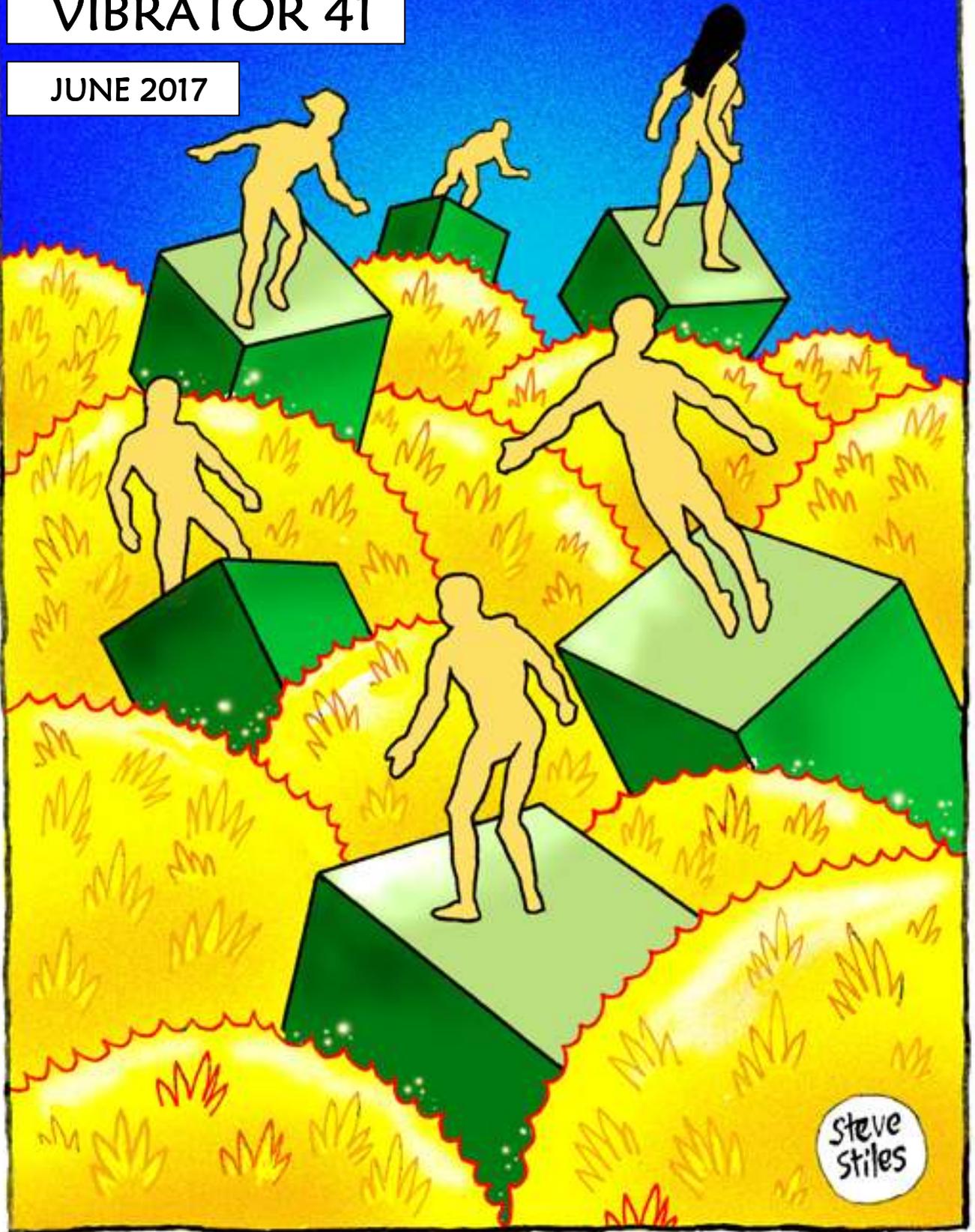


VIBRATOR 41

JUNE 2017



Steve Stiles

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It's the end of the month. Why did no one tell me June only had 30 days. I was hoping for an extra day's lie in, but now I have to get up and climb back into the editing saddle. I don't understand fanzine publishing. I thought Issue 40 of Vibrator was distinctly short-weight and lack-lustre, but in fact it has gleaned possibly the largest input of locs for a long time. Just shows some people are easily pleased, I guess. This issue has a fine cover by my main man Steve Stiles, who threatens it may be his last piece of fan-art this year. But I don't believe him and never did. Steve has health issues at the moment, which may or may not be explained in his loc to this issue, so let us all wish him well. I am publishing Andrew Hooper's loc as a prime feature this issue, because not only is it so rare to get a loc from him, but he puts me right on several facts in my previous article about the Sultana Tragedy and provides yet more consolidating information. Was thinking of running a long article on Mike Moorcock's New Worlds Years, but then thought what has the bastard ever done for me. Certainly never sent me a loc. So here is a nice photo instead.



ANDY HOOPER ON THE SULTANA TRAGEDY

I've been meaning to write a letter of comment to VIBRATOR for some time – 40 issues, apparently. It can be seductive to watch a monthly fanzine pass you by, assuming you'll eventually reply, but never quite managing to write anything before the next one appears. People complained of this effect in responding to APPARATCHIK and FLAG, but even when I slowed down dramatically, all the same people kept replying. You're a letterhack or you're not, I suppose.

Anyway, the "America the Damned" section in VIBRATOR #40, concerning the Sultana disaster of April, 1865, was immediately of interest, and inspired me to comment on several points. First, I'm sure that someone else will point out to you that John Wilkes Booth never got within 1,000 miles of the Mississippi River after murdering Abraham Lincoln. His flight took him south from Washington through Maryland, and while he did cross the Potomac River, he got no more than fifty miles south before he was cornered and killed at the Richard H. Garrett tobacco farm in King George's County, Virginia. This occurred on the evening of April 26th – the day before the *Sultana* disaster. Incidentally, the hunt for Booth caused another naval disaster associated with the repatriation of prisoners. The canal barge *Black Diamond*, crewed by civilian members of the Alexandria, Virginia fire department, was anchored in the Potomac in an effort to observe anyone trying to cross in the vicinity. On the night of April 24th, the Steamer *Massachusetts*, carrying more than 400 former prisoners of war downriver to Norfolk, collided with the barge, causing both vessels to founder. 83 prisoners and 4 of the barge crew were killed, an event which surely would have brought greater attention if not for the events of April 27th.

The *Sultana* and her sister *Luminary* were certainly designed for the St. Louis to New Orleans trade, and were long ships with a relatively narrow beam, a design thought to be more efficient than shorter, more stable forms. They were unusual in having their tall smoke stacks located entirely forward of the main cabin and hurricane deck, which allowed for more cargo stowage around them. But it would not be accurate to say that she had run a regular route for the two years prior to April of 1865. She had operated very briefly as a private vessel on the Ohio River in 1863, and had been inhibited by the fact that her stacks were too tall to transit the bridge at Wheeling, West Virginia. But the Federal government requisitioned her for military service in April, 1863, and she actually came under Confederate fire while supporting Ulysses Grant's siege of Vicksburg. After about 18 months of perpetual service, which garnered her owners a profit equal to twice her construction costs, they sold her to a partnership in St. Louis, including her future Captain, J. Cass Mason.

You note that the ship was "legally" rated to carry 376 passengers; this was so-defined by provisions of the Steamship Acts of 1838 and 1852, which did provide some limits on the ability of owners to overload their vessels. However, this and

many other Federal laws were superseded by powers granted to both the President and the Congress as wartime measures. Ships were routinely overloaded, run at dangerous speeds and under hazardous conditions, because the consequences of failing to arrive on time were equally lethal. Also, Mason and his predecessors aboard **Sultana** had often run her boilers at high capacity in an effort to set and maintain speed records, which allowed her to charge greater rates for the passengers and cargo which they still attempted to carry between ferrying Union regiments to the war zone.

Ordered south from St. Louis to conduct former prisoners of war from Vicksburg, Sultana called at Cairo Illinois on the 14th, and was the first boat to leave carrying the news of Lincoln's assassination the following morning. The crew were thus already in a somber frame of mind, and brought the grim tidings to places without a telegraph connection as they continued downriver.

The fantastic overcrowding on the ship was indeed arranged by Mason and Quartermaster Hatch, who received a generous kickback of the \$5.00 offered to transport each private soldier. At one point, some soldiers saw the overcrowding ahead of them on the **Sultana**, while another boat, the **Carroll** stood by empty, and refused to go aboard; but their officers spread the story that the **Carroll** had been the site of a smallpox outbreak, and the mutiny collapsed. On the other hand, the pressure on Hatch to get the men out of Vicksburg was enormous. Many of them had been held at the notorious prison at Camp Sumter near Andersonville, Georgia, and were desperate to see home again before malnutrition or illness killed them. There was no food anywhere in the south – three years of war, and the Union's final destructive invasion of Georgia and the Carolinas put the entire Confederacy on the edge of famine. Even if he had not received a penny in return, Hatch would have loaded the largest ship available beyond its capacity, just to get as many starving men as possible out of the state of Mississippi.

In the end, the River destroyed the careful calculation that Mason hoped would bring his partnership into profit. The April flood was higher and stronger than expected, increasing the current that the Sultana had to fight as it sailed upstream. With the huge weight of humanity on board, the boilers had to work at full capacity to maintain speed and control. It was like trying to maintain a steady rate of speed in a car while climbing a steep hill – the engine has to work much harder. The famous Mississippi mud also played a part – with so much more of it suspended in the spring floodwater, it clogged the boilers as it passed through them, blocking some flues and increasing the pressure on others. The top-heavy load caused the ship to list heavily as it turned to follow the river, and the boilers, mounted side by side, would alternate being flooded and left dry as they rose and fell with the list. The dry boilers would heat up dangerously, and when the water was returned as the list decreased,

it lashed instantly into steam, causing the pressure to jump violently. It was probably one of these events that caused the explosions.

When the boilers failed explosively on the morning of April 26th, between 40 and 60 people were killed outright, and an equal number sufficiently wounded by flying fragments and wood splinters or scalded by steam that they would not survive the sinking. The huge smokestacks collapsed and fell, causing part of the hurricane deck to crumple downward onto the main cabin and the boiler deck, crushing and trapping a number of men. But many more of the fatalities came from the intense fire that followed the explosion, which ultimately gave many the choice of drowning in the Mississippi or roasting alive aboard the ship. Men who had been strong swimmers were weakened by months of captivity, and found they could do nothing in the frigid spring floodwater. Hundreds drowned or died of hypothermia.

Local efforts to rescue anyone from the river were made almost impossible by the fact that Union sailors had been ordered to destroy every privately-owned boat and canoe in the vicinity of Memphis on April 9th. This may have been an effort to forestall some imagined amphibious action by die-hard rebel guerillas, or simply an act of petty revenge. But civilians could only listen to the shrieking, struggling men in the current, and try to throw ropes to them as they were carried downstream. Some were rescued by the crew of the *Bostonia II*, a stern-wheeler descending the river on her maiden voyage. Two US Navy vessels, the Ironclad USS *Essex* and the gunboat USS *Tyler*, were moored at Memphis, and sent out their longboats to rescue survivors as they were carried past the wharf. The *Tyler* was under repair, but the *Essex* put on steam and churned upriver, saving another handful of men. But by the time the dawn broke, they had begun pulling scores of bodies out of the water.

Since James Cass Mason and many of his crew were killed in the sinking, it was convenient to place a significant amount of the blame for the disaster on him. However, the criminal overloading of the ship had been supervised by U.S. Army officers, and an inquiry raced to place their blame before all could resign their commissions to escape the court's jurisdiction. Captain Frederick Speed, who sent the great wave of prisoners from the Parole Camp to Vicksburg, remained in service long enough to receive condemnation for his failure to confirm that adequate transport was available for the prisoners before sending them to Vicksburg. But Colonel Reuben Hatch, found mentally incapable of performing the duties of Quartermaster for the Department of the Mississippi, was re-assigned, and tasked with transporting \$14,000 by boat to St. Louis. The ship's safe was ransacked during the trip, and while the thief was caught, \$8,000 was never recovered. An Army Court found Hatch personally liable, prompting his resignation of his commission at last. He died in 1881, an inexplicably honored citizen of Hillsboro, New Hampshire.

Unlike many historic catastrophes, the published estimates of deaths in the *Sultana* sinking are probably somewhat low. There were nearly 100 paying

passengers in the ship's staterooms, as well as 85 crew, before more than 2,100 paroled prisoners and 28 guards were put on board. The total number of people on the **Sultana** was probably greater than 2,300. While as many as 750 people were rescued from the river, more than 250 of these died in hospitals within a month of the sinking, and they were not included in most government estimates of the dead. An Association of Survivors met annually into the 20th Century, and its members were uniformly of the opinion that fewer than 500 of those aboard had survived long enough to leave Tennessee. It seems almost certain that more than 1,800 people died as a result of the sinking.

In addition to the Survivor's Association, the **Sultana** sinking acquired some of the same lore as attached to other famous shipwrecks. The handful of passengers who left the ship at Memphis commonly invoked providence to explain their survival. Among these were Lt. Col. Charles E. Compton, a white officer in the 53rd Regiment, United States Colored Troops; and the Chicago Opera Troupe, a minstrel company who gratefully performed a show to benefit the survivors. The last living survivor of the disaster was Private Charles M. Eldridge of the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry, who died in September, 1941. Charred planks and other wooden artifacts believed to be from the wreck of the **Sultana** were excavated from beneath 32 feet of Arkansas mud in 1982. Since 1865, the river's course has moved by more than two miles to the east, so that the wreck site is now on dry land.

To anyone interested in the story, I enthusiastically recommend ***Disaster on the Mississippi: The Sultana Explosion, April 27, 1865*** by Gene Eric Salecker, published by the United States Naval Institute Press in 1996. Salecker's book relies on eyewitness accounts and contemporary newspaper articles, but also makes use of the vital records that were just beginning to be digitized 20 years ago. He does his best to identify all 2,300+ people on board at the time of the disaster, a truly epic effort.

I was glad to see that Nic Farey is at least mostly recovered from the flesh-eating bacteria that attacked his ass. We're at an age now when our peers are all being eaten away by one affliction or another, but any medical event that you can write about afterwards is better than the alternative. I have read the accounts of all the medical issues that Pat and your son have had on Facebook, and felt a strong recognition as one brother-in-law fights to recover from a stroke, while a nephew is just plain fighting with another. I think the Modern world generally makes us live our lives in the growing suspicion that we are crazy or dying, until we eventually awaken to find that our fears have all come true. The comforting part of this is that when someone on my mailing list drops dead, I do find there is a mild lift from the sudden absence of my concern, the perpetual worry that they will die – once they are actually gone, I actually feel better for a few minutes, until I think of someone else

who is still suffering along with us. This relentless morbidity certainly has an effect on one, but then, that's why have the Blues.

Mean ol' levee, taught me to weep and moan...

Thanks for your 40th issues, and best wishes for sending 40 more!

Andy Hooper can be found at fanmailaph@aol.com

MEANWHILE BACK AT THE CLICK BAIT

This is an unashamed loc hook, standing naked in all its glory and displaying its naughty bits. Okay all you Beatles fans. What is your favourite Beatles LP and why? If you don't like the Beatles, go away. You are dead to me.

Mine is Rubber Soul. Rubber Soul really epitomizes the differences between Lennon and McCartney in their collaborative songs. Wistful Lennon songs like Norwegian Wood and Nowhere Man, and upbeat driving bass-led melodic stuff from Paul like Drive my Car. And George chips in with existential stuff like Think for Yourself. Michelle is McCartney ear candy which preshadows sentimental stuff like She's Leaving Home, and he gets to sing in French. Pretentious, Moi? Good old Ringo gets his chance to do Mock Country on What Goes On which the band plays straight-faced although I imagine they were laughing behind his back. In Girl, Lennon thoroughly answers McCartney sugary Michelle, with its sharp intakes of breath which are musical highlights in their own right. I'm Looking Through You most accurately represents their early collaborative writing days in Liverpool. Two guys plonking on acoustic guitars with Lennon's mellow harmonies and Paul unleashing his characteristic roar on the chorus. In My Life is typical Lennon introspection which he later unleashed as Day in the Life on Sergeant Pepper. Wait is a weak track in that it relies on a vocal expletive which they regurgitated later with the more melodic 'Help' George's If I Needed Someone again goes into pseudo-existentialist territory, but it has chiming guitar figures to sustain it..Lennon's rather vicious Run For Your life reflects his rather violent misogynist nature, he is not hiding it, and looking forward never did. All in all it is a perfect *pop* album, acknowledging their past and looking forward to their future.

FATHER'S DAY

Father's Day came and went while I was twiddling my toes, languishing in an alcoholic haze, so I thought I'd share a few thoughts:

My father was a pretty passive sort of person in terms of his personal relationships. I don't think I ever heard him once reminisce or share any views about what kind of internal landscape he might be occupying. This obviously pushed me the other way to some extent into being a more personally revealing kind of person.

So what did I have to live with on a daily basis? A strong man obviously both physically and strong in that he was often intractable. Set in his ways certainly, again, which forced me to develop a spirit which was always open to an alternative point of view. He loved and supported his family, of that I'm sure, and was proud to be the sole supporter, in an age when nothing less was expected of a man. But I also think he was rather confused by the way his sons developed. I was possibly the prime source of confusion, the youngest and someone who fairly obviously from an early age was not able to compromise for an easy life and argued with everything and everyone.

At one stage I made a deliberate attempt to connect with my father and his interests. He was an engineer and never happier than when engineering in his own complex of sheds and workshops. I asked him to teach me how to weld with oxy-acetylene equipment and how to work his metal turning lathe, and he did. I admit I may have been expecting him to reciprocate by expressing an interest in my teenage obsessions, writing and sf, but of course he didn't. Confused as always. I remember on some occasions when I would plead to watch fairly avant-garde television in a family setting (The Pythons, Magical Mystery Tour, that kind of stuff) my father would sit and watch it grimly expressionless, casting a cloud of incomprehension.

I don't know how happy his life with my mother was. They were not an emotionally sharing couple. I was more emotionally attached to my mother, and thus hated her more on a daily level and found more to rebel against in her.

One of my meaningful memories of my father is when he was invited to go to an annual dinner dance with a group of Speedway affiliates (my father was chief engineer on the Wembley Lions Speedway team in the post war years). My mother declined to accompany him, so he asked me. This was to be held in the Connaught Rooms in Kings Road. He was not a social animal and was uncomfortable and when we got there he seemed genuinely at a loss. This was an unusual state to see my father in, especially as to a degree I was supposed to act as his support. To tell the truth I was at much out of my depth as he was. These were all old Speedway Grandees, many of whom shook hands and nodded at him without realizing or caring

who he was. I don't think he enjoyed it, but remember, these were people whom he had invested his whole world in.

One summer, while working in his shed, my father *felt a twinge*. He was taken to hospital and we feared a heart attack, without being given any concrete information. In those days illnesses seemed harder to diagnose than these days, with modern tests and equipment. Once home he continued to be *mildly* ill for a long time until a further visit to hospital revealed bowel cancer, which proved to have been diagnosed too late to treat. My mother had fed him saturated fats all his life, but I don't blame her. He lived and worked in a fairly toxic environment full of poisons, chemicals, oils, greases, and fumes. I think it was that that killed him.

Do I miss him? At moments like this, yes, obviously, recollecting his sometimes idiosyncratic ways and behaviours. But sometimes, like all independent children, I wished both him and my mother were not there. What can I say?

WITHER FANDOM

A very Short history of fandom according to Graham Charnock

Well I always wanted to produce a long piece of reasoned exegesis on some aspect of fandom, in the way Don West could do so well, but don't count upon this to be it.

Here follows my current diatribe on the state of fandom today. As I get older and especially as I continue producing what is viewed by some as a highly regarded focal point fanzine, I realize I am becoming even more out of touch with fandom, not only mainstream Hugo-orientated fandom, but seemingly my own. I'm not going to witter on about how fandom was different in *my day*; you can all take that as read. Fandom was different for all of us in *our day*.

I would also not be presenting a particularly striking new argument if I said the *idea* of fandom has largely been over-written by the enthusiasm of those who are centred upon sf media which is not written or formed as a literary enterprise. Even The Big Bang Theory must have its fans, I suppose, possibly even those who write *fan* fiction about its characters. There are those amongst us who accept this and even excuse it by saying "Oh, there are many fandoms". There may well now be many, but I have a hankering feeling that while that may be true there was originally but one. Which was initially formulated in the thirties in the USA as a response to a burgeoning market in speculative and adventurous fiction largely based upon pulp, mass-market magazines. The dreaded *media* were not slow to pick up on this phenomenon even then. In 1932 Universal began making a series of low-budget pulp themed movies beginning with Island of Lost Souls in 1932. They were produced by

people who had never read sf and people who had never read sf watched them in drive-in theatres while groping up their dates. Talk about Cheap Thrills. The rot had begun.

Meanwhile the more nerdy and needy amongst us continued to take sf seriously. We saw it possessed the potential to develop some quite philosophical themes and arguments which we had only seen handled so far in mainstream writers, like Joseph Conrad or Thomas Hardy, or E.M. Forster (who actually took on the genre head-on with his novella *The Machine Stops*) or to take an American view social themes developed by William Faulkner, John Steinbeck and others. A trivial example of the way this new slant applied to sf was the early story by Tom Godwin, *Cold Equations*, which was basically a “who would you throw out of the balloon” moral dilemma. Simple stuff but at least it was not predicated upon a “They Went Down to the Planet...” structure. I love Eric Frank Russell stories but I will be the first to admit they were all “exploration” based and militaristic. The initial chapters of *Next of Kin* consist of detailed descriptions of combat between spaceships. It was a throwback to pulp origins and one I was all too ready to outgrow when *New Worlds* under the editorship of a radical intellectual like Mike Moorcock came into view.

But I don't want to jump too far ahead. What about H.G. Wells, I hear you all say. How does he sit in the pantheon of sf Gods. Well, not at all, I would suggest. Wells was a socialist writer who grew up in a society torn by various social problems, the emancipation of women and the rise of unionization followed by the decline of what he saw as Traditional British, largely rural, values. There is a sad strain in most of his work of a culture changing, where *old* values would (or should) be overthrown. Wells was brought up in a Country Home, not his own, but one where his mother was a humble servant. That in itself imbued in him a resolute social “them against us” spirit. In short, he became a Socialist producing novels promoting his idea of the benefits of a world government, especially as under threat from right wing European trends such as Nazism, as in *Things to Come*. But there you have it again. How many people read *Things To Come*, for its complex development of militarism and how many non-literate people watched the film which simplified its message and didn't care about its origins.

We will take a short time here to talk about Superhero movies, a genre which surely has attracted more *fans* to it than any other. Well, Universal started it with the *Flash Gordon* movies, but I don't think we can entirely blame them for how it developed. The origins of these films is of course in various franchises licensed from the owners of the Comics, which may now involve Japanese or even Chinese megacorporations. Yes, there is a lot of money to be made here, mainly from producing candy which appeals to *fans* who enjoy CGI and slaughter. There are no *messages* in these films, other than we win who kill the most. I suspect Islamist

terrorists especially enjoy them. Things explode all the time, including our perceptions of what is important, I suspect.

It is in the nature of fanzines that they are emulations, objects produced in the form of the media you are trying to emulate. If you read magazine you will want to produce ersatz magazines. If you google fanzines these days the first entries will always be for music fanzines. They took exactly the form that sf fanzines took because they too emulated the magazines that music fans read.

Other people have written better articles about the origins of fanzines and their importance in the cultural history of our civilization. I urge you to seek them out.



ROB JACKSON

Many thanks for the pdf of Vib 40 posted on the well-known but unnameable e-list. I have printed it out, and you are seriously under no obligation to post me any more issues as I am happy to become one of your pdf recipients. I undertake to print out my own copies, as I prefer to read them in paper format. My self-abnegation here is an acknowledgement that – though you and Pat have had Inca in trade – I have done nothing else active in response to Vib since more than 2 years ago when I expressed a few opinions about the fanzine Hugos after Loncon.

A little tip about printing out pdf copies. If you have a version of Acrobat Reader which allows printing in duplex booklet format – and I think all of the current operational versions do – it is incredibly simple to staple your printed fanzine by folding it along the spine, then folding the bottom corner loosely at 45 degrees so you can get at the spine with an ordinary stapler. Then do the same with the top corner. What you are left with is a perfectly serviceable booklet fanzine.

Then you can read it. First thing you notice (if you are me) is the typo in your email address in the page 2 colophon. You are cartiledge, not cartiledg. But that is trivial and I must stop being pedantic.

Some actual comments, inevitably beginning with a medical one, as it is me writing. Robert is quite right to think that allergies can fade away; if the immune response is not re-triggered at all, the cells that continue to produce that particular antibody may gradually disappear over time. Or alternatively, the system can be trained by low-level regular exposure to get used to the allergen rather than being more reactive to it – this is called desensitisation. Either may have happened, but whichever it is, is good news.

You want flamboyant and flashy in a way that suggests foolishly mis-spent youth? The way we all (well, some of us) did when we were young? Do we actually want to go back to painting our nails black and rolling out of room parties at 4 am only to throw up in the corridor?

Maybe what you want is to get some yoof reading Vib. Hmmm – now where do we find some of them? Even James and Shell are starting to settle down into pre-middle-age parenthood. We need some younger people still. In another place, it emerged that hardly any of us had heard of Ariana Grande until her fans were rottenly targeted by a mad suicide bomber at her concert in Manchester a couple of weeks ago. Perhaps what you need to do is get copies of Vib distributed at an Ariana Grande concert. But first – I'd forgotten – you need to make the content relevant to your target audience.

No, that doesn't make sense. Your target audience is Us Lot. And most of us are of a Certain Age, and in general have more life to look back on than look forward to. Ideally we should do the looking backward bit with gratitude, amusement or at least equanimity, and the looking forward bit with acceptance of what is no longer appropriate, but enthusiasm for whatever kinds of fun are still open to us, or with a sense of achievement for whatever we are still able to get done that is useful, interesting or enjoyable for other people. Or even ourselves.

I didn't expect to wax philosophical in that idealistic way. But it happens. Go with it.

Rob Jackson can be found at jacksonshambrook@uwclub.net

PAUL SKELTON

“There are intimations lurking within and swirling around the pages of *Vibrator 2.0.38*” writes (if not overwrites) Robert Lichtman in his LoC, “that you might be tiring of your relentless monthly production schedule.” Indeed these intimations continue their swirling in this issue, starting in the colophon and “trudging towards the

finishing line as usual.” You do not seem to be enjoying yourself very much in your fanzine lately. Of course your fanzine could simply be a reflection of your life, which is perhaps not a bowl of cherries at the moment, or perhaps it is that your subject matter seems to be striving for more serious significance than of yore. You do not seem to subscribe to IF³. There is no leavening lightness of tone, though briefly I thought I’d stumbled across just such a piece.

“Ah, this should be different and interesting.” I thought to myself, flipping *Vibrator* 39 open at this issue’s episode of ‘America the Damned’. “What’s he going to find so damning about an old-time popular song-writing duo?” I really and truly had it in mind that they were a pair of songwriters, sort of like Rodgers & Hart, who penned old standards with titles like ‘A Nightingale Broke Wind in Berkeley Square’, and suchlike; partly because perhaps, for some reason I associate the name Leopold with pianos. Come to think of it, it’s more likely that I was confusing Leopold and Loeb with Lerner and Loewe. Even so, there is too much of this ‘false memory’ stuff going about these days, especially in my head.

I do seem to be more successful than both Robert Lichtman and David Redd when it comes to offloading books. On the last two occasions the Mearae have visited here they have left each time with a couple of large bagfuls. Several bags also went to Tesco when they were doing their ‘Help for Heroes’ charity bookstall. I am finding it strangely liberating and am beginning to consider the heretical possibility that, when we finally get the library rewired, replastered, redecorated and refurbished with all its bookshelves...I might not actually have any books to put in it.

Paul Skelton can be found at paulskelton2@gmail.com

DAVE COCKFIELD

Vibrator 40 was missing a whole page of sex. Actually page six which was the start of Gary Labowitz’s loc and also page fifteen the middle of Robert Lichman’s. This did not in any way spoil my enjoyment as it was great fun working out the order of the remaining pages and the issue still contained 100% Graham Charnock.

I’m a bit of an American civil war buff so it was good to read something that I didn’t know about, namely The Sultana Tragedy. Your brief telling of this incident is something that I will now have to investigate further.

Somehow I never read any Leslie Charteris but I do have fond memories of The Saint tv series. I’m really enjoying repeats on ITV 4 at the moment. I never particularly liked Roger Moore in the Bond movies or anything else other than The Saint actually although I thought that he was a wonderful conversationalist when interviewed. He was always totally charming and very witty in a gentle way.

Like most of us I collect too much stuff. In the case of books I'm always a few hundred behind with what I want to read even though these days I read three a week. Over the years I've sold off many books but now that my brain is getting addled I have cravings for books that I read in my youth. Recently I started picking up cheap, well-tanned, paperbacks by the likes of Asimov and Clarke but this has now extended to Zelazny, Moorcock, Christopher Anvil, and even Andre Norton. In a few years I guess I'll be looking out for Oor Willie, and Noddy.

Sitting on my bed and looking at a bookshelf it came to me why I keep books that I have read and may never read again. Firstly, I enjoyed a book so much that I hope that I will in fact reread it one day. Secondly, it is an investment that will turn a profit. This has been the case many times but years later I often feel regret even if the money was good at the time. Lastly, when I pick up a book it is tactile, often looks good, and smells beautiful, I get a warm nostalgic glow just thinking about the pleasure it gave me in the past.

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DAVID REDD

Well, now past the Longest Day, nights drawing in already, second half of 2017 all downhill from here .. rather like the first half, eh Theresa? Brazilian dams across the Amazon about to wreck the remaining rain forest, ISIS prove how Islamic they are by blowing up a mosque, a Mayor of London observes on TV "Corners have been cut too long in the interests of saving money" – he's only just noticed? Ah well, to take our minds off all this we can celebrate and discover Vibrator 40. Thanks. We need you this year more than ever.

I see your cover confirms your ongoing evolution: the "2.0." has definitely gone the way of the "British Edition". Almost sedate and stylish, your cover now. Are you losing your quirkiness and going mainstream in your old age? (Fortunately, your tailpiece indicates an attempt to postpone this.)

Another well-told America The Damned. Ta. Unscrupulous fixers cramming helpless transients into leaky old tub for quick bucks? We're so lucky that couldn't happen today. Incidentally, following "America" through your quirkiness-packed page numbers was quite a voyage. Vib 40's pages start 1, 2, 3, 2, 5, 4, 7... rather like the aliens' counting in some old Retief story. (Unlike them, you haven't yet numbered a page "several". Not yet.)

You gained your knowledge of riverboats from *Maverick*, did you? Why not *Riverboat* c.1960? Stirring stuff, that one. I saw it on vintage black-and-white tiny screens. Sort of a cowboy-historical above-water forerunner of *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, or perhaps of *Star Trek* as its vessel was named "Enterprise". Episodes are around. So much more fun than modern entertainment, cf *Transformers: The Last*

Blight or whatever it was, which no doubt accurately reflects the modern human condition of huge inhuman entities battling for survival and trashing everything around them. I'd say POOT!, only I need a Lichtman footnote to explain the term to my sheltered soul first. (And speaking of Robert, when you upload Vib 40 on efanazines I may get to read what he wrote on the "censored" pages 15 and 16. No, wait, 16 is in there somewhere – yes, between 17 and 19. You little joker.)

Ah, Robert, rushing to buy a book full price is the problem. The ones I regret missing are various intriguing but unusually low-priced oddities on ebay/amazon or in charity shops making me think first "Don't *really* need more books," then on reflection "Yes of course I do!" and naturally when I go back they've always gone. If one does appear again it's 5 years later and 8 times the price.

Not even end of my page yet, but must close. Despite (for example) Dave Cockfield's interesting and involving letter, I find my letterhacking abilities now fail me, mainly due to Nic "constant trickle" Farey. All human life is there.

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FRED SMITH

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

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

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

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JIM MEADOWS

Thanks for sending me Vibrator 38 and 40 (I looked up 39 online and read it as well). It's nice reading things by fans I haven't heard from for years (I gafiated in the 1980s, and have only sporadically re-established contact in recent times).

I do notice, however, that we're all older. I'm sure there are younger people writing in the fan community, as young as we were in the 1970s, but I'm not seeing them in Vibrator, or the other random fanzines I've come across. This may make for a deeper, richer concentration of writing about the illnesses that beset us in our later years, notably as you recorded in "Adventures Through Time And Space In The Whittington" (and I hope Pat is doing better now). It's interesting to me that I'm perfectly ready to read about such things. (I will spare you my list of infirmities, which are not as interesting). I don't know how younger readers would react. I don't remember much on the topic in the fanzines of yore, but maybe I am blanking it out --- and thus showing how this reader DID react, when younger.

You write about Leslie Charteris' "The Saint". I have some of the Saint novels, waiting to be read, but before I begin, I would like to find the very first one, "Meet the Tiger", which seems to be totally out of print. I've read that Leslie Charteris felt that first book was inferior to the later ones, which may be why I can't find it.

I've heard that only the later "Saint" tv episodes are in color, that the first batch were filmed in black & white, and that going to color film dovetailed with the show being picked up by NBC in the United States. I have a DVD of a feature film, "Vendetta for the Saint", drawn from a two-part episode from the color days, where they set some scenes in Sicily, but filmed them in Malta, for fear that the show's depiction of a fictional Mafia would offend the real Sicilian crime lords.

Bonus fannish fact. "Vendetta for the Saint" is based on one of the later Saint novels from the 1960s, credited to Charteris, but actually ghostwritten by Harry Harrison (according to the DVD commentary and Wikipedia)!

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LEIGH EDMONDS

Vibrator 40 has been occupying my inbox so I'd best to do something about it. A LoC perhaps. These fannish acronyms, you get used to them but at the convention they held in Melbourne last weekend I moderated a panel on fan history and used the word gafia. Somebody stuck their hand up and asked me to explain it. Don't they have classes for neofans any more, or a handout or something so people don't display their ignorance in public.

Talking about ignorance, I liked your article about the river boat which told me a lot that I didn't know. For example, I've never been interested enough to nail down exactly when the American civil war happened and now I've got a better idea. Also river boat design. I was interested to read that riverboats should be 'seaworthy'. Is that the appropriate word for riverboats that never go to sea, presumably. Riverworthy?

Marion mentions The Doctor Blake Mysteries which are partly filmed in Ballarat. I stopped watching it when the story advanced to the stage where he was about to put the word to his girlfriend and his old wife turns up on the doorstep - too much like soap opera for me, so I gave up. Somewhere in Ballarat there are drinking games for every time a scene shot in Ballarat comes on the screen but often only some of the exterior setting shots are shot here, the rest are shot at other locations in Werribe (so I am told) or Melbourne. There are some scenes of Ballarat's seedy underlife which have to be shot somewhere else because Ballarat just isn't that seedy. Not in the parts that look historical these days, anyhow, they've all been spruced up to look good for tv and tourists.

Other things I liked in this issue were yet more reminders of my deprived childhood in which the only thing I can complain about is being dragged to church and Sunday school and being subjected to the occasional Pleasant Sunday Afternoon - only other's subjected to a Methodist childhood can know the true horror of those words. And, of course, there were Nick's continuing stories of cab driving in Las Vegas. It's not the Las Vegas you see in all those movies.

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CLAIRE BRIALEY

Ah, *Vibrator*. It's been too long...

So long, in fact, that I don't know whether it's still necessary to begin with a double entendre or whether they've all been used up and faded into the west like all the Poots. Or should that be Poots!? No, that looks wrong. But so did Poot!s.

See how easily distracted I can be?

Indeed, I was almost put off from writing after all when you described those of us from whom you never hear as lackadaisical sloths, since as funny animals of fandom go that seems to be a pretty good one to be. But 2017 is already the Year of the Tamandua (an anteater wearing dungarees), at least around these parts, so I am resisting the siren song of the sloth in order to write to you about the Saint.

It still takes me a little by surprise whenever someone mentions the Saint and Roger Moore together. It's a matter of timing; Roger Moore stopped playing the Saint before I was born and so I first became aware of him as James Bond. By the time I did, Bond films had good gadgets and snappy soundbites, although I discovered the books around the same time and preferred the written version of Bond for all that – or perhaps because – the character was harder and the action less arch. And Roger Moore wasn't even my favourite film Bond in the end, so I shall have to remember him fondly as more or less the inventor of the Magnum choc-ice-on-a-stick and try to forget the Conservative-supporting tax exile parts of the legend.

I came to Simon Templar after James Bond, anachronistically for their respective publishing history; it took me a while to realise that the Saint books most readily available in the library were novelisations of the TV series, and then to establish a reading order that meant I could go back to start at the beginning – although I must have enjoyed the later fix-up versions enough to want to bother doing that. By then I'd also seen enough of the reissued paperback covers to have a mental image of Ian Ogilvy as Simon Templar, and was genuinely surprised when I found that Roger Moore had played Templar before he was Bond. I never saw any of the 1960s TV series, and I'm not sure I caught any of *The Return of the Saint* either. (I missed *Maverick* too, of course.)

Having just written in *Banana Wings* about my other fandoms, or more properly near misses at having another fandom, I realise that I left out The Saint Club – which I found out about through that rather traditional method of adverts in the back of the paperback books. Like everything else before SF fandom, I was a member of the club but didn't really engage with other members; in fact I don't recall if there was much opportunity for participation, although presumably fans determined to have a fandom could have found one another's contact details. I gave it up again within a few years, perhaps because I never found a community in it. I don't think I've even got the membership card any more although it was quite an amusing one.

I keep meaning to re-read the Saint books, having very nearly a full – and thoroughly unmatched – set after a frenzy of collecting some twenty years ago. But I keep fearing I will be disappointed, so I don't. (I've just had to take a short break in order to listen to Stan Freberg doing 'The Banana Boat Song', since you mentioned it; as usual, it is cheering. 'I come through the window' gets me every time.)

I have learned from at least one of my past mistakes, and I'm not going to go back to try to compose a comprehensive LOC on the other fourteen issues you've published since the last time I wrote to *Vibrator* (which was itself a plug for voting in the FAAn awards and not an actual LOC – thus leaving me in principle with even more catching up to do). This almost certainly means that I'll miss the point of a long-running joke or just repeat what someone else already mentioned with greater originality. And so I'm left feeling that I shouldn't jump into the middle of most of the current conversations in the letter column in case they were really at the end, so this letter will soon run out of steam. But believe me, that's better for both of us than the alternative.

Nonetheless, I was fascinated by Dave Cockfield's observations in his letter about alleged movie miscastings which were actually spot-on. Meanwhile, I deduce from Leigh Edmonds's letter that there is no solution to the conundrum of not being able to find what you want to read, although in our current state of housing crisis I fear that 'I left it in our other house' is not a statement that would be met with much sympathy in the UK. And I boggle that Robert Lichtman has only a couple of stacks of unread books; that's close to running out!

I'm not going anywhere near Nic's arse.

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ROBERT LICHTMAN

I don't know what you had in mind using the Saint paperback as the cover for *Vibrator* 2.0.40, but, y'know...poot! (I did wonder why suddenly you'd dropped the "2.0.x" from the issue numbering. Any cosmic significance to that?) It all cleared up for me, though, when I read on page 2 about how you play Freberg's Banana Boat Song "and feel better." I have that relation with his work, too, and I even have a CD of his songs – but these days I'm more inclined to play them on YouTube. And my favorites rotate around some, but reliably so far as the song parodies are concerned I always get off on "The Great Pretender," "Heartbreak Hotel" and "The Rock Island Line." And of his sketches, "St. George and the Dragonet" and "Wunnerful Wunnerful." Actually, as I type these short lists and then look at what's available I can hardly stop there. And my initial questions leading off this paragraph have mostly evaporated as I play "The Great Pretender" as I type.

If I ever knew about the Sultana tragedy in the force-feeding of American history I endured when in high school and any subsequent reading on the subject (including Larry Gonick's *The Cartoon History of the United States*), that knowledge has been long forgotten. If I remembered, perhaps this sentence in the third paragraph would have made more sense to me: "In 1860-61 a number of Southern American states seceded from the Union proposed by Lincoln, and to which he had been elected President in March 1881." Well, of course 1881 is a typo – it's "the Union proposed

by Lincoln” that I don’t get. The United States as of 1860-61 already existed, and it included all the Southern states that seceded to form the Confederacy. Thus, so far as I know Lincoln didn’t “propose” a Union when he was elected to the Presidency.

I resonated with Gary Labowitz’s quote from Steve Allen about how “there are several thousand musicians who produce good to great songs. But, there can only be a few hundred published in any given year, and only a few of them become even a little bit famous. The odds, in other words, are against any given person breaking into the music scene. Of course, once one does...then they are more likely to have more material accepted. And if they are any good at all, a person can become fabulously famous and perhaps wealthy. I think of Irving Berlin and the Gershwins; how lucky for us that they broke through. I wonder who we missed?” For the answer to that, I sometimes wish I had been able to retain the several thousand vinyl albums I had prior to moving to Tennessee in 1971. Because at that point I’d worked in the music industry and had run into albums by people who were very good but who never got a break, and whose albums I played just as frequently as ones by the famous. If I had those albums, I could give details. But in the current day and to the extent (small) that I pay attention to current music and musicians, I sometimes wonder why Cindy Lee Berryhill isn’t more famous.

Nic has all the luck, not! Of all the places for a taxi driver to get a bad case of cellulitis, the ass has to top the list. In the thankfully distant past I’ve had little outbreaks of it here and there – though not the “there” of Nic’s affliction – and was lucky enough to be able to deal with it using over-the-counter topical medications. Like Nic, I’ve also occasionally had periods of suffering from athlete’s foot. When they’ve struck, I’ve used a medicated spray between my toes and it’s cleared up pretty quickly. And, in fact, it’s been years since one of those, too, cross fingers.

That aside, my sympathies to Nic on the loss of his fellow cabby friend.

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PAUL SKELTON

Ah yes, *The Saint*. I guess I must have been reading the books about the same time as you. I read them all of course, but was aware the quality dropped as time wore on. Picking them up second-hand though meant it took me a while to realise this as the exigencies of used-book shops executed their temporal shuffle. Odd that on the cover you used he looked more like Sean Connery than Roger Moore, especially as I moved on to the Bond books and subsequently to what I still think of as one of the best series ever, John D. MacDonald’s *Travis McGee* books. The odd thing about the sequence in which I read the Charteris series was that ‘the Saint’ was Simon Templar’s secret identity, but this was blown in the very first book I read. I have no

idea now if this was the first book in the series as the gales of time have scattered any detailed memories I ever had of them.

As to the latest instalment of those Damned Americans I am somewhat ashamed to admit that my first reaction to reading of the disaster was that at least Captain Mason's greed meant that he didn't get paid. Actually that was my second reaction because my first was that I wondered where they had come up with the name. On our first US visit Cas, who at the time ate 'Sultana Bran' for breakfast, tried in vain to find any in the US. It was all currants and raisins, and in fact we could find no reference to sultanas at all, whether in cereal or otherwise. Of course I swiftly realised that a Sultana is also a Mrs. Sultan, so promptly moved on to my second, more irreverent but equally irrelevant reaction. I would also point out that he certainly wasn't to blame for any "injudicious decisions regarding its sea-worthiness", given that it was in regard to its **river**-worthiness that he fucked up big-time! Not even a total numpty would have considered any riverboat sea-worthy.

I still feel though that the only particularly American element of this incident was that it was ***B*I*G***. Greed is universal. Also, let's face it; they had just come out of the arse-end of a crippling Civil-fucking-War. Most folk in the South were in deep shit and struggling to get back on an even keel. Even ignoring chancers like Captain Mason, Health & Safety oversight was not a major priority for anyone.

Regarding David Redd's comment that "we woke up one morning to find the world changed overnight" I have decided to stop worrying and go with 'Que Sera, Sera'.

I will be seventy in August and, given the genes in the Skelton family tree, I'm extremely unlikely ever to make it to eighty. Short of some over-coiffed idiot pushing the nuclear button (which sadly is not entirely out of the question), anything that goes wrong is likely to be somebody else's problem.

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STEVE STILES

(Editor: Steve has recently been diagnosed with a tumour on his lungs. However he has been advised it has not spread anywhere else, and hence should be excisable. Of course we all hope for the best possible outcome for that. I asked Steve if he minded this being disclosed, and he said, yes, what the Hell.)

By now you know about my own depressing personal news and, above that, there's always the background despair many of us experience here knowing that we have a foul and ignorant piece of arrogant excrement, one who makes George W. Bush actually look good in comparison, in the White House. (Hey, at least The Shrub reads and paints!) Never did I think we'd reach such a pass in this, my so-called Golden Years. Seems more like five months under a Golden Shower to me.

My personal good news is that I'll finally be getting that big fat freelance check I was expecting back in January –damn those editors! Now I'll be able to get that electric swing album I've been wanting, an Eric Dolphy CD (recently realized I liked his music more than I had originally thought), and a Ren & Stimpy DVD. The considerable rest of the check goes right into the bank for (sigh) practical reasons.

What prompted me to write was your opener about Leslie Charteris' *The Saint*; like you, I was a big fan of the series when I was a teenager and collected as many of the books as I could lay my hands on. Most of those, however, are gone, my collection winnowed away to two hardcover anthologies and two paperbacks, one, "*The Saint In Action*," a twenty five cent Avon edition that crumbled a bit when I tried unsuccessfully to find a publication date; dare I attempt to reread it? Never really cared that much for the tv show, Roger Moore was far from my mental image; like you I envisioned him as a leaner, darker type. Besides, no mentally challenged hood from the Bronx, Hoppy Uniaz, in the series, a touch of New York in the UK.

We only have our one lousy house here in Baltimore County, but it seems adequate for our own collections, mammoth as they are. I just spent the afternoon reordering my CD and comics collections, but as far as printed matter is concerned it's fairly unlikely that I'll get to reread more than a fraction of any of it. There was an organization in Baltimore called *The Book Thing*, where people could drop off books in exchange for free ones, if they wish, and I had ten boxes of books packed way for *The Book Thing*, but "was" is the operative word since *The Book Thing* warehouse burned to the ground and there seems little hope that it will be rebuilt or moved to another location. Anyway, I'm rereading "*Red Planet*," my first s.f. novel –still holds up, although Mars was all wrong.

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PHILIP TURNER

Thanx for Vib 40, which arrived on June 14th in an envelope with a franking telling me that this is World Blood Donor Day. Not that I was expecting to participate. As a pensioner, my blood is much too old and tired for anyone else to want.

I also have a collection of *Saints*: 36 paperbacks and a couple of hardbacks assembled by a sustained campaign many years ago. Yes, Roger Moore made the character his own, but Ian Ogilvie did a creditable job in the role too.

There is an eye-catching word in the *Sultana Tragedy* saga: EMOCKFAU. It has the almost pig latinesque sound of a useful word to deploy in the hope that combustible people will explode on hearing it! May I quibble? The one in the 19th century was the **second** American Civil war, given that a lot of Americans wanted to Bremain when Judge Washington was running his rather inept Leave campaign in the 1770s. And

steamers with the paddle at the back are stern-wheelers, according to all the Western films I've seen.

There's an occasional feature in the Daily Mail called Wordy Wise -- readers messing about with familiar words to create a new concept with a witty (with any luck) definition, e.g.: apartmint – one with the hole in the roof. Jim Linwood's "The Boston Stranger" would be an ideal contribution, assuming he can come up with a suitable tag line.

"Jumped, humped, born to suffer, made to undress in the wilderness." That would appear to be Taxi Nic's lot in life right now. I'm now in fear and trembling in anticipation of when he tells us about his troubles with lobsters.

And finally, here's a contribution to your Joke Wall:

"Knock, knock."

"Who's there?"

"Police."

"Police who?"

"Police move your car, it's parked on my foot."

[or if you're in that sort of mood: "Police fuck off and die."]

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JENNIFER FAREY

I am constantly amazed at the closeness of those in fandom. There's such a sense of family, of community. Such a sharing of delicate, personal information. Which brings me to my husband...

In today's Vibrator, Nic Farey shares ARSE 2 : THE REVENGE OF GLYER & TMI. It's a rousing tail...er...tale, of a work-related injury (since he did get the original arse-pain from a less-than-meticulous and itch-inducing cab) gone terribly, terribly wrong. But he left out a few details. One is that I now call him "honey-butt" which makes sense after you read his article. The second is that he is now proficient in the use of a certain feminine hygiene product. So here's the rest of that story.

A week after being released from the hospital, Nic was ready to go back to work, but there was still drainage from the wound. Drainage is good, because the bad stuff is getting out, but it's not so good if it leaks through your shorts. So, I suggested he put a maxi-pad in his underwear to soak it up. After pulling a few faces, he agreed. When he came home from work the next day, I noticed that leakage had indeed happened, necessitating a laundering of his undies and shorts. When I asked why he hadn't used the pad, he said, "I did. Damn thing fell out as soon as I got to work." Seems that as he walked from the office back out to the cab, the pad fell out of the leg of his shorts, prompting a co-worker behind him to say, "Man, I think you

dropped something." Nic's response was to casually scoop it up and stick it in his pocket. I found this curious, since over my many years of womanhood I've had an accident or two, but never had a pad make a run for freedom out of my clothing. I needed more details.

Me: "Didn't the adhesive hold?"

He: "What adhesive?"

Me: "Did you take the strip off the back?"

He: "What strip?"

At which point I doubled over laughing while he protested, "Well how am I supposed to know how to use the damn things?" Indeed. Why had I presumed to expect my manly-man to know his way around a maxi-pad? So I gave him a brief tutorial. I'm happy to report that he can now apply and wear a pad with the best of them. I just hope he never has the need to learn how to use a tampon. I don't think either one of us would survive that.

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TALES OF A LAS VEGAS TAXI DRIVER

By Nic Farey

ARSE 2 : THE REVENGE OF GLYER & TMI

Even as the rough beast of last issue's column was electronically slouching its way to be born into the pages of this highly gelatinous miscollated excuse for a BAFTA award winning performance by the shredding Emperor of Arse, your godlike and solipsistically accurate Charnock (G), subsequent diagnoses were already invalidating its revelations.

The reader (Unc, J) may recall that I was previously attributing the anal leakage to a modest if continual diarrhoeal excrescence as a side-effect of the antibiotics, but a three-hour wait at Urgent Care on that Friday (the day after delivering the previous arse installment) revealed that not only was this in fact due to the drainage of an abscess of Grand Canyon proportions but that said wound was, yea, many-layered and unsusceptible to the ministrations of the attending physician, who decrees that I must hie me to the hospital up the road and get admitted unto the care of the arse experts therein. Thus begins a week of the kind of tedium anyone who's been in hospital will be familiar with, in this case punctured (ahem) by continual sticking in of needles, both attached and unattached to IVs dispensing antibiotics, dire

pronouncements about white blood cell counts (normal range 5-10 somethings per something of something, technical explanation, when I got in mine was 26 somethings per something, which is a bit up there, or something), and occasional re-dressing of the Grand Canyon, which is initially reclassified as *Valles Maneris*, or for non-scholars of the impressive surface features of the red planet, a wide-eyed "kinell".

I did get some good news right away from the first arse doctor (of several), who was happy to pronounce that since my apparent Wolverine-level mutant healing factor was causing the abscess wound to drain like buggery, they didn't feel the need to do the usual surgery, cutting out the necrotic tissue, since what passes for my body these days was having at it in no uncertain terms, giving it some major "Out, damned spot!" and also fuck off y'bastard. The preferred spoo to assist with the healing is now, apparently, medical honey (yes, honey, from bees), riotously expensive but effective, with the presumed additional benefit that if there's any left after you've completed the medical purpose you can spread it on toast.

For arse connoisseurs (J, Unc), allow me to also describe the highly awkward location of the *Valles Maneris*. You may have thought, for lack of specific GPS so far, that the abscess wound might have exhibited as a clear and present danger, staring down the viewer like the drooling slit of Jabba the Hutt's gob, but although comparable in size, in fact it's been lurking in a location where you actually have to pull the cheeks apart to even see the fuck, which goes some way to explaining why it took a few days to even realize it was there. Nurses were bringing in 6x6 adhesive dressings and receiving admonishments from me along the lines of "Look, you can't even tape a dressing on this bastard", and getting "Oh, right" after they've actually had a look. The buns, when released from being pulled apart to grant access did and do tend to hold a bit of gauze in place so the expensive honey (from bees) can do wot it do, Archie.

Despite the target set by the infection (arse) doctor that they were looking for a something something something of 15 to release me from confinement, I ended up getting the "go home" at 17 presumably due to an acceptable trend and also possibly the need for a bed for someone in worse shape, noting that I was moved twice to different though very adjacent rooms over the course of the week, making visits a bit of a lottery. I ended up being off work for two weeks, what with follow-up doctor visits and more blood work after they kicked me out. Luckily these weren't particularly lucrative days that I was missing, although not having the temporary disability insurance (which you can bet I'll be getting next signup) that's half a month of fuck-all income. Lucky Cab is, as I've mentioned, one of the smaller firms in town, and as such we all know each other to a greater or lesser degree, and it really does have a family atmosphere. My co-worker Shirley, who's on the same 5-5 shift as me, immediately took it upon herself to pass the hat, visited a couple times (along with

several other colleagues) to hand over the dosh, collected my paycheck to pass on and other fuckin-A stuff. The collection made up last month's rent and was well on time. Local fan friend visitors included Jacq Monahan, who, concerned that I might not be getting enough sleep, brought a copy of *SF Commentary*, Brenda ("Brender!") Dupont, Roy Hessinger and Ken Vaden, several bringing quantities of Camel Snus to manage my nicotine habit. Goes without saying, except I'm saying it, that Jen was in every day, interrogating all & sundry about my likelihood of survival.

I've been back at work for two weeks, finished the antibiotic scrip but now rattling with all the fuckin supplements that my (very nice, really) regular doc insists that I go on for three months or more: a probiotic, fish oil for something and 2000 units of vitamin D daily, which is all supposed to do something favorable while I put up with the apparent gut-ache that it all causes.

This has been pretty much the first time I've had any kind of close-up look at the utter joke that passes for "healthcare" in the Disunited States, but I'm bound to point out that while the *system* is utter crap, ridiculously overburdened with separate billing, unnecessary levels of management and inflated costs (I'll be on the hook for \$3,000 deductible, we expect the total bill to be over \$200,000), the actual standard of care and professionalism of all the staff I dealt with, doctors, nurses, assistants and all, was pretty dam good. That, I think, is something that gets lost sight of in the endless and acrimonious debates on the topic. Healthcare isn't something that ought to be debated in theory, especially by cunts like McConnell up in the Senate, who's undoubtedly never had a heart problem in his life, since he has no fuckin heart. Healthcare is about the people who need it but can't, in this excuse of a damned ((c) Charnock) country, always get to what they need, but at the very least, when and if they can, doctors and nurses everywhere do the job they signed up for. Kudos!

I got back to work in time for the usually lucrative EDC weekend, which for the most part wasn't bad, in fact this last week was well decent. The night shift tends to coin it better than us day drivers, but I still had a good run with a lot of rides, working off the center-strip arriving shuttles rather than schlepping all the way up to the speedway, which although that gets you (typically) an \$80 ride back to the strip, takes anything up to two hours per. That is, however, a feasible strategy for the 2-2 and 3-3 drivers, who might end up coming in with only 10 rides, but a \$400+ book. Working the 5-5 day shift, though, you have to look at the fact that after 8:30am or so everything's going to die on you (EDC runs sunset to sunrise), so you'll make the choice whether to get 2 or maybe 3 rides by playing the speedway and risk getting stuck and having to come back empty, or working the center with a lot of short rides but staying busy. Sunday was my busiest day, a total of 28 rides, 15 of them in the first 4 hours, for a meter of just over \$300, a number which was replicated for the three days of the festival. With so many cabs trying to play the speedway for the "big ride", half the strip was wide and waiting for that first few hours and I got a lot of fast

loads. Even when most of the rides are only \$10 or less, you can rack it up a bit, and also you're getting tips (however minimal) on that larger number of rides, from a crowd not typically known for their generosity in that respect.

Final arse update: given the extensive nature of the godawful dissembling Tory squat gob size of the abscess wound, we were understandably skeptical of assurances that it would actually fill in with the application of the honey (from bees), but that has truly proved to be the case, since it's now down to about dime-size or less and may be all nice again in a week or less. Not that you could see it, though.

- Nic (The Arse) Farey





Illo by Steve Stiles

Wouldn't claim to be a philosopher, but I'm afraid you are stuck with me anyway regardless. If anyone else wants to take over editorship of this journal on either a guest or a long-term basis, please contact me at graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk

Meanwhile time to wrap up another issue with my pearls of philosophical wisdom. What can I say? Don't feel like commenting on Trump, he has crossed so many boundaries he is no longer believable as either a president or a human being. I also don't want to comment on acts of either Christian or Islamic terrorism since they get enough atmosphere on Facebook and other social networking sites.

I could talk about my last trip to Sainsburys but most of you would be bored witless. Okay, I saw a guy carrying a mirror and realized that was really what I needed in my life, since I just regularly run my razor and scissor over my face indiscriminately. But bits of my facial hair have been growing out of control lately and confusing me. Buying a mirror with an enlarging reflector was a big mistake, though. I hadn't realized before that I was that hideously ugly, with pock-marked and scabby skin. No wonder women flinch when I approach them and try to Schmoos them on the cheek.

I'm hoping Pat will be well enough to proof read this issue, and perhaps help collate the print issue correctly. Meanwhile you know where I am if you want to reach me.

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