



VIBRATOR 2.0.4

IN THIS MONTH'S BUMPER ISSUE: DEATH,
FLIES, CAMERAS, BIRDS AND FLOWERS!

Fuck me with a dildo as I was often wont to say to my old Mucker, Judith Clute, whilst we fornicated under Brighton Pier, whilst Emma Tennant looked on and took photographs, this looks like yet another splendid issue of VIBRATOR ("Thanks for the last issue, it will save me buying any more toilet paper for a while" – Andy Porter). This issue is dedicated to Gary Farber (He Who Farbs), the only person to unfriend me on Facebook (I must be doing something right). So sit back, turn on the TV and watch Flog It! And wonder why anyone in their right mind would pay £80 for a clockwork wind-up sea-lion. It's Spring outside. My horseradishes are thriving or running amok as Pat would say. So let us gird our loins in anticipation of the eventual arrival amongst us of Curt Phillips the 2014 TAFF Winner. This issue is scheduled to appear in May 2014. Whether this dedication to a monthly publishing schedule will be kept up let alone earn me the host of awards I richly deserve is largely down to YOUR response. So write now to graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk.

*****The PDF version of this fanzine is interactive. Hover your cursor over a highlighted area and you will be taken directly to the link*****

WE'RE GOING TO KICK OFF THIS ISSUE WITH A JOLLY ARTICLE REJECTED BY THAT INFAMOUS AWARD NON-WINNER PAT CHARNOCK WHO THOUGHT IT WAS TOO GRIM TO INCLUDE IN RAUCOUS CAUCUS

HOW TO DEAL WITH DEATH

Here's a warning. This will not be a happy sparky humorous article of the inconsequential kind immortalized by a certain other fan writer who writes so ably and interestingly about things like stamps and international reply coupons, and on that basis Pat will probably not publish it in *Raucous Caucus*. She has told me she wants jolly happy stuff. I tell her she should have married Roy Kettle. At least he knows about stamps. I would have been quite happy marrying Kathleen in an alternative universe. At least that way I may have ended up with a son who was a whiz at mathematics and knows more about set theory than John McEnroe, and a daughter who was as beautiful as Jennifer. But knowing my gene pool, I doubt if any of that would have happened. Knowing Roy's gene pool I'm rather surprised it happened the way it did anyway.

Most of us are members of families, whether extended or not, so much of our first experience of death, outside hamsters in cages, involves family members. You are unlucky if you lose siblings. It must be traumatic but I have no direct experience of it. So usually our first experience of death or related death is with grandparents or people on the more extended scale of our familial relationships. The Charnock family had a grandmother who occasionally came to visit. She smelled of senna pods and wore black. I wasn't particularly affected when I was told she had died. I was probably so young at the time that death didn't mean much to me.

Graham Greene said, "In childhood we all live in the bright light of immortality."

Soon, though, usually from about seven years old onwards, you can't avoid thinking about death. As long as real death isn't around you can think about it quite abstractly, to the point of painting your face in black mascara and listening to The Cure and imagining yourself being buried alive. You might even try reading Edgar Allan Poe stories

for fun and spiritual advancement. Occasionally if people bully you or you take life too seriously you will have a direct experience of death, usually by hanging yourself. Look, I told you this wasn't going to be jolly; some young folks just can't handle the mess hormones make of their bodies and brains.

Let's move on to the hardly more cheerful subject of more immediate concern, the death of parents, which is probably what most of us of a certain age have had to deal with. If this comes early in your life, you may not even notice it. Good for you. If it comes later it is a Life Experience which demands Dealing With. Talking about it is good. If you haven't done so before, please feel free to email me.

My father was the first person in my immediate family to die. He had been hospitalized with a condition no specialist could pin down. This was back in the 70s, when apparently doctors were less able to recognize mortal diseases than they are these days. I don't know whether that is down to training or technology or the simple fact that doctors weren't that good in those days. I have an eidetic memory of my mother coming to me (I was in the garden) and telling me my father had had an incident and she had called an ambulance for him. After that it was all downhill, but fairly slowly, at a tedious pace which frustrated those of us expecting a real diagnosis and prognosis. As a result of this I probably have a fatalistic distrust of doctors. Well, it would be fatalistic, wouldn't it.

My mother survived into her nineties, but had a series of small strokes along the way, which led to her being hospitalized occasionally. Pat and I would visit her on these occasions and speak encouragingly to her, but to be frank, I expected her to die any day real soon for decades, But she hung on, confounding us all. Her life was largely unfulfilled, and lived out in a scenario with increasingly narrow margins of interest, so as a consequence I've never been persuaded that living forever, or even for a long time, is necessarily a good thing. We sold her house and used the proceeds to find a home for her, and there she lived out her life, until the silent angel, pneumonia, took her away. It's amazing, isn't it, that all you have to do to die is sit back and let it happen. Well I used to think that until I saw Hitchcock's first feature where an old woman is bludgeoned and her assailant tries to cram her into a gas oven to gas her to death, but she struggles and refuses to die. A master narrative stroke by Hitchcock. Death can be quick but it can also sometimes be remarkably hard to die. Dignitas Clinics abroad are a testament to the lengths some people have to go to, to achieve it.

Eventually death catches up with all our close friends. And that is often more touching than deaths in the immediate family, because these are our peers and equals. I've spoken enough about the death of Rob Holdstock not to have to mention it again here. But I am still touched by the apparently senseless deaths of people like John Piggott, who died of an embolism, whilst relaxing after completing the Times Crossword. Anything can happen, anytime. Isn't that encouraging to know? But not if you are in the habit of doing crosswords. My old mate Rob Jackson reckons they are good for promoting mental health and brain longevity, but a simple blood clot can wipe out the work of a whole lifetime of crossword compilers.

Some deaths are even more poignant than the deaths of close friends. A small child was killed by a bus on her birthday when she ran in front of it at the end of our road. The proprietor of the local off-license who witnessed it described it as if someone had dropped a bag of mince. This example of the poetry of the common man haunted me for some time.

Brooding about death, of course, inevitably leads to a consideration of suicide. When I was young I confess I was somewhat obsessed with the idea of suicide as a creative act. My life must have been pretty empty of sensation back then; apart from the bliss of conventions one weekend a year I had little to look forward to, and after they had passed they always left me particularly depressed and unsatisfied with my lot. Cesare Pavese was just such a literate person who wrote at length about the futility of living, and thus became rather seminal to my researches, and almost convinced me that suicide was the only rational answer to the mystery of why our passage through life is so brief and transient and ultimately meaningless. While other people were reading Narnia novels, I was doggedly exploring the lives and feelings of people who had topped themselves. Existential suicide, of course, of the kind I was

interested in, is totally different from that born of despair and depression, such as that which caused Tom Disch to blow his brains out on July 4th because his partner had died and he was under threat of being turned out of the apartment which had been his home. I get depressed but I can't imagine being that depressed, but then I suppose the problem is most people who end up in that state can't imagine it beforehand either. Then suicide is merely an expedient answer to an expedient problem.

So what have we learnt about death, especially about suicide. Possibly more people would kill themselves if more guns were available, but then plastic bags and tall buildings and big fast lorries are readily available and their availability doesn't seem to affect suicide figures. Life and its vicissitudes is what affects suicides figures, and there is no answer to that, nor should we look for one.

It seems to me that Death is best considered when we can joke about it. Ingmar Bergman didn't tell particularly good jokes about Death The Reaper, but Bill and Ted managed a much better job. So laugh as you choke on that pickle and nobody in the restaurant knows the Heimlich manoeuvre.

GOT A NEW CAMERA, JOHN?

Well as a matter of fact I have. Thanks for asking. For a long time now I have been frustrated by the quality of the happysnaps I take with the range of digital cameras in our possession. Sometimes it's my mistake for leaving it on a macro setting while trying to take a landscape, sometimes it's camera shake due to delirium tremens or my general nervous debility. Pat has a Pentax SLR with a zoom lens which she has owned since her early days as a photography student, and back in the days of celluloid film I got a great deal of pleasure from using it, and being able to frame pictures in the viewfinder as they would actually appear. I did a lot of work in black and white at rather grainy high ISO settings. I was put off buying a state of the art modern DSLR camera by the prices, but Jim Linwood recommended a Nikon D40, a camera which first came into production in 2006 and I was encouraged to see second-hand examples on sale online for not much more than £160, a price which made them an attractive prospect compared with top of the range modern models. I'm not disappointed with it. The AUTO mode makes it easy for even a dolt like me to take crisp, clear blur-free images. If there is a downside, it is its bulk, which makes candid camera shots, to which I am particularly partial, rather out of the question. You do sort of tend to announce that you are photographing someone or something when you pick it up and point it. Anyway, next time you meet me, don't be surprised if I poke my massive thing in your face and ask you to smile.

YOU KNOW THAT MARK PLUMMER BLOKE, YOU KNOW THE ONE THAT WINS AWARDS FOR HIS FAN WRITING. I DON'T KNOW WHY I SHOULD ASSIST IN HIS QUEST FOR WORLD DOMINATION IN THIS FIELD, BUT HE SENT ME A LOC, AND, YES, UNCLE JOHNNY, VIBRATOR DOES PRINT LOCS. SO HERE IT IS.

There was this fly in the house yesterday.

I blame Claire. She'd been mentioning for a while that the lawn needed cutting -- how the lawn had communicated its wishes on the point I don't know -- so yesterday morning I dragged the lawnmower out of its winter hibernation, in the process dislodging about 30 snails which had seemingly made it their home and then died, and set about destroying the thriving ecosystem that is our back garden. You're familiar with the idea of desire paths, those tracks that are eroded by people walking where they want to walk rather than along the defined footpaths and pavements? Our squirrels had worn out their own desire path across our back garden.

I am pleased to report that the lawn now looks at least a little bit like a lawn. I hope it's happy.

Getting to that state, though, involved an electrical cable trailing out of the back door for about an hour or so, which in turn meant leaving the back door open. We have a fly curtain -- as an aside, and while it wouldn't have helped in this case, I often wonder why we don't have those nifty screen doors favoured by our North American and Australasian cousins? -- but that's not entirely foolproof, or indeed flyproof. And so this fly got into the living room and started buzzing around the house. Bloody great thing, it was.

Fortunately I know what to do when this happens, thanks to The Guardian newspaper, a reliable source for everything you want to know about everything, especially if it concerns Game of Thrones. On this occasion I am delighted to acknowledge Judy Rumbold's 'Mud Slinging' column of 22 May 2004 -- and hey, isn't that spooky, only two days off exactly ten years ago. Now, true, the article didn't mention Game of Thrones at all, but it did explain the best way to kill flies. It involves Topsy & Tim books apparently. However at the time my eye was drawn to an accompanying Mick Brownfield cartoon, a representation of a squashed blue bottle splattered by the corner of a magazine with a distinctly recognisable typeface, and a by-line for Edmond Hamilton. Diligent research, by which I mean I looked at an online archive, probably while I was supposed to be engaged on crucial government business, established that it was the November 1941 issue of Weird Tales.

Now I'm sure that Curt Phillips would be horrified at the thought of me flailing around the house with a copy of the November 1941 issue of Weird Tales as an engine of fly extermination, but don't worry, Curt, I don't actually have a copy of that particular magazine. Or indeed any copies of Weird Tales. Well, apart from some of the later ones from the tail end of the last century which I'm sure hardly count at all. And those are upstairs. So my Guardian-derived knowledge was as nothing, and I had to use what I had to hand, and that was a copy of Vibrator.

I am pleased to report that there is no longer a fly flying around in our house.

You, however, might not be so pleased. You might regard this as a gross misuse of your fanzine. You might think that having spotted the intruder I should have immediately gone down to the nearest second-hand magazine shop to purchase a November 1941 issue of Weird Tales before embarking on my campaign of fly slaughter, and Curt Phillips be damned. And it is true that this extra-curricula activity means that your Vibrator now bears an indelible stain of splattered fly. It's on the back page, over that bit of text where you say, 'If you like this fanzine and want to receive another issue, please let me know. Same goes if you don't like it.' Not that it's a comment on that.

But I think this is going to work well for you, long term. See, Vibrator will be duly read by all the residents of 59 Shirley Road, and then it will be filed in our fanzine collection. Perhaps some years hence, as Claire and I sit around the fire with the squirrels on a winters evening, we'll take it out and one of us will say to the other, hey, remember that Graham Charnock fellow, and the other will think for a moment and say, er, no.

More time will pass. Civilisations will rise and fall but our fanzine collection will pass down to the ages. In some kind of far, far future -- you know, Eloi and Morlocks far future -- somebody will find that copy of Vibrator and will wonder about the indelible stain. Using their far, far future technology they will extract the fly DNA and reconstruct the fly so it can become the centrepiece of a major island-based theme park. But things will go horribly wrong and the fly will fly about all over the island, bumping into curtains and terrorising far, far future children, until the hero swats it with a copy of the November 1941 issue of Weird Tales.

Inevitably they will make a movie out of this thrilling story -- in which the hero is played by a far, far future man who looks a bit like Curt Phillips -- and when they do you'll get a credit: 'A palimpsest of a stain on Graham Charnock's Vibrator', it'll say

No, don't thank me. It's the least I can do.

Mark Plummer is at mark.fishlifter@googlemail.com

I felt compelled to answer:

Thanks Mark. If I was a professional magazine editor I would happily pay for material of this quality. As it is you will have to settle for me buying you a drink sometime. There was a fly in our front room yesterday. I too tried swatting it with a copy of Vibrator, or maybe it was a real vibrator Pat had left lying around, then a copy of the Haringey Advertiser which was not even sticky, so Pat obviously hadn't touched it. It laughed at me, the fly, not the Haringey Advertiser, that would have been bizarre. Eventually I went away, had a few drinks, and when I returned the fly had disappeared. It's amazing how often that works.

But as always Mark felt he had to get the last word, if only to prove how good he was at googling pulp magazines about flies:

Perhaps it's just that your Haringey flies lead more active social lives, flitting from one house to the next, a bit like a fly version of a pub crawl only without any actual pubs. And flying rather than crawling. And being a fly.

There probably wasn't a great deal else for a fly to do on a Monday in Croydon. There are not even any secondhand magazine shops where a fly might browse for a copy of the November 1941 issue of Weird Tales or, better G-8 and His Battle Aces #68: Three Fly With Satan, which sounds like it might have rather more in to appeal to a fly.

It probably welcomed being flattened with a Vibrator, just for the novelty.

REMEMBER ALISON SCOTT, FAMOUS HUGO AWARD WINNER AND ONE TIME-FANZINE PRODUCER? OH WELL, TAKE MY WORD FOR IT. SHE WANTS US ALL TO KNOW SHE'S STILL ALIVE AND THAT UNLIKE PEOPLE IN CROYDON AND HARINGEY SHE DOESN'T HAVE A FLY PROBLEM IN HER HOUSE.

Such a delight to get a Vibrator in the post. Much better than the normal run of mobile phone sales pitches.

At any rate, I thought I would let you know that I have an excellent short book, "How to Find Lost Objects", in which one Professor Solomon outlines a 12-point-plan for tracking down the missing things. I've found it works very well in providing a structured plan for search.

Unfortunately, I'm not entirely sure where I put it. It's definitely in the house somewhere.

Cheers

Alison can be found at alison@kittywampus.com

NED BROOKS HAS ALSO LOST SOMETHING, FORTUNATELY NOT HIS MIND:

Thanks Graham! You are the Dave Barry of zinedom.... It annoys me so much to lose anything that I seldom do it - I printed a one-page reminder sheet the other day and it vanished and I had to print it again. And one of the 216 magnetic balls in a set vanished the other night - some connection between magnetism and the universe next door, perhaps. But the only important thing I have lost in years is a pocket-knife. Of course there are books that I imagine I have a copy of but can't find - out of umpteen thousand I suppose that's inevitable.

Ned Brooks can be found at nedbrooks@sprynet.com

PAT CHARNOCK OBJECTED TO THE TONE AND TENOR OF MY CRITICISM OF HER GARDEN:

I was disappointed by your “review” of the garden.

What you didn't mention was that the gardeners who enter their gardens into the Open Gardens scheme are only open to the public for one day. A day of their choice. And they pick that day because their garden will be at its best on that day. And you didn't mention the wallflowers and osteospermums in the garden which were looking quite nice at the time. Of course, you couldn't have mentioned the Jackman's Blue geraniums, because they weren't yet in flower Or the purple geranium with the black centre.

(Editor: Pat also included lots of nice photographs with her post, but I can't honestly afford the ink for pretty pictures of flowers, so they are only included in the PDF edition at these links:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/rueh5584ozdo5pc/pats%20garden1.JPG>

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/en0ai97l7t6hma5/pats%20garden2.JPG>

As for the cats' graveyard, if you didn't know they were there, you wouldn't know they were there. It's not as if there were bones sticking out of the ground! The only marker is a buddleia, which will be in flower in a month or two. And if you'll give me some help, and a lift to the dump, I could clear some of those old bits of concrete.

Pat Charnock can be found at patcharn@blueyonder.co.uk

JIM LINWOOD ALSO SENT ME A PHOTO OF HIS GARDEN. NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL A GARDEN. I ONLY WISH YOU COULD SEE IT.

Many thanks for *Vibrator* 2.0.3 which arrived unaccompanied by *Raucous Caucus*. It came at an opportune moment as I was waiting for treatment for a bleeding gum at West Middlesex Hospital's A&E Unit. Marion thought I should have something to read during the long wait, went home and returned with two just delivered items - the latest *LonCon 3 Progress Report* and an envelope containing *Vibrator*. Marion decided that she would read *Vibrator* leaving me to read Malcolm Edwards' publishing reminisces in the *Progress Report*. We noticed that doctors, nurses and patients were giving Marion funny looks and realised it was the title and illo that had given rise to some speculation. Speaking of gardens here's what ours looks like at the moment:

(Picture available here – interactive PDF edition only -
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/qd2qic0tlx4r7w7/jims%20garden.JPG>)

In the foreground red campion, a curry plant and lemon balm. Then potatoes, fennel, lettuce, rocket and comfrey in the background. Admission free.

Jim Linwood can be found at jlinwood@aol.com

MIKE MEARA TOOK TIME OUT FROM COMPILING THE LATEST ISSUE OF HIS AWARD WITTING FANZINE A MEARA FOR OBSERVERS (PUN, GEDDIT) TO SEND ME A LETTER, SO WHY NOT PRINT IT.

I have in front of me three issues of your recharged fanzine, and it has occurred to me that if I want that pile to grow any bigger, I ought perhaps to say something, however unargumentative.

Something that did grow bigger was the vibrator itself. On 2.0.1 it is short and stubby, but on 2.0.2 it is somewhat longer, its increased ability to satisfy reflected in the content of the issue itself. (A vibrator that could sense one's, shall I say, mood and change size or even shape accordingly would indeed be a wonderful thing, well worth popping into your local Anne Summers for.) And then on 2.0.3 it is much smaller again, but a different model. Still an old design, though, I'd guess. Are you planning to illustrate the history of this well-loved device in your colophons? Some of the ones you can get today appear to be designed for aliens. And why not? And why did John Hall describe it as obsolete? So many questions, so few answers.

Some of your loccers took issue with your piece about arguments, but I thought you made some good points that I agreed with, or at least, which resonated uncomfortably in my lower regions. You and I have had our disagreements in the past, and I didn't enjoy those, and largely as a result of that I have resolved to try hard not to argue with anyone ever again, if I can help it. These days I refine my views about stuff by reading what people write, or listening to what they say, and seeing if I can incorporate any of it into my own worldview. No written or verbal contact with the other party need be involved. If I agree with something somebody writes, I'm happy to say so, and thereby add to the sum total of human happiness; otherwise, I try to keep schtum. I know my opinions are often not very well-formed, or indeed well-informed, and I have now come to recognise how feeble and ineffective they may be as a counter to others' doubtless superior ones.

I do still shout at people over the telephone, though. But that's a different thing.

I see you've adopted the Dr Robert "Hoover-It-Up" Jackson Method for the generation of fanzine material: recycle it from an elist – with permission, of course. Rich's story has a happy ending: he did indeed get the Dr Didg I recommended to him. I gave him a copy of the CD at Corflu. I'd bought it twice by mistake, so it was no big deal. At least, I hope it was a happy ending. Maybe he hated it. He hasn't said.

I hope this refurbished Vibrator has long-life batteries, and that you'll keep on sending it. You can do that via pdf/email if you prefer; a fanzine like this works better on paper, but I can print it out myself, no trouble.

AND HERE'S GOOD OLD JERRY KAUFMAN, ALL FRESH AND WAXED UP FROM HIS LAST BOUT OF ARM WRESTLING

I wish we could use a more original moniker for the whole Ross Fiasco than Rossgate, or even Rossfail. The actual series of announcements, denouncements, and responses took place largely while I was asleep or at work. Unlike Robert, I am going to the Worldcon, and know a little about both Farah M and Seanan M. (I really like Farah's critical study of fantasy.) It's Ross about whom I knew nothing. And to this day, he has not been replaced - I wonder if the Worldcon committee would accept if I volunteer? I'd keep the ceremony pretty short, but might make a joke or two about SMOF as noun and verb.

Rich had too much about parking skill and not enough about Amoeba Records, don't you think? But I am glad he still has it. If you'll be in London this year or Spokane next year, Rich, can we have a workshop?

As for the records he picked up, I have one on my Sony Walkman: Lake Street Dive. A local music critic made much of them when they performed here recently, so I downloaded the album. At first listen, they are a bit too jazz-pop for me, but I'll listen to them some more and see if they grow on me. I've heard of Thee Oh Sees (I do think the first word is T-h-e-e) and the Black Lips. Having the word "black" in your band name is always promising - The Black Keys are one of my favorites currently (although Jack White thinks they stole their sound from the White Stripes, which may be ironic.)

Rich mentions trying to find Deep Fix records, so I went to my music subscription service, and found there's a newer group named that, with albums in 2008 and 2013. I also found a collection of musics that were all Hawkwind side projects, so there's one Deep Fix song, "Kings of Speed" - a note says "Previously Unreleased."

I've talked to Eileen a time or two about that Smithsonian article - she says it was a lot of work, not only interviewing a large number of people, but also cutting their quotes down to fit the word count she had, and working with the

Smithsonian editor to keep the piece from saying the opposite to the points she wanted to make. (I can say no more - I've probably said too much already.)

(EDITOR: New Readers Start here. Deep Fix was a Mike Moorocck studio project and never existed as a live performing group as such. Steve Gilmore and I contributed in terms of songs and providing backing, and signed the contracts with Doug Smith, Hawkwind's manager. I suspect the 2008 and 2013 references you found are down to re-issues of the original material or compilations mainly with Mike's stuff. It remains my only brief flirtation with mainstream pop, but it's always nice to have a piece of vinyl with your name in the credits.)

TARAL WAYNE BRIEFLY FOUND TIME AWAY FROM THINKING ABOUT SLASHING HIS WRISTS TO WRITE TO ME:

Actually, I have found from experience that being able to put myself in someone else's shoes and see an argument from his perspective tends to weaken my ability to present my own case. I end up shooting myself in the foot with cavits such as, "of course, there are exceptions," or "only in general." The debater who sticks to a black and white, either-or, yes or no course will almost always come across as having the stronger position. It pays to be stubborn and one-sided.

Two issues of the modern incarnation of Vibrater, eh? And British as well? You're a shoe-in for next year's FAAn award for best personalzine. It doesn't hurt your chances that you attend Corflu too. But you'll have a race on your hands if you're to beat *A Meara For Observers*.

To help you along your way, I've taken the liberty of creating some new logos for your next few issues. Of course, I simply followed well-established precedent.

(EDITOR: Thanks for the logos, Taral. I once got into trouble with some tender-hearted people for sending pornographic material through the post, so I don't think I will be using them.)

ROBERT LICHTMAN CAN ALWAYS BE RELIED UPON TO SAY SOMETHING:

Graduation ceremony yesterday was what you'd expect -- long periods of tedium briefly punctuated by those magic moments when my son was onstage. There was a surprise additional one: he was honored as the outstanding graduate in his field (nutrition) and got to make a short speech. In which he acquitted himself well -- no cliches, funny, and heartfelt. (There were two others who were outstanding grads in related field and whose speeches were near-noNstop cliché.) Afterwards, some good family visiting with His wife's parents, their friend (older woman), even my ex-wife. Photo attached for your delectation.

(EDITOR: Photo deleted. I don't publish photos)

WHO'S LEFT, JOHN PURCELL, THAT'S WHO:

Okay, Graham. You sent me your zine, so it has now been read. I suppose I should send a loc to you now, right? Fat chance.

Instead, you're going to get a bit of blather about the back yard fence getting repaired and the tree branches I cut off out front; there were four large branches needing to be immediately lopped off, then to even the tree's appearance - aesthetics, you know - I had to remove a half dozen other branches of assorted sizes. We even have a bit of garden out back, but that's mostly Valerie's responsibility. Oh, I'll help out with the heavy lifting, being the man of the house, and with any kind of luck we'll have ourselves tomatoes, squash, peppers, green onion, and strawberries. Some little critter has been getting into the berries already, so this weekend we are installing finer mesh chicken wire. Maybe that will keep the bugger out. We suspect rabbits or some kind of mole.

I hope writing this will be enough to satisfy your cravings for attention. See, I know how these things work.

Oh, and thank you for the zine. I just won't tell the wife you sent me a vibrator in the mail. She might get the wrong idea.

THAT'S ENOUGH OF ALL THESE LOCS, BACK TO A PIECE OF EDITORIAL

WHY I DON'T WRITE STUFF

I have to write something. Believe me (or not) I really do get up with this mantra going through my head virtually every morning. On other mornings it is sometime 'I must be sick, where's the bucket...' Then I remember I have a reputation as a writer to uphold. Not much of a reputation and as not much of a writer, but nevertheless... I must write something.

I once confessed to my doctor that I was an alcoholic because it helped me write and I always 'had to write something'. She looked at me as if I was strange, which I was. I was depressed at the time and also had to masturbate compulsively, because that was part of the madness, and unfortunately one I think she connoted with writing. Maybe she was right. There's a lot to be said for the correlation between masturbation and writing, especially when you've finished what you feel is a good piece and scream out 'I've come!' much to the annoyance of the neighbours. I gave her a copy of my story 'Harringay' in David Garnett's *New Worlds* and the next time she met me she looked at me even more strangely, like I was some geek who imagined strange stuff in his head. And masturbated.

Now, of course, there is a bigger imperative to write than merely to amass a vast fortune (like Chris Priest and Garry Kilworth), but mostly for peer acclaim in the form of awards, albeit very small awards dispensed in a very small pool of involvement. I would quote Pete Weston's views on this here, but frankly the thought of him in ill-fitting plimsolls depresses me

Frankly I have given up on this competitive stuff. No matter how much brilliant stuff I write for that seminal literary journal *CHUNGA* people (mostly Andy Hooper, which is strange because he is one of the editors) persist in ignoring me. Okay, once Marty Cantor proposed me for past fwa president at Corflu in Sunnyvale but he was soon shouted down and the anodyne Spike, who can't even afford a last name and was on the organising committee, was elected in my place. Nowadays it seems Brits are elected every year without actually doing anything or displaying any talent. Even Roy Kettle. Bitter? Not me.

Having said that most of my impetus for writing comes from being drunk, I have to admit the flaw in my own argument. When I'm drunk I frequently just feel tired. I think of lots of stuff I could write, including long novels with vast starships (but also heart-searching poems dealing with death and mortality) but then I reach for another drink and turn on *Bones*. Concentrating on anything except where the next drink is coming from is a problem for the likes of us.

Also shopping gets in the way of writing stuff. Every Tuesday Pat and I go down to the local supermarket for our regular weekly shop. While I'm wandering around looking at tofu and Thai Red Curry Paste, I'm sometimes struck by the fact that I could be writing, or doing some other creative endeavour. Then I remember the last time I tried to be creative in Sainsburys the security staff insisted I turn off my camera and delete everything. The penalty for not doing this was apparently to be taken to a back room where a Mr Big (or knowing Sainsburys, a Mrs Big) would be waiting for me stroking his/her pussy. At that point I knew I was being far too creative and stopped thinking and went directly with Pat to the checkout. That normally stops all thinking processes. Of course I didn't delete any of my shots and still have lots of under the skirt material courtesy of the mirrors on my toe-caps,

Once upon a time I didn't use to write much. I know, hard to believe isn't it? As a professional (huh) writer I've always waited for what I like to call 'the call'. Sometimes it was actually a real phone call from Rob Holdstock or Dave Garnett, looking for any cast-offs I had on the stocks. Of course I always denied any aspect of cast-offs and set down to writing something new and startlingly original. I'm sure you've read them all. But most often the call was from within my soul, from a small blanched skeleton of a man sitting on a huge white boulder of bleached rock dredged

up from a river, saying, something like, here's an idea, 'Squirrels in Space'. Usually I ignored him, but sometimes he came up with something good, like what happens when atomic coincidence fails to co-incide (*Fulwood's Web*).

I have no pen and I must write!

Of course having a computer with a word processor certainly helps with racking up the words. I tried to write my first novel on a typewriter, then on two typewriters, one of them shared with Graham Hall. You probably don't remember this experience but having typed 100 pages of manuscript and then discovering a typo on page 37 was a distinct let-down. Pretty soon I got a Canon typewriter which allowed me not only to justify type but to save bits of it to memory. Needless to say that didn't help me actually write anything significant. I was pissed off at having spent so much on an electronic typewriter when we were all on the cusp of a computer revolution.

I have something to say here about what to do when you have actually happened to write something. Don't send it to an agent. Chris Priest had lots of enthusiasm for the novels I sent him, but then the enthusiasm waned when I pasted in a segment predicting his own death. And don't bother sending it to anyone who publishes sf. They will find an excuse for not reading it by insisting you send it in actual manuscript form (Gorden Van Gelder) and if they don't find an excuse they will then ignore it for two or three months. I don't know any other supposedly professional organization that takes this long to make a decision on something they are offered with the intention of making them money. You wouldn't take your car to a garage and ask them if they could provide an estimate, maybe in three or four months time. I can see publishers may have a lot of stuff to wade through, but maybe they should consider employing people at a decent minimum wage to do the job. When I was working for New Worlds we knew within seconds which stuff was going in the bin (usually the stuff written on toilet paper). I can't believe things have changed that much.

I still wake up screaming 'I must write stuff'. In fact I just did, and it's the middle of the afternoon. Well, I have three blog sites going where I am developing novels or at least long narrative streams. I'm not going to tell you about any of them. Wait 'til I die and read my obituary, why don't you. It will probably be by Chris Priest.

WILLIAM BREIDING HAD TROUBLE PLUGGING IN HIS VIBRATOR AT THE LIBRARY, SO TOOK IT HOME INSTEAD WHERE IT WORKED FLAWLESSLY.

That's a very slick issue of *Vibrator* (2.0.3; Mr. Lichtman is very observant!). I prefer, however, the old school plastic vibrator of the former ishes to this rubbery knobbed thing you've passed to me digitally.

Robert Lichtman's loc displayed the structure and tone of a Harry Warner letter. Robert's assimilation is so complete that I understand Nic Farey has convinced Andy Hooper and Mike Meara to change the name of the FAAn Awards' best loc hack to the "Robert Lichtman Award For Best Two Pager." If only I could do it like that.

I could go on about my first ~~love~~ mimeo, a Speed-O-Print hand crank, purchased used from a church in 1974, but I won't. I never liked marijuana and stopped smoking it by age 15. I was last stoned in 1985 when my roommates pranked me by adding hash to the melted butter they poured over the broccoli without telling me. I was stoned out of my mind for hours. I was not amused. This is a monkey of a different sort.

John Nielsen Hall gets the bit about arguing just right.

When I visit San Francisco I genuflect in front of Amoeba Records then spend somewhere between eight to sixteen hours (depending on how obsessive I'm feeling) rifling the bins and usually end up taking somewhere between 50-100 CDs back with me to West Virginia. Most of these are from the cheap-o bins, where I've discovered a few of my favorite bands. I'm usually walking so have no need to salivate over open curb space like your old buddy, Rich Coad, who does an admirable job describing parallel parking as an action movie.

About that lost stuff. I think you might have a problem there, Graham.

In my dotage I've taken up pen to toy with fiction. When I read that you've been fiddling about with same I was tempted to send you one of mine, but thought better of it.

It was sweet of you to quote from my belated locs. However, that was not me that described DeVotchKa, nor made all those typos. I don't know where "Danver, Colorado" might be. Keep vibrating.

LLOYD PENNEY HAS BEEN SAVING UP HIS VIBRATORS TO MAKE ONE CONSOLIDATED COMMENT. THAT'S NO WAY TO WIN A FAAN AWARD, LLOYD.

Many thanks for three Vibrators in the mail. I figured you'd fax 'em, but here they are on my desktop. What good are they if they don't buzz? I'll open them up, and see if they make the leetle grey cells buzz.

2.0.1...Who else is getting on your tits lately? Off to make friends, Dale Carnegie style. I am so glad fanzines don't come with Like buttons; it would come down to being all we'd get. (Just checked...there are no 'thumbs up' symbols I can insert here.)

When it comes to the late Mr. Glicksohn, we may be visiting with his widow Susan Manchester soon. She is a local artist, and is part of a drop-in art exhibit at her home. I gather that if we were to visit Mike's old pace on Windermere Ave., we might not recognize it.

I hate this getting old crap. Who knows what unpleasant surprise the doctor is going to unload on you when you get there? High blood pressure, cholesterol, cancer, diabetes, tumours in embarrassing places...living is often dangerous to your health. When I first got tested for blood pressure, it was 200/150 or so, and my doctor said I was close to a stroke. I take the pretty pink pills now, and all is well. Diet's had to improve, but with what I eat, it couldn't get any worse.

(The local educational TV channel shows a lot of British telly. I have seen the entire Farm series, we have books from Ruth Goodman and Alex Langlands, and I think I even understand all of In The Night Garden. A drug trip for the kids.)

2.0.2...FAAn Awards. Well, all of a sudden, people seem to be not only fed up with the Hugos, but now fed up with the FAAns, too. No one's happy, and it looks like some kind step out of fanzine fandom altogether. Originally, Yvonne and I had our Loncon memberships and a reservation at the Aloft, but we just haven't been able to save enough to go. The memberships are sold, and the hotel is cancelled.

I will not make remarks about the huge fence along the American Mexican border, except that some politicians would like to see one along the American-Canadian border. I think it's a good thing. With that in mind, you may be assured that Murray Moore is indeed ignoring you. If he keeps on practising medicine, he may eventually get it right.

The next Corflu is in your neck of the international woods, and only a working transporter unit will get us there, I'm afraid. Gratuitous Star Trek reference. You're welcome.

2.0.3...Collecting kittens might be an entertaining venture, but once you've got a critical mass of them, internets tend to appear, which acts as an effective time-suck.

Perhaps this is the best time to ask you if you could ask Pat to send me a Raucous Caucus or two. I've had people ask me what I thought of it, and when I said they'd never seen it, they cast their eyes downwards, and walked away. I am not Cool, I suppose. Just enough to get on the second page of this Word document. Ta for sending them to me, or having them available on eFanzines, I can't remember. Hope there's another one to come.

TWO BRAINS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Swifts migrate for the winter and only return to Britain when the climate becomes kinder. Recently I've started to see them, soaring some way up in the atmosphere above my back garden. Interesting birds, swifts. They spend most of their lives on the wing and can rise to 10,000 feet or more, living off insects carried up in thermals. They only come to earth and nest to breed and raise their chicks. Who can blame them? I would imagine that juggling eggs would be somewhat difficult to do in flight.

It has been noted that swifts can sleep on the wing because they can shut down one half of their brain to sleep, and can use the other half to regulate their flight. The bit about them shutting down one half of their brain to sleep is common to all birds (even the pigeons you see on the ledges of buildings are doing it) and perhaps hints at the reptilian basis of bird evolution. Reptiles and indeed fish, are cold blooded and are also generally slow moving and live in environments where they are easy prey for predators. Sleep seems to be a necessity for any living organism, but sleeping leaves many species at risk from predators. A split brain ensures that primitive creatures can sleep but remain alert on some level to threat, so in an evolutionary sense it would seem to be a Good Thing for such creatures.

Man of course also has a split brain, and it has been reasoned by some people that human consciousness itself only became consolidated in the whole brain quite recently in evolutionary terms when the body developed neural links that were more beneficial to survival than having a split brain and the bicameral brain broke down. Before that the two hemispheres were quite capable of operating autonomously on allotted tasks.

The main proponent of this theory is Professor Julian Jaynes, whose seminal book *THE ORIGINS OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE BREAKDOWN OF THE BI-CAMERAL MIND* has always been a favourite of mine and not as daunting as its title suggests. Jaynes suggests the split in the human brain might have been responsible for many religious and supernatural beliefs, because the perceptions of one half were received by the other in a way it found magical and inexplicable, it literally heard voices which it could not attribute to any external source. His theories incorporate such things as ancient oracles, and the origins of drama and storytelling. Today many of us articulate conversations *in our heads*. Imagine what might happen if the conversations produced in one half of our brain had to be shifted to the other without the other having any knowledge of the context of the conversation. We might indeed think they were external voices giving us advice and guidance. There is speculation that incomplete or unformed neural networks are the mechanism behind some mental illnesses, most obviously of the schizophrenic nature.

In case you imagine swifts find sleeping and living mostly on the wing to be tiring, you are thinking about it as a human not a swift. How do you imagine albatrosses manage to fly thousands of miles at a time across vast oceans? It is because they have 24/24 consciousness split across two brains. If humans still had split brains, a man could walk around the world without ever stopping to sleep as long as he had access to sustenance. We made the trade in for a consolidated consciousness which means we have to close down awareness completely and sleep for a certain time every day. Possibly that only happened when we were in a position to protect ourselves from predators in shelters and caves and suchlike and thus feel *safe* to shut down, and so didn't need to stay awake on every level. Think of that as you curl up between your duvet tonight. No sleep 'til Brooklyn.

NOW THAT NICE ROBERT LICHTMAN DECIDES TO TURN UP, ALMOST TOO LATE FOR THE PARTY

It's hard to get started on a LoC for *Vibrator* 2.0.3 when the first two pages are mine responding to the previous issue. From there I jumped right over "On This Day in History," paused at Unc's letter long enough to agree with him on the differences between arguing and debating, and landed feet first on "Gardening Notes."

I have some of my own. Every year around this time we have to get into “compliance” with the stringent fire prevention and safety rules promulgated by the Oakland Fire Department in the wake of the disastrous October 1991 fire that wiped out about 3,000 houses and killed a couple dozen people. They are *serious* about this, sending around their own personnel house by house to inspect. Most years this inspection takes place in late June or July, by which time—thanks to a person we hire who does the work—we’re in full compliance.

But this year, totally unexpectedly, they came early—annoyingly and coincidentally, the day *before* our person was scheduled to come with long-handled tree branch trimmer and gas-powered weed whacker. And so, instead of the usual official pat on the back for our good work in properly maintaining a “defensible” area around our house, we were hit with a full-blown notice of non-compliance. We have thirty (or more) days before they come back for a reinspection, but now everything is in order.

It took our person a full day and part of another to do the work. As you’ll recall from your visits, our yard is the opposite of level, so it’s a hard job that’s slowed further by dealing with the terrain. In some years past I’ve done some portions of this, but with advancing age it’s become hard on me to do all the bending involved in pulling the grassy weeds that grow in our ground cover out by the roots and hard on my legs to move around on the hill. After all, we can’t all be Ted White.

A more pleasant part of our local gardening notes is the annual replenishment of the potted plants on our front entryway and the hanging planters on our deck. Although there are perennials in both locations, we get different flowering annuals to fill in the empty pots and open spaces in the planters. We’ve done this already on the deck, and sometime this week we’ll go back to the nursery to get three or four pleasing plants for the front. It’s always enjoyable to go there with some specifics in mind, such as color of flowers, height and width to which the plant will grow, etc., and see what’s available that fits these specification.

And after that, it’s just weeding and watering. We hope there will be enough water!

Rich Coad’s piece on his visit to Amoeba Records was fun to read. I know well the feeling he had when searching for an elusive parking space, spotting one, and worrying that it would be taken by another car before he was able to maneuver around to get to it. As for his music choices, I’ve never heard of any of them. Were they good ones, Graham?

I hope that the happy ending of the “Cat Story” came to pass!

On “Lost Stuff”: I’ve never managed to lose a wallet but one time recently I misplaced it in my car. To explain, for many years I’ve always carried my wallet in the left rear pocket of my pants. But a year or so ago I realized that I was beginning to get hip and lower back pains because of this. I began keeping it in a drawer at home, and when we went out I put it in the compartment near the bottom of the driver’s side door. But after a time I found it was awkward retrieving it from there, so I started putting it various other places instead—such as in the glovebox, on a flat part of the console between the front seats, and sometimes in the compartment that’s part of the console. I didn’t remember where specifically on the occasion of misplacing it, and thinking it might have been on the console and fallen off I started feeling under the seats—at first slowly but then increasingly panicky. I was just about to freak out completely when, scanning around one last time, I found it. I’d absentmindedly put it in that driver’s door compartment. Great relief!

This seems to be it. I read the rest of the issue, including the other LoCs, with varying degrees of enjoyment (and no displeasure), but don’t seem to have anything to say about them. I may have to reread *Lake*, though, since I don’t recall your exploring “the idea of science fiction writers influencing technology” in it.

(EDITOR: The Cat story did indeed have a happy outcome. Near neighbours two doors up come out of their house one morning to see the notice Pat had pasted up on a telegraph pole virtually outside their house. They had been looking for a kitten and saw this as an omen, so were glad to take it off our hands when no real owner stepped forward.

That must be a big fat wallet if it was giving you hip and lower back pains. Of course I would expect nothing other of you than to have a big wallet wallet... I famously once lost my wallet in a Walmart in Las Vegas. I went back in and found it had been handed in and was able to reclaim it. I say famously because I performed an impromptu song about it later at Corflu Silver, called Lost My Wallet in a Walmart, which managed to bore and bemuse a small crowd of onlookers.

Shoot ,Robert, the whole idea about *Lake* was that a big technology corporation hires a group of people, including the main protagonist, who is a science fiction writer, to come up with ideas for them. Yes, I suggest you go back and re-read it. Anybody who doesn't know what Robert and I are talking about are directed here:

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/graham-charnock/lake/paperback/product-20559900.html>

Robert's mention of his gardening activities brings us neatly to an extension of my own Gardening Notes:

NO FLIES ON ME

I bought a Venus Fly Trap on eBay, with a view to establishing it in a terrarium. It's a cute little plant, not half as frightening as the one in Little Shop of Horrors, and I can't wait to let it loose on my flies ('I wouldn't touch a straight line like that for a free weekend in Pismo Beach' – John Brosnan). Has anybody any experience with these plants or with terrariums as a whole? I think I like the idea of a terrarium because it is small-scale low-maintenance gardening which doesn't involve you in painful kneeling, hacking and digging and pruning and all the other sado-masochistic activities that real gardeners get up to.

While I was in Sainsburys looking for suitable glassware to house it I saw what I took to be some miniature cacti and bought a set of three which I thought might go well with the Venus Fly Trap, although in real life they come from widely differing environments, cacti being of course desert dwellers and Venus Fly Traps mostly rooting in damp swampy ground. I hadn't noticed that they were advertised as faux cacti and sure enough when I got them home I found they were made out of plastic. Really? Why do they even sell this stuff? In the bin they go. Next a trip to an aquarium shop to get some sand and exotic pebbles and maybe one of those little plaster castles. They have some rather nice slate shards in the car park of my local McDonalds. I may have to go down there with a bucket, after they close, except, damn, there are open 24/24. Now, where can I find some moss? Ah, yes, on the patio...

So another issue of Vibrator (the only known antidote to an Arnie Katz fanzine) rolls into the pits to have a lube job and its cylinder head rubbed down with a greasy rag. Careful with those gaskets, guys. It's been fun, hasn't it? Well perhaps not so much fun as receiving the Parish Newsletter from your Aunt Peg every Christmas describing her frolics with the Sherpas in Guatemala, where they would roast up guinea pigs for an Xmas treat (or have I got the wrong country?) but not necessarily annoying enough to be thrown down the toilet bowl of life (unless you are Andy Porter). The cost of mailing on such a regular schedule is starting to pinch, I must confess. I will continue sending out hard copies (nudge nudge) to most UK readers, but overseas sufferers may have to put up with emailed PDFs in the future. In either case the only way to ensure you stay on my mailing list and keep up with this *Focal Point Fanzine* is to respond, or else otherwise to find a way to ingratiate yourself with me, like vowing Lifelong Allegiance to the Cult of Charnock. Oh, and anyone who takes out a membership for Tynecon III: the Corflu is guaranteed a lifelong subscription.

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[http://www.corflu.org]

What more can I say, go out and celebrate, but if you hear the sound of drones overhead don't blame me, they are