheel and no gears, thus making it impossible for me to really achieve my dream, of leaving home and cycling around the world. I did manage to leave my home several times, but only got a hundred yards or so before having to come back.

But I remember another Christmas which seemed to indicate straighter times, when Dad's gift to us was plastic sack full of junk and battered lead toys. I don't know if this is a real memory, and there is no one left now to trust with their testimony. My older brothers have always denied they were beaten with a strap my father kept hanging up inside the kitchen door, when I remember it so well.



LEIGH EDMONDS

Yet another issue of *Vibrator* throbbed its way into my email box the other day and was very welcome. The letter column proved to be rather introspective with lots of your favorite letter writers chuntering on about death in one way or another. I've said enough on the matter, I reckon you're dead a long time so there will be plenty of time to think about it then.

The main disappointment of this issue was John's long article about the process of getting his blood cleaned. After your introduction I thought that it would be a long, boring but blood stained article, but instead it turned out to be quite

interesting and informative. Now I know exactly where to park if I find myself in the Oxford region in need of dialysis, and to take a packed lunch and lots of reading material should the need arise. The only exciting part of the essay was the bit where the blood didn't clot and spurted everywhere, just like in the movies. I imagine it's alarming when it happens the first time, but maybe it's something you get used to if it happens a few times. Just so long as they don't make you clean up your own blood before you leave.

More sympathetically, I feel for John having to spend so much time in traffic to get to and from his appointments. That would take a real chunk out of the day, and it sounds as though the traffic is not very pleasant at times. Actually, I feel for John having to spend so much of his time plugged into the machine but it's better than nothing and I bet he gets an awful lot of reading done. There is something to be said for being forced to lie down for long periods of time with nothing else to do.

Philip Turner is right, of course, about the idea of playing the 'bonus' tracks on the Saints album first. It's a very clever idea and I'd do it if I could figure out how to do it quickly and efficiently. As soon as Philip sends me some instructions I will get right on it.

I'm gratified to read that a couple of people are on my side - after a fashion at least - in my disagreement with Joseph Nicholas over 'dusty days of old' stf. This is one of the few times in the history of the universe when anyone has commented favorably on my thoughts about stf. I'm tempted to cut out those short segments and stick them on the fridge to cheer me up on those gloomy days.

I am with John Hertz when it comes to Doc Smith's use of those grandiose adjectives. Most of the time when he goes off the deep end with his thesaurus of grandiose words I'm more likely to be struck by his audacity than to be annoyed. I'm rereading *Grey Lensman* at the moment so let's see what we can turn up by opening a page at random. After looking for a moment I find that most of the pages are not very exciting, but space battles are better. Here's one: 'those indescribable primary beams lashed out; stilettos of irresistible penetrant energy ...' That's not too exorbitant really, there have been times that I've almost had to reach for the BIG dictionary to find out what he's on about. But as I said, audacity, I like it.

Just flicking through *Grey Lensman* reminds me that there isn't much space battle action in this one, to the point I've reached anyhow though I bet there is a big set piece at the end when the dreaded Eich get theirs. What there is a lot of Kinnison going under cover in some of the galaxy's most nefarious drug haunts and places of vice. The odd thing is that he never really gets drunk and he makes

a lot of women happy without getting any horizontal folk dancing action going. For a moment I had the idea of writing a 2016 version of *Grey Lensman* where Kinnison really does get down and dirty in the squalid dens of iniquity that he spend so much time in. However, I'm afraid my imagination really isn't up to it and I'm feeling a bit too stiff and sore these days to undertake the rigorous research necessary, so somebody else can have a go. The other thing that turns me away from this project is the thought of having to deal with Kinnison's guilt trip after having had to betray his nurse girlfriend with all those other women, just to keep up his cover. Do grey lensmen know what guilt is, I wonder?

I'm on facebook but I don't let it bother me much. I don't have many 'friends', which is not quite the appropriate word for people who do little more than click the 'like' button occasionally as a sign of their high esteem for me. There's no point at getting cranky with people in that venue, they just get cranky back. Is it something in the water these days or are people more naturally cranky than they used to be?

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DAVE COCKFIELD

As usual I overdid the drinking leading up to Xmas. That is the trouble with being a social drinker, I can't say no. I was therefore quite happy to spend the big day alone to recover in peace.

The day started well with a breakfast of scrambled eggs, dill infused smoked salmon, toast, a bottle of champagne, and my first festive Vibrator. I managed to restrain myself to 1 bottle of Champagne, 1 bottle of Port, ½ a bottle of Jim Beam and 3 bottles of IPA over the two days.

I think that I was feeling a bit down when I wrote my last loc as I was in the middle of an old age crisis wondering where my life was heading. Thanks to my old friend Ian Williams I now know that I do in fact have something to look forward to, Death! But from now on a death that just happens to be inevitable so I may as well do my best to have a good time until then.

My doctor once complained that because of my excess weight, a paltry 5 stone (no kilos here mate), I could end up with diabetes or have a heart attack. I reassured her that I would not become a burden on the system. If my health got too bad, if I was totally infirm, or if I was in permanent pain I would throw myself of the top of my high rise. The look of shock on her face was gratifying because she realised that I was actually being truthful. I believe that when we're gone that

is it although like Paul Skelton I think that it is a shame that there would be no more 'me'.

(EDITOR: My experience, Dave, is that Doctors like to spring the occasional scare on you because they somehow believe it will persuade you to change your ways. Fifteen years ago when I first disclosed my alcoholism to my doctor she earnestly told me I had only five years left to live. I've never been able to believe anything she says ever again, so it was all really counter-productive.)

If it turns out that suicide really does lead to Hell it wouldn't matter because I would probably be headed there anyway. I must admit though that I do quite envy people who have real faith.

The highlight of Vibrator 2.0.34 for me was your piece about James Stewart or was it Charles Lindberg? Did you know that the other famous James Stewart had to change his name to Stewart Grainger to avoid confusion on the big screen?

Anyway he was a damn fine pilot and his statue did a good job of testing the rocket backpack in the "Rocketeer" movie. Lindberg that is, not Grainger.

My favourite account of the kidnapping is actually a work of fiction. It is "Stolen Away" by Max Allan Collins. He has written a number of crime novels with his Private Detective, Nathan Heller, investigating true historical events. I don't think that this one was overly popular in the US because if I remember correctly he concluded that Hauptman was framed. After all, a lead investigator in the case was the Superintendent of New Jersey State Police, Herbert Norman Schwarzkopf Sr. Good old Storming Norman's dad.

I demand another Vibrator from you Graham. You are rude, opinionated, cantankerous, and as lovable as Grumpy Cat. I need the fix every month!

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JOHN PURCELL

Oh, great. Another bloody fanzine. And from Graham Charnock, no less. Oh, well, I might as well slog through it.

Your opening segment discussing dialysis with Uncle Johnny didn't churn my stomach at all, and reminded me of the near-fatal internal bleeding I had back in May of 1999, about which I wrote in the fourth issue of Dave Locke's fine online fanzine *Time & Again*, which is firmly archived on efanzines.com. The article in question is "By the Numbers," and was reprinted in Guy Lillian's *Challenger #32*, I don't want to get back into that experience in great detail here, so all I will say is

that I spent nearly two full weeks in two different hospitals and received a grand total of 13 units in blood transfusions. Thankfully I am feeling much better now and taking care of myself. Or at least I hope I am doing a decent job taking care of myself. The wife claims a lot of credit for my survival, too. Well, I'll grant her that.

Graham, your faith in my becoming the TAFF delegate to the upcoming WorldCon in Helsinki is heart-warming. I believe I have a damn good shot at it otherwise I wouldn't have bothered. With over two months of voting to come one must admit that anything can happen, but the other two candidates are young ladies (I think they're both still in their 20s, or early 30s at the oldest) who can run in 2019 to attend the Dublin WorldCon. I'm becoming an oldphart - 62 now - and a grandfather, and the battery in my timeclock is starting to lose its charge, so I say vote for me to be the bloody TAFF delegate in 20-bloody-17. Let those girls duke it out two years from now. They've got time.

Anyway, Valerie and I have begun planning out an itinerary for what is beginning to look like a four week European excursion that will begin in mid-July and end the week after WorldCon is over, returning to Texas on August 18th or 19th. Something like that. It would be splendid to have the chance to sit in the rockers and plunk out some tunes with you at some point - you have a front porch? I would have thought you'd be lucky to even have a stoop to sit on in front of your home - while enjoying a pint or two. You and the rest of British fandom will meet Valerie; she was at LoneStarCon III with some of her artwork on display in the Art Show, and you can interview Jim and Carrie Mowatt, or even the lovely Nic Farey, to get their impressions of Val. I could tell you, but I'm a bit prejudiced. In either case, she's looking forward to the trip. We have the passport applications ready and I've already set up accommodations in London, Wales, and Italy. Now to line up places to stay in France, Copenhagen, and Prague. Hmph. Where did I put that European mailing list of mine?

Enough of this twaddle. I have another TAFF focused issue of *Askew* and then the January *Askance* to prepare.

See you next summer, Graham.

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OWEN WHITEOAK

Thanks muchly for the new fmz. I'm afraid I've been feeling a little morose lately, despite my previous philosophical approach, as I ponder my mother lying in a hospice awaiting the inevitable, and I couldn't find anything to comment on for the moment. I might enlighten Robert Lichtman (Hi, Robert!) about the origin of

the 'knockers' and 'arthritis' connection. It was a running gag on the Morecombe and Wise Show (two very popular comics on British stage and TV, and even a couple of films, for the benefit of our overseas visitors). A woman would be mentioned by Ernie Wise, and Eric Morecombe would ask, "The one with the, er..." as he held his hands out in front of him as if to indicate a, erm, large endowment. And Ernie would reply, "Arthritis, that's right." I don't know if the joke dated back further to the Music Hall era (Eric and Ernie had been very successful on Northern variety bills long before they won the TV hearts of the nation), but I think that's what made the joke a Certified British Standard.

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LLOYD PENNEY

I don't know how far behind I am in things, but I have two issues of Vibrator outstanding to comment on, and who know how many others are out there. Anyway, issues 32 and 33 are here, and here come the remarks.

32...Barcon 4 sounds like a fine time indeed. And, I hope everything is calm and happy in the Charnock household. Take care, and look after yourselves. Plastic £5 notes...we've got plastic C\$5 notes (plus \$10s and C\$20s) here, but never came across any in the UK in August. We had a fine time, by the way. A previous Barcon was in Lincoln? There are great bars in the artistic quarter. Which one did you go to?

Being involved in costuming at Worldcons before getting into loccking fanzines, I remember costuming and masquerades and hall costumes. Cosplaying, or costume playing, didn't come along until the mid-80s. Today, there are professional cosplayers who get paid to wear their costumes at cons, and be the character they play to add atmosphere to the con. Hey, more FAAn Awards for me? The cheque's in the mail! Thanks! You get asked what you think? No one asks me that ever, so that's a bonus for you.

I can hardly wait for the explanation of what a defribulator is, and what it does, especially in a sexual setting. I expect the setting to be HIGH. I can't remember the last time I was defribbled.

I see references to the point spread in US football, and it does occur in other sports, but while I've never betted on sports, I do know what the spread is for. The newest news out of Las Vegas sports-wise is the new National Hockey League franchise, the Vegas Golden Knights. Sounds like a university team.

33...Maybe Stephen Fry is like Keith Richards...he's dead, but no one's taken the time to tell him that he can lie down now? I've had close friends pass away

lately, and yes, death is on our minds, too. We've lost weight to try to assure ourselves that we won't be passing away any time soon.

Those flying cars? When the calendar hit 2001, I expected Jetsons-like flying cars, too. Yes, there'd be flying chaos, but there'd be lots of new jobs for automotive air-traffic controllers.

When in London, I saw vending machines that said on their fronts that it could not process polymer plastic bills, so I guess the £5 notes were predicted. Liquor in a private hotel room is okay, but the hotels need more opportunities to make money. There's no more free function space as long as you fill your room block, and North American convention con suites are getting more and more expensive to stock.

Done for now, I am. Hoping to see further issues of Vibrator I am, too. Be good, and be around to create that further issue. And, we will see you then, and many thanks.

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PHILIP TURNER

That yellow bucket on the cover is for "sharps": used needles and glass drug ampoules, and anything else capable of inflicting injury. Just one glance is enuf for anyone who's been at the mercy of the medical profession to identify it.

Phew! Those corridors! J. N-H is exactly right there. Having traversed the length and breadth of Stepping Hill hospital, mainly on behalf of my parents, I was once quite an expert at getting around the place. I still would be were it not for their habit of moving things around. Which left me struggling to get my head around being an out-patient at the Ambulatory Care Unit where I used to visited my mother in cardiology territory.

Paul Skelton's mention of estate planning linked in with one of my current projects. It's the festering season again and I'm getting lots of opportunities to stock up on wine before Xmas. Fine, but I realized a while ago that there's enough rack space for 4 dozen bottles under the stairs and I've been keeping them topped up more or less as a conditioned reflex. But as I'm the only remaining customer, having run out of parents to look after, do I really need that much stock?

What if I, an increasingly old bloke, blow a fuse right after a top-up? All that wine wasted; from my point of view, at least. So I'm resisting temptation and watching the stock dwindle by a couple of bottles per week, and wondering what

the ideal level should be: 6 each of red, white and a couple of pink? Or even two of each?

On the other hand, when you're dead, that's it and you're in no condition to give a rat's ass about the undrunk wine. Why does life have to be such damned hard work?

Apropos of nothing: having noticed that light bulbs, which I bought on special offer for 10p when the government was abolishing incandescent bulbs, now cost over 2 quid in my local supermarket, I dared to reflect that I had not had to change one in living memory. My reward was to find myself in the dark in the bathroom the next evening. And my reading lamp started to go dim yesterday and had to be replaced. Beware what you think, comrades! And whatever you do, don't believe the lies on the packaging about how many hundreds of years CFLs will last.

Lichtman's Law of Fandom states that "Everything two or more fans do together is fanac." [BW #63, p. 40] To which may be added the caveat: "Most of it is not worth recording; or even remembering after they sober up, especially during the festive season." Linking the guru and your last back cover, I can report that I didn't remember that Hal Clement's *Needle* is a kids' book (young adult?). I'm currently re-reading *Iceworld*, which has a gang of kids in it but also lots of adults and a very science-related plot.

Taxi Nic strikes again! He made me realize that Thanksgiving should be held on this side of the Atlantic. WE should be giving thanks that a miserable bunch of fun-denier Puritan gits got on a boat and sailed the hell away from Merrye Olde Englande. 'Bye, guys! Don't forget to suffer!

TTFN, but I might be in touch again in a month or so if I haven't blown a fuse in the meantime.

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DAVID REDD

Looks like I missed your LoC deadline, sorry. But thanks for Vib 34 in glorious paper. Lots of vivid but gloomy pieces - JNH on blood, Ian Williams being truculent about death, your tailpiece about stress and depression and grumpiness ... all so 2016 really. Let's hope 2017 sees us turn the right corner at last. Peace processes in Syria and Colombia, protection for pangolins, Paris environmental agreement more or less, vinyl sales up; pointers to improvement? Let's hope. Happy New Year!

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PAUL SKELTON

Unc's piece (barring the detailed directions for getting from anywhere in the Churchill to anywhere else in the Churchill, for which I suspect I shall never have need) was informative and enjoyable. Of course part of the enjoyment was in the knowledge that, whatever minor travails I may suffer from time to time they are as nought to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune which are visited on some others. Not I hasten to add (because some sod will always take things the wrong way) that the enjoyment is in the suffering of others, but that it is in the not-suffering of me. I also liked the explanatory cover but did wonder why the machine has to be so big and clunky, or is there a lot more going on inside than the explanatory notes? In a way it looks very old-fashioned, providing a thematic link to Robert Lichtman's 'Mission of Gravity' cover with its steam-punk control room, even if the latter does not have a big yellow bucket (which I believe will be for the safe disposal of some or all of the 'contaminated' disposables mentioned in Unc's piece).

However 'dated' the cover now seems it is certainly infinitely preferable to Penguin's offering which makes you doubt that the artist, Yves Tanguy, had ever read the book. Personally I always felt insulted by Penguin's attitude that any SF artwork had to be so trashy that it needed to be replaced by some serious modernist work in the hopes of improving the minds of the obviously moronic scum that read such worthless tripe. Of course that might just have been me being a wee bit on the touchy side.

Hmmm - first Sacco and Vanzetti and now Lindbergh. Why do I have this feeling that Fred Smith's tipoff about the Bill Bryson book didn't come as a complete surprise to you? Mind you if so I suspect it wouldn't be the first time it had been used as a source for some fanzine material as the Lou Gehrig information in it could have been the source of such material Andy Hooper wove into a piece he wrote about Ray Bradbury's Worldcon trip that year which appeared in a relatively recent *TRAPDOOR* I believe. That's 'relatively recent' strictly in number of *TRAPDOOR* issues, of course.

*(EDITOR: Your suggestion that I have been cribbing from Bill Bryson is a vile calumny, and furthermore totally inaccurate. I was not aware of course before Fred mentioned it, but when he did I immediately bought it, if only to indicate what I should *not* write about next.)*

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NIC FAREY

A solidly fuckin' grumpy slice of *SexToy*, as one has come to expect. Our favorite Mad Tory Uncle (J) may be attempting to compete in the vehicular crash department, with all those windy little roads, going against No Entry signs (even with dialysis exceptions), and skinny parking spots, but I feel obliged to remind the old git that there are those of us with *years* of CV in that department which he cannot possibly match, since I'm so well ahead. That having been said, it's a solid and wry piece which, as usual, makes us long for another *Motorway Dreamer*, if only as some small competition for the inevitability of *SexToy* scooping up the important award again.

Your exchange with that Edwards bloke came to a disappointing conclusion only in the sense that it all ended up in what certainly appeared to be genuine politeness, when I'm sure many of us were hoping it would all come to the sharp edges of hardbacks thrown at dawn, or even better, the shred face-off from the movie 'Crossroads', in which case my money's on Charnock (G), e'en as he gazes wonderingly at what the strings might be for from his Vodka(qv) crate.

For the oft-needed enlightenment of the Mighty Robt, the "spaghetti bowl" is the name given to the quite complex Downtown interchange of the I-15, US-95 and various streets and accesses. For UK readers, the equivalent is spaghetti junction, which I'm sure most of you had guessed. A California comparison might be the Orange Crush.

The Mighty Robt also expresses his displeasure of the term "rack" to describe a decent set of tits, and given his sheltered life is unsurprisingly unfamiliar with the term "arthritis" to describe such. I will confess that I'd only heard it used once, leeringly and effectively by George Carter (Dennis Waterman) in an episode of 'The Sweeney' (or possibly one of the movies), but I thought then as now that it was poetically descriptive. For myself, I've tended to prefer "nice shelf", but there are of course many descriptors in play, any or all of which will have their knockers.

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ROBERT LICHTMAN

In your introduction to #34 you write that "those of a sensitive disposition (Ian Maule) should avoid our lead article in which Uncle Johnny spills a lot of beans but not much actual blood." My cancer treatments don't happen – and have never happened – with anything approaching the same frequency as his dialysis. And there's never been any spurting of blood over my clothes, either. But one

thing his treatment and mine does have in common is that “All the lines connecting you to the machine and to the saline supply are thrown away after each session.” Frankly, I wouldn’t want it any other way – and I suspect he wouldn’t either.

About parking for his procedures, he writes of being “a holder of a disabled person’s Blue Badge” so he doesn’t have to pay – but still has problems in finding a parking space even so. When I began treatment last year, I had a similar problem. The hospital has free valet parking, but I’m not inclined to use it because my car’s ignition switch is a little touchy – sometimes the key won’t turn, but I know how to fiddle with it, carefully, and it always will. I worry that the attendant may encounter this and perhaps be overly aggressive in turning it and make things even worse. (I could spend a couple hundred dollars for a new switch, but my specific key can’t be matched and I don’t want yet another one to have to carry around.) I also prefer not to have to wait around for the attendant to bring my car. Before I got my disabled placard, I used to have to walk quite a few blocks in order to park where there are no time restrictions. Now that I have it, I can always find an on-street metered space on the same block as the hospital – I show up just before 9 a.m. when there are plenty of them – and my walk is considerably reduced. The parking being free is a nice perk, too.

He refers to a “graft” as “the bit that actually connects me to the machine,” which makes me wonder if this is the same as or similar to what I have – which is referred to here as a “port,” an implant on my upper right chest just below the collarbone, where the line connecting me to the saline and the infusion of my immunotherapy drug is always made. Life became much simpler and less painful when I had that installed. Actually, the nurses are all pretty good at not inflicting pain to varying degrees – even the worst being very mild and brief.

Johnny also writes of asking for “a cup of cold water” to have with his “packed lunch.” My standard procedure when I arrive for treatment and get assigned my room for the day (which always has a bed because it’s too hard on my back to sit for six hours in one of their Not Comfortable chairs) is to go myself (after putting my packed lunch in one of the refrigerators that also hold hospital-supplied snacks and drinks) to the water and ice machine with two paper cups. I fill both of them to the brim with ice and then add water to one of them. By the time I’ve finished the water-filled cup, the other one has melted and is still refreshingly cold for later in the day.

All in all, a very well-done and especially-to-me interesting article that put me in the chair next to Johnny!

Your article on Lindbergh told me much I already knew, but well-presented – especially the parts about Hauptman. However, you left out that he was a racist

– views that he made clear in a 1939 article in *Reader's Digest* in which he wrote, “We can have peace and security only so long as we band together to preserve that most priceless possession, our inheritance of European blood, only so long as we guard ourselves against attack by foreign armies and dilution by foreign races.” For more on this, check out the Wikipedia article on him, with special attention to the section entitled “Thoughts on race and racism.” And also see the *New York Magazine* article drawing parallels between Lindbergh and Trump:

About Malcolm Edwards’ questioning of fannish tradition about sending fanzines to people mentioned in them, you respond that “it has never been a tradition, as far as I know, for fanzine editors to send copies to people merely mentioned.” It all depends, in my view, on how extensively and in what context someone is mentioned. In the case of what you said about Malcolm that you quoted, I think it would have been a good idea to send him a link to that issue with a page number reference. But in most cases, not – for instance, someone being mentioned in passing in a convention report would not rise to that standard.

John Purcell congratulates Steve Stiles on his Hugo award, and then suggests that “now it will be some other deserving person’s turn.” Noting that Steve was nominated numerous times before his win this year, I observe that Grant Canfield received nominations seven years in a row back in the ‘70s and never won. He returned to fan art for the first time in at least a couple decades with his artwork (and excellent article) in the March 2016 *Trap Door*. This issue will be on efanazines by the time you publish and I commend anyone who didn’t get the print edition to check out his work.

Philip Turner writes, “Dare I disagree with the illustrious Robert Lichtman? I don't think Donald Trump will give a rat’s arse about being swindled out of the US presidency by a rigged voting system.” Say what?! Did Philip write this letter before the election and you’ve just gotten around to publishing it? Trump benefitted from the “rigged voting system” that was done courtesy of his buddy Putin, and has no complaints.

Leigh Edmonds writes of his friend Robin Johnson’s phone which “has an app (whatever they are)” – really, Leigh!? – “which shows all the aircraft in airspace over Australia, all the ones with civil transponders who have filed flight plans... We sit playing with it for a long time until I shake myself out of my numbness and give the phone back to him. If I had one with that app on it I reckon writing letters of comment would be lower on my list of things to do. Do you think that might be the cause of the death of fandom as we know it?” Maybe not but one has to wonder, since LoC writing does seem to have declined in recent years except for frequent focal point fanzines like *Vibrator* and *Banana Wings*.

“While I’m ‘addressing’ Robert, (so to speak),” Fred Smith writes, “would mention that I too have one of those Nokia pay-as-you-go mobile, collectible, phones which will only make and receive calls. It will also take photos of a sort but not the sort that you would ever want to look at!” Yours is newer than mine, then, since there’s no ability for my phone to take photos of any sort. Besides making and receiving calls, mine is also able to collect voice messages. It can also receive text messages, which is an annoyance that can’t be turned off and uses up some of my minutes collecting phone spam. It can also theoretically send texts, but the method of doing so is annoyingly complicated – no pop-up touchscreen keyboard – so I’ve never done.

I enjoyed Nic’s column this time around, as I always do, but nothing popped out at me screaming for a comment. Well, one thing: Congratulations, Nic, on nearly two years of steady employment.

“Rich Coad says he has recently switched off Facebook because it stresses him too much. I must say I sympathize with him and often feel like doing the same.” Those thoughts have occurred to me, too, but instead of leaving it out of my personal universe I browse selectively – rolling my eyes and scrolling rapidly past the political stuff to find updates from my friends about Real Life and that sort of thing. And without Facebook I would have a serious shortage of photos of my four sons, their wives/girlfriends, and especially my many grandchildren.

“Why do I bother continuing with this fanzine, when every month it pitches me into a deadline panic? Well, mostly because as Wilkins Micawber said, something always seems to turn up, if only a loc from Robert Lichtman and an article from Nic Farey.” Well, that says it all.

And mindful of getting my response to you by the end of December in hopes of another issue, I’m sending this off now with not quite two hours to spare before Big Ben chimes in the new year over there.

Robert Lichtman can be found at robertlichtman@yahoo.com

TALES OF A LAS VEGAS TAXI DRIVER by Nic Farey

YEAR END FINANCIAL REPORT

Having driven every bugger away with that title (except for the money-mad accountancy maven Unc (J)), I'll first observe that Leigh Edmonds can (a) of course sit in the front seat, although we prefer to direct the punters into the back, and (b) in another cab entirely, the fuckin' stiff. Most Aussies I get as fares seem to know the form as far as tipping goes, and we usually have a bit of a larf about them being inevitably accused of being English, while I get pegged as Australian by the accent-deaf Merkans half a dozen times a day, at least (though not this month, since half a dozen rides is about all I might get on a shift in the slow days that are most of December). Edmonds (L) is obviously an atypical bloody skinflint who should be apprised of the fact that a lot of people over here rely on tips to make the job worthwhile. This is especially the case for restaurant employees whose income is mostly tips and fuck-all else. Las Vegas in particular is a town where the majority of employees are dependent on tips to some degree or other, and those of us who are tend to be good tippers ourselves, giving at least an expected minimum for adequate service, tending to the quite generous the more exceptional it gets. I had two *very* generous tippers the last month, neither of whom carried a boomerang. One was a quite mad tiny little old Hawaiian lady who also gave me costume jewelry for the wifey, a decorated pen, and \$100 for the \$23 fare while talking non-stop the whole ride. I swear she must have been breathing through her ears. The other was one of a couple of California-resident Pakistani blokes who I took to the bank (apparently to deposit \$10,000 cash), and coughed up \$100 for the \$42 fare. Both of these were timed perfectly to the arrival of demands for payment from various vital services.

This slow time of year is also when we get to spend a lot of time with smartphone games (a subject dear to award-winning Grah's spleen, I know), when we're not out of the cabs chain-smoking and bullshitting like champions. My friend Tracey, who drives for Star Cab, has it over on her toes to compare game notes as she sees me poking at the screen while we're waiting for anyone to wake up at the Linq and decide they'd rather be somewhere else. "Which one is that?", she asks. "Cookie Jam" I reply. "Ooh, I play that one too, which level are you on?" "1,327." Her eyes widen a bit, then she grins and opines "Ah, the life of a taxi driver!" 'Cookie Jam' is one of those 'Candy Crush'-type games where you have to maneuver three like somethings next to each other, whereupon they disappear with a satisfying "sput". I can't help thinking that someone should try this with James Bacon, Chris Garcia and Ian Sorensen on the offchance...

So, to re-quote Oscar Beuselinck: "What about the fucking ackers, then?" I have in my hand (all right, on the desk in front of me) a piece of paper, being the

paycheck stub collected today, along with a mildly derisory Xmas gift of a \$25 Walmart card. It sez here that my earnings YTD amount to commission of \$28,146.89 plus tips reported of \$6,547.03 for a total of \$34,693.92. The latter may warrant a bit of explanation. "Tips reported" is what's given on credit card payments, usually enough (or close) to satisfy the IRS assumption of 10 or 11% of meter. Remember that my earnings (commission) is half the meter, so the credit card tips represent about 9.5%. Some fares who know the form may pay by credit card but tip cash, since they know that's essentially untaxed and therefore better for the trouser. Deductions YTD, Federal tax withholding, health insurance & the like adds up to \$14,990.36, leaving me with a declared net of \$19,703.56, which I estimate to be about 15 bags of sand pre-Brexit, or about fifty quid now. To save wear and tear on the shuffling abacus beads, that's about \$380 a week clear (10/6d).

Ah, but you mentioned cash tips, says everyone (Unc, J) except Leigh Edmonds to whom it hasn't occurred. I'm having a sort of New Year's resolution moment to try to keep a ledger in 2017, something I didn't do this year, so I'm going to have to make some estimates. Let's say that the tips reported represent about half of the tips I actually got, which isn't unreasonable, so, rounding the numbers, we'll add \$6,500 to the net. Side money from the occasional strip club or rub 'n' tug drop (and machine gun ranges) also needs to be added in, and I'm guessing this at maybe \$1,000 for the year total, which might be a bit over, but not far off. That brings my take-home up to about \$27,200 for the year, \$523 a week or about \$2,100 a month (37 guineas).

This is of course utterly small potatoes to the idle millionaire readers of this award-winning literary journal, who are unlikely to even get out of bed for less than 2,426 euros (9 squillion rubles) and a hand-job from Ivanka Trump dressed as a temple maiden and carrying a pot of starters, and will, from a vaguely remembered sense of *noblesse oblige* be calling Harrods to see what they have in hampers for the less well-to-do. Believe it or not, however, that's actually enough to live on in Las Vegas, with its agreeably low cost of living, even with my smoking and drinking habits. A twelve of Newky goes for \$12.99 (972 rupees) at the local Smith's, and my smokes are \$10 a carton - that's not a misprint, they're *one dollar* (Merkan) a pack (3 1/2p), which is well good since I still get through two or more packs a day. <KOFF>, sez the reader.

All currency conversions are estimates based on utter lack of knowledge.

POST-TRUTH LICHTMAN DESIGNER CALLY FOUR NEAR GLOSSARY

If I told you what it all means, O Mighty Robt, what would you have to loc about?

Time to write the coda. I can tell you what fun I had at the end of the year, but frankly I didn't. Family illness meant we had to postpone Christmas so it was just another day for me, except one with absolutely nothing to watch on television. I could use it to summarize the year chronologically, but I may already have done that in the foreword, I can't remember. I can tell you how the most significant annoyance of my year was people somehow managing to blame it for the constant flow of celebrity deaths, and suggesting it was somehow unusual that celebrities die, but that would only make me sound more peevish than I normally sound. Besides if you follow me on Facebook, you will have heard it all before.

I could tell you what fun it was to be fitted with a Holter monitor to check my heart, since a stupid nurse thought she had detected an irregular pulse. Actually the experience wasn't too bad, apart from when it came to ripping off the electrodes at the end of it, taking half of my chest hair with them.

I could tell you how this issue was even more of a slog to produce than most, but I have to thank my loccers at least for providing some substance amongst all the waffle. Keep it up chaps. If there is going to be another issue you need to comment on this one by the end of January. I hope there is a next issue since it will complete three solid years of less-than-solid publishing and will mean I can issue a third Combined Volume.

Pat Charnock may have proof-read this, and if she has I am dutifully bound to mention it here. I am not a fat mono-maniac with a ginger comb-over and bigoted misogynist views. I am not even a number. I am Graham Charnock, graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk