

# Vibrator 48

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steve  
stiles

## **ALL THINGS MUST PASS**

### *An Editorial Statement*

The spark that became the latest incarnation of Vibrator initially started in a toilet in Austin, Texas, when I was chatting with Claire Brialey (we often hang out in toilets together, especially when the bath is filled with booze). I innocently asked her what it took to publish an award-winning fanzine, in her case Banana Wings.

She looked at me demurely over a can of some despicable American attempt at a lager and said: “Well, Graham, if you are an attractive woman like me, it’s easy. You just staple your name to a masthead, publish frequently, and sex-starved fans will beat a path to your door in the hope of getting some nookie.” (Except she didn’t use the term ‘door’ or, for that matter, ‘nookie’.) I knew I couldn’t possibly compete in the attractiveness stakes but my takeaway from this conversation was the word ‘frequently’.

Many years before all this and even possibly before Claire had been born, I had published a protean fanzine called Vibrator, which was off-the-cuff material straight onto stencil, full of news and gossip and vaguely occupying the corner that the rest of Ratfandom had easily made its own, with True Rat and Big Scab and suchlike tirades against fannish conformity. So, easy, I thought, just revive that format, do it every month, and up up and away.

At this time I was a member of an on-line forum founded by Harry Bell called Inthebar. Harry had chosen a very apposite name, envisaging a conversational group where virtually anything went, mimicking the ebb and flow of anecdotal storytelling that often goes on in real bars. I quite deliberately tried to copy this format by establishing a coterie of regular loccers and commentators (again, admittedly, mostly stolen from Banana Wings’ mailing list) whom I could rely upon to sustain the monthly schedule even when there was a dearth of my own or other outside contributions. I was lucky, I guess, in that this seemed to work. People obviously found some satisfaction in writing a comment or two and then finding it published within a few weeks, rather than having to wait years between irregular issues, which has often been the standard in fandom (come on, we all know who you are).

Well, it has to be faced. It was never my intention to continue publishing Vibrator ad infinitum and I always thought four years of continuous monthly publication would be enough. So this will be the last issue of Vibrator. I am neither proud nor ashamed of what, if anything, I have achieved with this fanzine. The monthly schedule was useful in prompting me to write, sometimes perhaps more than I should have. But being free of the nervous-twitch-like need to produce something during the last week of every month will surely be good for my mental health. I’m justifying all this by telling myself I will now be free to write more consequential things. I have at least three novels stalled because ‘one can only write so much’. I might also be able to write more for other fannish ‘markets’ given sufficient encouragement. I’m sorry to cut some valued correspondents adrift, many of whom have been with me from the start, people like Robert Lichtman who has never

missed an issue, and stalwart other loc writers like David Redd, Phillip Turner, and Fred Smith. I am quite proud of encouraging Nic Farey to come up with a regular monthly column for so long, and owe him a particular debt of thanks. I'm hoping he might negotiate some other venue for his taxi memoirs, but I suspect he might feel as grateful for a rest as I will be. This issue will feature a cover by Steve Stiles, who has also supported me, almost every bit as I have supported (or nagged) him. I'm proud to consider this worthy Hugo winner a good friend and amazed he often took time to share his talent with me for my little backwater venture. And significantly I should not forget to credit and thank Pat Charnock for her considerable contribution in making this all possible by taking time to copy-read everything so it wasn't entirely obvious I was making a fool of myself.

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AND HERE IS CLAIR BRIALEY'S RESPONSE TO MY EDITORIAL:

### FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TOILET DOOR

I've heard Graham's version of our Bathroom Encounter a number of times in the past ten years. While I'd happily take my fair share of any credit (or blame) for another fan's resurgence into fanzine activity, it's fair to say that I recall it a little differently.

Many fanzine fans seem to have an inspiration story about another fan or fanzine, typically from one end or the other of the quality spectrum. Some report instead an early exposure to one of the fanzines justifiably renowned as a wonder and a thing of beauty, before which they quailed at their own unworthiness and slunk off to run a club or a convention or a country instead – but others will wax lyrical at how instantly awestruck and inspired they were by the possibilities inherent in fanzine publishing and how they have been striving ever since to emulate that original state of perfection. Plenty more, though, first encountered a fanzine which was... differently good, and so were inspired to utter the words which set them on their future path: 'Even I can't do any worse than this crap!'

I have naturally assumed that I fulfilled the latter function for Graham.

I'd encountered Graham before our meeting in a toilet doorway at Corflu Quire – very recently before if you count as a separate meeting our tentative identification of him and Rob Jackson in the transit lounge at Houston airport, but first and more significantly at the 2003 Eastercon, which featured on the programme Graham's Astral League comeback tour; I think he had a *Vibrator* out then too, although not like these modern ones. It was a suitably memorable first in-person impression to the extent that I can't actually remember any of the details now, joyously stunned as we all were by the whole experience.

Like many of the fans returning from gafia in the first decade of this century, Graham was already something of a legend to me. We'd believed these giants of former days<sup>1</sup> faded

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<sup>1</sup> The 1970s.

away into the west or at least into a different phase of life which meant not going to conventions or London pub meetings or appearing in fanzines any more. Which was probably just as well, because they clearly wouldn't approve of me. I was still a bit wary of the cool kids in fanzine fandom who were roughly my contemporaries, so I certainly didn't want to be attracting the attention and disfavour of any of the vanished minor deities who used to produce witty and brilliant and groundbreaking fanzines before I was even in fandom.

And then I bumped into one of them in the bathroom.

I recall Graham's question pretty much as he renders it here, which of course instantly flummoxed me because he must be taking the piss (British usage, non-bathroom context). Mark and I did seem to have a deathgrip on the Nova awards at the time, but it was *Plokta* that was winning Hugos and we had emerged as the non-winners of the FAAn award for best fanzine at the previous year's Corflu, after the administrator had woken shaking from a nightmare and realised he needed to do a recount. And, of course, I was certain that the legendary (witty, brilliant and groundbreaking) Graham Charnock must diskard utterly (*Editor: sic*) what we were doing and how we were doing it, so assumed that if his question wasn't already a sting then biting mockery must be about to follow.

So I burbled something, desperately wishing that I could think of intelligent and amusing comments off the top of my head or at least appear relaxed and insouciant; I was expecting to end up more in the territory of vacuous, but at least that would be better than coming across as too earnest and stolid as usual. Amidst my burbling, of the various words Graham ascribes to me I do vaguely recall the word 'frequently' appearing in some form. So in all the essentials for his resurgence we do actually agree.

I refute the beer slur, mind you. Whatever sort of American beer it was, it would have been one of the good ones.

So remember, fanzine fans: think before you speak, even if you don't think it will help you to say anything more coherent. You might just think you're having a slightly awkward casual encounter in a toilet, but you could hold in your hands the future of an award-winning frequent fanzine. Graham's version of our conversation has more narrative momentum and more sticking power, as has this fanzine for the past four years, and on reflection that's fine. It's surely not such a bad thing to go down in posterity as the person who inspired *Vibrator* to rise again.— Claire Brialey

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## ANDREW DARLINGTON WRITES ON THE MEDIA'S APPROPRIATION OF SF

Hello Graham, Television ads are strange, don't you think? What deluded agency persuaded its clients of the need to connect with a youthful demographic via that new-fangled Rap fad?... I mean, kids are into that kind of thing these days aren't they? So you get sad Rap attempts to promote compensation lawyers, foreign holidays, and a rapping bear doing Rice-Rice baby. Is that funny? It wasn't even cutting-edge decades ago. As per

William Gibson, the future might be here, but it's unevenly distributed. For there are at least two TV-ads that prove exactly how far science-fictional ideas have been seamlessly absorbed into the mainstream. There's one where characters in a hi-tech lab climb aboard a Peugeot 5008 SUV, demonstrating its inner 7-seat spaciousness almost in passing, the girl driver keys it into motion, and accelerates it through a kind of Stargate portal – 'Enter A New Dimension' runs the strapline as they cruise along a raised highway over ocean, soundtracked to John Newman's "Love Me Again", where a huge orca rears from the surface to backflip over them. The multiverse-slipping between reality-planes needs no explanation. It's just a useful metaphor. The other – for the 'Thinkbox' system, is a fully-compressed one-minute movie which opens with an alien fleet arriving and a ship broadcasting from Earth orbit onto every TV – 'Oola Oola Zod!', a UFO-watcher in a camper van races to the coordinates as military helicopters circle and troops set up a defensive perimeter, the ship lands – only for it to be crushed under the wheel of the geek's white camper van. It's a case of relative proportions, the bombastic six-toed alien is tiny. Of course, it's a plot stolen intact from Katherine Maclean's "Pictures Don't Lie", adapted by Bruce Stewart into the 11 August 1962 ABC-TV 'Out Of This World' stand-alone, a full black-and-white sixty-minute drama – introduced by Boris Karloff, broadcast to then-stunning effect. I remember the Sense Of Wonder shock turn-around as I watched it in our frontroom. The 'Red Brick Road' ad obviously has higher production values, each sequence is character-detailed movie-quality, yet it's done to concise comic effect. All our SF revelations reduced to the service of commercial merchandising...!

*Thanks Andy. The sophistication and ease of modern CGI has a lot to answer for, I fear, when it can seamlessly reconstruct old footage of dead stars such as Audrey Hepburn for chocolate adverts. Soon reality won't count for much. We will believe anything we see, no matter how unlikely, and our TV myths will go down for future generations as 'reality' and 'actuality'. It might even be possible to reconstruct Trump as a Humanitarian Saviour.)*

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## Talkin' 'bout Ma, Ma, Gen- Generation

By Graham James

I've seen a mention that the next issue of this veritable fanzine will be the last and so I do a quick note to Grah asking if this is the case. He confirms that this is no fake news. I start to wonder why. Has he been ordered to cease publication as part of an initiative to prohibit opinion outside of social media? Are there insufficient photographs, quizzes, hyperlinks and a total lack of large type fonts with coloured backgrounds? I stop wondering and the germ of an idea surfaces.

Maybe a parting shot from me would be timely. I mean, I have only locked the zine once. I reply with the suggestion. "Ok" says Charnock, "Write me something about music and add in Simon Ounsley". Fuck it I think, so he reckons a) all I can do is write about music and b) My writing would be improved with the addition of a few ounces of Ounsley which I would agree myself is a valid point, so mission accomplished.

Right. Music then. And, if you're keeping up, here's a second musical reference - It may help to listen to the B-52s 'Is that you Mo-dean' before, during or after you read this article.

The original Vibrator emerged in the seventies, at least 2 generations hence. I surfaced on planet earth bang in the middle of what is described in some cultures as 'the 20th century' which of course is grossly inaccurate terminology serving only to limit historical understanding and reinforce religious doctrine. It gets worse when we now chop up periods of time and refer to them as 'the sixties', 'the seventies' etc. I suspect this has something to do with the commercialisation of just about everything and limiting historical perspectives.

I am, therefore a 'child of the sixties' despite being conceived in 1949 and being born in May 1950 and living 10 years of the 'fifties' before the sixties began, which of course was a few years on from 1960 anyway. When did 'Decade-talk' start to dominate? Well clearly there was the 'roaring '20s', a decade not dissimilar to the present times where there is a media dominance of celebrities, sports and sporting icons and stars of the screen. Albeit, the screen's definition has somewhat widened. After that, there are identifiable traits describing the following decades ('30s = depression) but it was not until the '60s where generation labels really gained prominence and they began to be associated with youth, people and cultures and sub-cultures.

To what or to whom could this be attributed? Well, judging by the subtle reference in this article's title, Who indeed? At the very least, the band's singles alone give something of a clue to the feel of the times and, perhaps, resonate with this fanzine's hallmarks and not least its editor:-

The early singles comprised:- 'Can't explain'. 'Anyway anyhow anywhere I choose'. 'My Generation'. 'Substitute'. 'The kids are alright'. 'I'm a boy'. 'Pictures of Lily'. 'Happy Jack'. 'I can see for miles'. 'Pinball Wizard'.

.... and, they deal variously with alienation, growing assertion of youth rights, political awakening, gender identity, exploitation, awareness of differences and not least masturbation.

So decade-nostalgia grew as did Generational labels. Perhaps the most nauseating one being 'Millenials', born in the '80s & 90s' and allegedly having social liberal attitudes. They are followed by Generation Z who are of course 'technologically savvy' although one could dub that 'technologically subservient'.

Before that, there was 'Generation X' (cue Billy Idol) a cohort born from around the mid-sixties to the early '80s. Despite being really children of the sixties they were apparently

entrepreneurial. So one step back and we have 'My Generation' which was the 'baby boomers'. I guess this portrays a vista of millions of dead soldiers and civilians in WW2 and the returning troops rampantly bonking with formerly left behind women who had been running the factories, munitions and industry only to be turned into compliant breeding housewives who washed their doorsteps and made their washing whiter than white. Men could have their dinner brought to the table after a hard day's slog in the factory and then settle down to have a smoke and watch TV for the rest of the evening.

Little wonder that my generation rebelled.

To some degree, Graham's fandom generation was a little different from mine. He had already scaled the fannish ladder and was, with Pat, Fan GoH at Yorcon 1 which was only my second convention. I recall little from that con despite my close association with its organisers. I do remember though chatting in the bar area when Michael Moorcock came up behind me and feigned a stabbing motion in my back, accompanied by the words "So you're Graham James then?" Kinda strange in that I'd only just arrived on the fannish scene and had yet to create havoc, let alone make a mark. It was only penning this article that the possibility occurred to me that Charnock might have had something to do with that. But of course, although Graham and I might now be grouped under one generational label, that's about as likely as Graham settling down to write LoCs with the free time gained through his impending fanzine retirement.

I can't recall anything particularly scurrilous about Graham at Yorcon 1 and I don't really remember any encounters although there must have been some as I am the proud owner of The Astral League's Golden Greats. I guess our mutual associations with Don were something we had in common. After both fading from contact with mainstream fandom it wasn't until we exchanged the odd pleasantry and insult in a couple of on-line groups (which shall remain nameless, least they offend Lilian Edwards) that our paths crossed again and we subsequently bumped into each other at a few gatherings. One of them was in York, when I walked into the bar and Graham promptly stood up and walked over to me and asked me what I wanted to drink. That was actually my first meeting with fans for maybe 20 years so it did rather make me feel welcome, such that I have subsequently been moderately polite to Graham on various media forums and have only been told by him to 'Fuck Off' on one occasion. Must try harder.

So, I'm wondering. Is the 'last issue' announcement a little like a band's farewell tour which serves only to reawaken an audience and be followed by a reunion tour? What will fill the void? Has Pat Charnock already put down a marker? I think the answer is not unadjacent to the question in Generation theory, namely what follows 'Generation Z'. My guess is Generation AI. Such will be the way of the fanzine. A self-replicating zine which mines past events, re-posts older works, jogs memories, celebrates 'x' years friendship, wishes you happy birthday, gives you the daily weather forecast for your zone of the planet and generally urges you to accumulate '000s of friends so you will never feel lonely. What do you mean it's already here?

And as 'Mo-dean' draws to a close, I hear the final chorus: "Astral projector, Astral projector" .... and I wonder: What will be the next piece of music? How will Graham now spend his time, free of a monthly publishing schedule? It's been a great achievement, several awards have flowed and it has taken us to some places we've never been. Perhaps we should all club together and buy him a box set to watch quietly from his arm chair in his study? But what? Hmm, there's a TV series which has something to do with SF – 'The Next Generation' That's it, but I wonder again, will there be one?

■ Graham James

*(EDITOR: I promised Graham James a rejoinder on this reflective article, although now I'm not sure what I have to say. Except that the older you get the more the generational thing seems to become either more or less important. I know from my own experience it exists in my interaction with fellow fans I meet socially. Let's face, it I am an old, rather unattractive sexual prospect for many people, be they male or female, and despite what the feminists tell you, sexuality is an important bargaining point in human relationships, as well as being an important vector in social fandom.)*

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## A GREEK ODYSSEY

### By Graham Charnock

*(EDITOR: An issue of Vibrator, especially the last one, would not be complete without a fannish travelogue. Here is one I made several decades earlier.)*

I don't know who had the idea first, but I suspect it was Chris Priest. He had recently been smitten with Rosie Dalton, a tall willowy girl who worked as an editor at Chris's publisher Faber & Faber. I think he imagined if he could entice her away to an exotic Greek island he stood a good chance of seducing her. He found a tour company which offered trips to the isle of Paxos, in the Ionian Sea, which seemed to fulfil all his criteria of being idyllic and a suitably romantic venue for his amorous advances. Malcolm Edwards at that time was a librarian, and had yet to set about building his Publishing Empire, and controlling British sf publication for more years than was healthy. He was married to Christine, also a librarian, he had met at work. I was a bookseller and thwarted writer and married to Pat Charnock who would later go on to reach greater glory as editor of Wrinkled Shrew than I could ever aspire to. I had known Chris since he too was a fan. Chris invited us all to join him and Rosie on an Epic aAdventure.

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So the day came and eventually we gathered outside the McDonalds across the road from Kings Cross Station and after a while shivering in the early morning dawn wondering what we had got ourselves into, a coach duly arrived. We jockeyed for seats, well, just tried to get seats within reasonable proximity of each other, although it was noticeable that certain travellers immediately barged their way to the front of the vehicle, most noticeably



Malcolm and Christine. I love Malcolm but he has always been somewhat embarrassingly transparent about his priorities. It's not even that the front of the coach was a strategically optimum location; they just seemed to go for it on a matter of principle.

I don't remember much of the journey down to the channel ports. I assumed we all waved at sheep in the fields as we passed them by. I don't remember much of the experience on the ferry either, although I have photographs of Pat in a silly straw hat. No one was sick. It wasn't until we reached France that the Big Adventure really began.



Pat waits for the ferry at Dover

First stop Paris. The coach company had not booked any overnight accommodation but simply went from hotel to hotel where they obviously had contacts discharging passengers as and when there were vacancies. Pat and I ended up in a hotel in the Place Pigalle. The Place Pigalle then, as probably now, was a notorious red light district and the hotel was basic and clean but with incredibly uncomfortable hard bedding and bolsters which gave you the impression they did not normally expect their regular clientele to stay for more than a few hours at a time. I took a walk through the district in a spirit of adventure and for the first time in my life was propositioned by a prostitute. I made my excuses and left.

We moved on, speeding across Europe at a rate of knots with as few stoppages as the drivers could manage. They managed to keep going virtually 24/24 by the simple expedient of switching drivers while the coach was in motion hurtling along motorway at more than seventy miles an hour. The almost balletic, and obviously carefully practised, precision with which one driver replaced the other while the coach never reduced speed was a wonder to behold. Occasionally they would allow us a stop for comfort breaks. Towards the end of our journey, in Italy, I experienced the effects of massive inflation when buying basic goods at motorway station and being given \*change\* in the form of sweets, which were kept in a jar on the checkout. Otherwise Italy was a bit of a disappointment; I remember passing through drab industrial vistas, rather than the views of hills and olive fields and archaic remains that I had imagined. Eventually we arrived at Brindisi.

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Brindisi is a city in the Apulia region of Italy, the capital of the province, off the coast of the Adriatic Sea. Historically, the city has played an important role in commerce and culture, due to its position on the Italian Peninsula and its natural port. The city is a major centre for trade with Greece, Turkey and the Middle East.

In Brindisi we said goodbye to the coach and drivers that had been our colourful but slightly offhand and dangerous companions across Europe.

From Brindisi there was a direct ferry link to Corfu. It was an overnight journey and we found ourselves in a cabin in which it was impossible to sleep. It was hot and there was no ventilation, just the overwhelming smell of diesel oil and the constant thrum of the engines. A bit like being in a claustrophobic hell.

Finally arriving in Corfu was a blessing and a relief. From Corfu to Paxos, our ultimate destination, there was another ferry, but it was a much smaller scale event and a far shorter journey, some three and a half hours. We arrived eventually at Gaios, the major town on Paxos. On the arrival wharf we watched a Land Rover belonging to slightly richer tourists than ourselves being offloaded by cranes.

We stumbled off the boat and breathed in the warm Mediterranean air. Now our holiday could begin. Or could it?

We were among a group of weary travellers all booked with the same company and we waited with eager anticipation for the company's representative to arrive and apportion accommodation to us. She had a clipboard and a list and worked her way through it, methodically thinning out the small crowd until only our party remained. She looked at us in a quizzical fashion that clearly said: "And who the fuck are you lot?"

She went away, made phone calls, and came back to tell us we had apparently cancelled our trip with the company several months earlier and she not only had no record of us, but had no accommodation to offer us.

Any other rep might have abandoned us at that point, but she was supremely professional and she settled us in a small restaurant in the town square and went away again. The restaurant was nice and friendly and went a small way to ameliorate our feelings of having been deserted.

It was the kind of place you were not only allowed to wander through the kitchen choosing your dish, but were positively encouraged to do so. It also represented our first encounter with Greek island cats, an obviously in-bred race, but which had so far not exhibited any worrying genetic traits. They swarmed around our table, obviously well-trained to beg for scraps and tid-bits. The town square was warm and pleasant and although I could envisage myself sleeping out under the stars that night, it wasn't a prospect I particularly looked forward to.

The rep returned and told us she had found somewhere for us. It was a bit of a beggars-can't-be-choosers situation so we went along with it. The place looked cold and empty, but

at least it had walls and bedrooms. We made ourselves at home in the kitchen and tried to light the stove, which promptly exploded. It was fortunate that none of us was particularly hungry.

Christine left us to explore the bedrooms and soon we heard a piercing scream, and she rushed into the room, trembling, and pointing inarticulately, her face a mask of frozen horror just like in a movie. We took up our flaming torches and went where no tourists dared to go, and certainly where no disposable extras in cheap movies would go. The bedrooms were all dark, but we flicked on the light in one and beheld the horror that Christine had witnessed.

Sitting silently in a chair in the middle of the room was an old lady in a black dress. Fortunately she was alive although she didn't speak English, or, in fact, any language at all. Her son had apparently negotiated a good deal with the rep, but failed to tell her the villa was occupied. He had told his mother (for it was she) just to stay schtum and say nothing. How he imagined we were going to stay there for two weeks and not notice her, I can't imagine.

The next morning it was back to the rep. She went away to negotiate and came back. She told us she had found a place new to the market, owned by a family who had never rented before, so she couldn't vouch for its state or condition. We were back to beggars and choosers.

In fact the place proved to be a real find. It was some way up a hillside from the main town, which was good for constitutional walks, but moreover it was owned by a lovely family who lived nearby, who were friendly and attentive. The man of the family was a fisherman who had his own caique and who could take us on trips to sandy coves on the nearby Anti-Paxos island. His son was an adolescent who had obviously noted the charms of the often scantily-bikini-clad Rosie and took every opportunity to hang out with us. In the evening his wife visited with local treats such as squid pickled in ouzo and we tested out our primitive grasp of the Greek language (mainly acquired through phrase books) on her. In truth, it was a pretty idyllic experience., and warmed us towards the friendliness of the Greek people in general.

After a few days the pleasures of Paxos began to impress themselves upon us.

Paxos and Antipaxos are the largest islands in the smallest homogenous group of Ionian Islands (the Heptanese). In Greek its plural form is Paxi. Antipaxos is famous for its wine and two of the finest sand beaches in the Ionian Sea.

The main town of the more populated Paxos and the seat of the municipality was Gaios, where our ferry had landed.

In Greek mythology, Poseidon created the island by striking Corfu with his trident, so that he and wife Amphitrite could have some peace and quiet. The Paxi have been heavily developed since we visited them and are now mainly sustained by tourism. In the 1970s they were far more rustic and characteristically Greek. When we arrived, roads were stony

and gravelled, and untended goats grazed the olive trees that bordered them. Lizards could be glimpsed scuttling between one dry stone and another, much as I imagine they can still be found today. Mosquitoes I'm sure will still wake you at night if you stay in a villa or farmhouse, and goats and cockerels will still wake you in the morning. There was one hotel on Paxos when we visited it. Now, by Googling, I see there are five. I don't suppose mosquitoes, goats or cockerels will trouble you if you stay at any of them, in air-conditioned luxury.

In the morning I would get up and walk down the steep track from our villa into the town of Gaios. Usually it took ten or fifteen minutes. No matter what time I arrived in the town, it was always awake with some level of activity. There were several premises with communal ovens which cooked bread for the local residents. Occasionally they would let you buy it. The bars, too, were always open early, or perhaps they had not closed from the night before. You could even buy stamps for your postcards at the local tabac and we spent many happy hours sipping cold beer and writing postcards home under the bourgainvillaea.

The local quayside restaurants were firing up their ovens and barbecues, whilst scrawny slinky cats prowled around them making no pretence about their objective to steal and eat anything and everything and anything they could find.

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For all that, Chris Priest didn't find it particularly convivial. I don't think he was getting anywhere with Rosie romantically and did not easily adapt to the casual way of life the rest of us were finding quite attractive. The island had obviously not lived up to his expectations and so he decided to take an early bath and get a flight home.

The rest of us got on with it. We swam in the harbour in the crystal clear sea, and we visited the small ruined fort just offshore. We hired motor scooters and trekked off to the more distant areas of the island. Some of us even fell off our scooters and grazed ourselves pretty badly. I had already contracted a bad case of sun-burn and was happy to watch the skin peel off my thighs. It was hard to find sun-block in those days.

Memorably we fancied ourselves as sea-farers. Our host had taken us around the island on his caique and we hadn't seen anything risky in the venture. The seas had been calm, the coves blue and translucent.

We had a boat with an outboard motor included in the rental and set off on our own journey around the island's coastline. I won't say the sea was rough, but it was distinctly choppy, and our boat was a lot smaller than the caique we had experienced before, and soon I began to entertain fantasies about a group of British tourists swamped and drowned in a freak boating accident in Greece that would probably not even be reported back at home.

Malcolm assured me cheerily that such a fantasy was nonsense; he was after all the self-appointed skipper of our boat and leader of our proud expedition. Then the outboard motor died. We were miles from port and really knew nothing about local sea conditions.

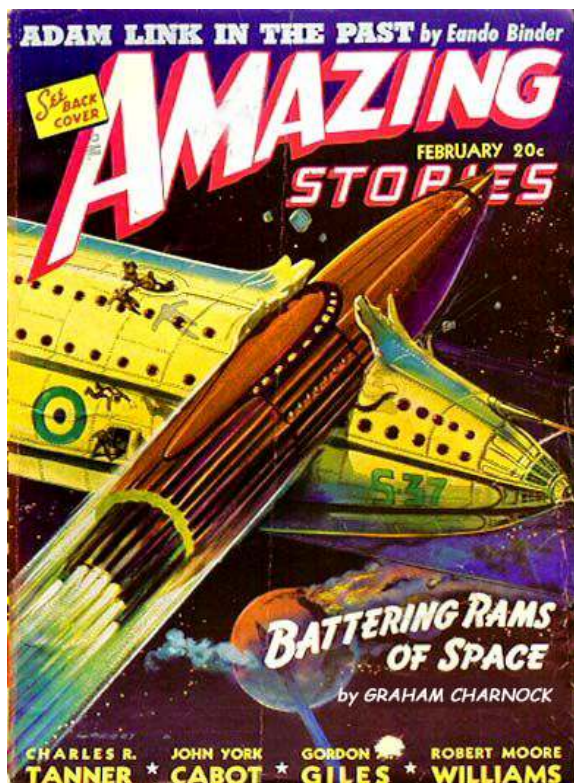
We didn't even have any oars on board, let alone buoyancy devices. And of course mobile phones were then only a future fantasy. Probably nobody even knew we were out there, bobbing unpowered on the cold cruel sea and certainly nobody cared or would miss us. Maybe someone would notice when I didn't make my daily trip down to the town bakery for a morning loaf, but most likely they wouldn't.

I was wondering who would volunteer to be eaten first while Malcolm laboured over the outboard and finally managed to spark it back into life. Oh, how we all laughed over our foolish anxieties as we chugged back to the shore. As soon as we arrived back at Gaios I headed for the church in the town square and made a pact with God, a down-installment on owing Him my life.

All too soon we had to leave our island life behind. We hit Corfu in the early evening and our return ferry was not until the morning. The others went to a local cafe intending to drink the night away, but it was a balmy evening so I decided to sleep out rough on a bench. I can't say I was comfortable but my weeks as a sort of Greek Island pioneer had perhaps hardened me to discomfort. We picked up the coach for the return trip. I remember Rosie parking herself on two seats and claiming that she was entitled to because her partner had died during the holiday. It didn't wash. The coach filled up anyway with ad hoc impromptu travellers who had been squeezed on board 'for a small consideration'. They mostly lay in the aisles.

The adventure was over. I think one conclusion can be drawn and that is that none of us ever wanted to spend time on holiday with each other ever again. That was fine with me.

--Graham Charnock



## BATTERING RAMS OF SPACE

*(EDITOR: I've never been a big fan of fan-fiction in fanzines not since I used to publish it when I was seventeen years old. But this was sparked by a cover illo I saw on a fan group and, dammit, I'm going to publish it while I still have a chance:*

Kevin Flinchcock, Space Trooper Third Class, knew he might have made a mistake when he signed up for the Battering Ram Legion. The recruiting sergeant, Gonzo Butthead, was a silver haired bull of a man whose eyes ran up and down Kevin's leggy frame picking out every maladjusted feature of his uniform, and then scuttled back to his face, where they sat glaring malevolently, whilst occasionally

lapsing into limpid blue pools, somewhere in the Caribbean.

"You realize, Flinchcock, your chances of surviving this mission are several million to one. We don't call our elite squadron of out-of-date space tubs battering rams for nothing."

"It would be an honour to die for the Galaxy Rangers, sir," said Flinchcock.

Gonzo ignored him because he didn't really understand what Flinchcock was saying, and because, like pigeons, he shared a different frame-rate of perception than normal people, and thus always saw everything in slow motion. But at least he was never hit by cars whilst crossing the road, or even sitting in the middle of the road picking over a dead rat's carcass.

"I'd like to know what makes you think you are qualified for space-ramming," he said.

"Well my father was a rammer," said Kevin, feeling the hackles on the back of his neck rise, even as those on the front of his chest relaxed, "and his grandfather and his grandmother before him. I think his grandfather's grandfather was a miner in the Klondyke so I'm not sure about him, whilst his grandmother's grandmother played football for Bolton Wanderers."

"I'm impressed," said Gonzo. "If anyone deserves to die it is you. Sign here."

Flinchcock's eyes ran over the form and then, having read it, ran out of the room screaming. There was no mention of free ice-cream in the small print.

Three weeks later, after undergoing basic training, which largely entailed him laying in a hotel bed, watching endless loops of Debbie Does Dallas and gargling with marshmallows, Kevin approached the gates of Space City's Mega Spaceport, where a small man with shallow eyes ran them over his rangy figure and then scrutinized his identity card. They then moved to Kevin's left sleeve where they stayed, for no real reason. After due deliberation he allowed Kevin in, and then his eyes ogled his buttocks as he walked away. They were tight, very tight. In fact they were the tightest eyes in the Universe.

Kevin followed the signs to the Space Tug Lot and finally found the ship that he had been assigned to, although not before first falling over a limbless beggar who tried to warn him about his future.

"My father lost his legs in a battering ram ship," said the cripple. "Whereas I just walked under a truck, whose driver had lapsed into a diabetic coma after eating too many doughnuts. My prediction is that you will die horribly, possibly by using your spaceship as a battering ram."

"I can live with that," said Kevin, displaying a masterful lack of understanding of what living entailed.

Kevin's ship was a squat ugly machine resembling Donald Trump in his heyday. A gnarled space pirate, whose name badge proclaimed him to be Rolf Harris, and who claimed to be its captain, was tossing a nickel outside its entry ramp. He stopped tossing when Kevin approached, which Kevin was eternally grateful for.

“Welcome to the *Ian Kilminster Sings Perry Como*,” said the shrivelled walnut of a commander. “This ship has seen action off the Fabled Horns of Orkney. It has run into dream torpedoes off the Shoals of Eshkalon. It has run the gauntlet of the Wraiths of C.P.McKenzie and seen Fresh Shadows merging off the Dover Banks. But beware, the ship’s computer is a bit cranky and complains of constantly beating its head against a wall.”

Kevin went aboard and joined the rest of the crew in the Ship’s Mess. There was Oswald Messiter, a tech android who could also excrete milk from his nipples. He greeted Kevin with an arcane sign, which Kevin ignored. There was Angelina Jollytits, a Scandinavian writer of noir novels who didn’t really know what she was doing here, except perhaps to lend local colour and talk about antique pens, which she collected. There was also Claudesta Punchinski, a long-legged Russian beauty who was there only to pleasure the rest of the crew and to cook her signature meal of Schrepke with Noodles.

The only other member of the crew was a cloned dino-dog called Rowf who did little but sleep and fart. But he liked having his stomach tickled. It was rumoured he could also shape-shift.

Kevin ordered a skinny latte from the Boozecomp, and sat back as Angelina regaled him with tales of the many Parker pens she had found on eBay, and the pride of her collection, a 1942 Conway Stewart with a tortoiseshell barrel. Claudesta served some Schrepke but Kevin had to decline them because they contain processed cheese which was against his religious beliefs.

The charismatic Rolf Harris appeared and said, “We sail tomorrow, shipmates. A fleet of alien Space Bees has been detected off the orbs of Manilow, and are due to arrive in a few hours.”

“In that case,” ventured Kevin, “Shouldn’t we sail sort of immediately.”

“Ah, it’s obvious you know nothing of the timewinds of the spaceways, you stripling,” said Rolf. “Come up to my cabin and I will initiate you. Although it will involve maps and a virtual reality headset, made by Sony.”

Three years later the *Ian Kilminster Sings Perry Como* blasted off to engage the incoming swarm of alien space bees. Kevin had grown a long beard by this time so was precluded from handling the ship’s guidance controls, simple though they were, consisting of something resembling a lollypop stick. He had to be satisfied by shouting out directions, such as ‘Up...left....right...down...up...down...’ and so on. I won’t bore you with a long list of his options.

“We are now entering Battering Ram Mode,” said the Cranky Computer in a Scottish accent resembling Sean Connery’s. “Prepare to die, you squidgy mortal flesh-worms.”

The *Ian Kilminster etc* engaged the enemy fleet. Everybody wrestled with their controls while lights flashed and spools of computer tape whirled. It was like being in a very bad twentieth century Japanese toilet, or else a movie starring James Coburn. Some of the

female crew members were forced to wear hot-pants while this happened. The *Ian Kilminster Sings Perry Como* attempted to ram everything in sight, but the lollypop stick broke quite early on and the ship eventually zoomed intact through a black hole and returned to orbit around a very small green planet orbiting a class 3 sun, or maybe a class 4.

Kevin wondered what it had all been about, but couldn't come to any firm conclusion. But at least he had a pension for life.

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## *Ten Stories That Should Not be Told*

By Taral Wayne

Some people have no shame ... I'm one of them, or I would have nothing to write about at the moment.

Other people almost always have something to hide, though. Perhaps they sew designer labels onto their Wal-Mart jeans, or discard mounds of used coffee pods, camouflaged as regular coffee from Yuban. Whatever it is, *everyone* has something to hide. Everyone, that is, except me. I am perfectly prepared to reveal ten things that I have not revealed to another human being ... until this moment.

### **In my childhood, my mother rode a goat**

Both my father and my mother were crazy about animals, and were particularly partial to breeding dogs. I was knee-deep in the bloody creatures as I grew up. Dogs were only the half of it, too. You can be sure that we had cats in equal numbers. At one time or another, my folks nurtured rats, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, squirrels, fish by the bucket, budgies, canaries, parrots, an immature iguana, two kinds of monkey, a horse ... I'm sure I missed a few species somewhere.

My mother spent half her life grooming, feeding and cleaning up after animals. It seemed to satisfy some deeply felt urge in her that I could not fathom. I liked animals well enough as a kid, but rarely found them interesting enough to turn me away from the television set. Then, there were those days when I realized that the family poodle was trying to hump me as I watched cartoons, and in those moments I sincerely wanted a Daisy air rifle for Christmas...

For sheer entertainment value, though, I never forgot the day my mother rode the goat. Much as I liked summer car trips, the destinations never turned out to be anything as cool as a drag race, or a guillotine museum. Instead, I recall endless barns and auctions. Crowded as our family's apartment in Toronto was, we had our own spinning wheel, a cobbler's bench and I think maybe even a butter churn ... non-functional, of course. But for my parents, the search for authenticity was insatiable. We were always scouting for more countrified cast-offs that had seen better days. One day while looking for a hay



thresher, or something equally picturesque, Mom dragged me into a dark, gloomy-looking barn, from where a mournful bleating rose up that sounded like lost souls.

They were – as you probably guessed – goats, and I was not anxious to stay any longer among all that hay and manure than I had to. But Mom was *determined* to lean over the pen to fondle one of the goats ... one with a particularly evil cast in its eye, and its fur all in knots. Before we knew it, Mom had fallen in!

Whether her coat sleeve had snagged on one of the brute's horns, or the creature had dragged Mom in on purpose, only the goat knew for sure. But Mom could not let go, and a moment later she was right on the goat's back, riding it hell-bent for leather! My dad arrived in time to get a grip of Mom's coat, and had her back out of the pen a moment later, but ... that coat was never the same again.

If you ever had a chance to ride a goat yourself, my mother's advice was to smoke a very cheap cigar that had been put out with piss instead.

### **I rode in a dress with Robert A. Heinlein**

In 1976 I was doing my darndest to express myself in ways that I had never tried before ... but it would soon become apparent I shouldn't have. The idea was not a fling with costuming or cross-dressing, but to adopt the style of my fictional extraterrestrial characters. I *should* have known this was a line that was not to be crossed, but you cannot know your limits unless you make a fool of yourself!

I had two outfits, actually. The lime-green one with the mini-skirt was the more socially acceptable. Had this been ancient Greece, I might have pulled it off. I'm still rather partial to that one, and wore the upper part as an ordinary shirt for some time. The other outfit was a skimpy, silver lamé pullover that no one who wasn't a visiting humanoid superbeing had any business trying to wear.

You are only young once, however, and I took the chance to see how much nerve I was capable of.

*MidAmericon* was a landmark of a Worldcon ... as well as a *landmine*. Robert A. Heinlein had not attended any convention for years, so his return as Guest of Honour was not without a certain amount of contention, as his views had hardened more than *slightly* in the intervening decades. Personally, I was not overjoyed with the occasion, and during the keynote speech I handed out mimeographed paper neckties to indicate that the GoH had requested that this be a formal occasion.

Handing out the paper ties was as close as I ever expected to approach the famous writer, as he was usually accompanied by an extensive entourage. But when I called for an elevator, the elevator door whisked open and I stepped into the cage alone with Robert A. Heinlein himself!

I was wearing the green mini skirt. He looked at me in silence for a moment, then politely asked if I was dressed in honour of my Scottish ancestry. I should have nodded “yes,” and left it at that. But I blurted out a half-coherent explanation that was made more humiliating by the author calmly stepping out of the elevator, as though he did this sort of thing all the time.

It was probably just as well that I was out of paper ties.

### **Stuck in mud to my neck with Victoria Vayne**

It’s possible that many fans under the age of fifty don’t remember Victoria, but during her time in fanzine fandom she and I were almost always co-conspirators in crime. We each had our own fanzines, but published *DNQ* jointly, and went to most conventions together until she dropped out of fandom, around 1982 or ’83. We never quite became an “item,” although we had given it a lot of thought. The chemistry just wasn’t quite right. Among other differences between us, we were never comfortable with the same *kinds* of risk.

Not that we didn’t end up in some ridiculous situations.

I don’t remember how we got on the topic, but it seemed that both of us had shared just enough experience in the area of mud baths to drive to a mud hole – lost in the impenetrable twists and turns of the Don River that nobody ever went to – and go skinny dipping. The place smelled of swamp gas, sucked noisily and was deep enough to arouse some little concern about just *how* deep it was. But most of all, it was very private. A wonderful place for a suicide pact, I suppose, but that was certainly not among our intentions. As it was, the grip on the mud was tenacious enough to take some effort to extract ourselves afterward.

It had been fun up to the point when we faced getting back into the car. During the drive home, had we been seen by any patrolling police cruisers looking like two Vaudevillian comedians in blackface, we would have had to make some very fancy explanations. Our luck held, though, and we attracted no attention from police or anyone else before we got inside and had a chance to shower.

Needless to say, that was as much reckless horsing around as Victoria was able to stand for quite a while.

Victoria dropped out of fandom after a few years, but we remained friends outside of fandom. She formed a long-standing relationship with a man named Simon ... who is also among my friends. Simon was almost the only person that Victoria would permit to poke fun at her ... and sometimes Simon could tease her pretty far. But one time in the car, I began to relate some ancient incidents. It wasn’t necessary to specify which incidents, only to allude to things that Simon never expected to hear. That Victoria had had “*risqué*”

adventures of *any* sort surprised him, and provoked a delighted laugh. Apparently it is still possible, in this modern era, to blush.

### **I remember the very first person I ever saw who was black**

To most American fans, this probably seems a literally unbelievable statement. But there were simply *no* black people when I grew up in Toronto!

Thinking about it, there must have been *some*. It was a city of about a million people in 1960. But visible minorities of any kind were few before that time. Now and then, I would hear of someone with a Polish or Greek surname, and I recall when the first pizzeria opened in my neighborhood. But it seemed that I was never directly exposed to anyone who was visibly *different*. I only knew of such things through the agency of American television news. My world only began to open during the rapid social and cultural changes as the decade progressed.

My first sight of an actual black man was a sensational event to me. I think I may have only been three or four at the time. I have a clear memory of sitting on a wooden seat next to my mother in one of the ancient streetcars that were still operated by the Toronto Transit Commission. The new, modern PPC cars were gradually replacing the old rolling stock from the '30s, but those were still in use well into my childhood. And, brother! ... those wooden seats were hard on a tender young bum! I was fidgeting to get comfortable when I happened to notice a man a few feet away from me, seated on one of the side benches, and my eyes nearly bugged out. A real *black* man! The first I had ever seen with my own eyes. I wanted to stare, of course, but my mother knew better manners, and brought me to heel.

I don't think I actually knew a single black student in school until early in grade school, when two small girls with long black pigtails joined my class. I only remember the name of one of them – Frederica. Perhaps it stuck in my mind because it seemed like a very odd name to me. A girl named "Fred?" *That* didn't seem right.

But world events were hurtling forward at blinding speed. My family were able to take a number of car trips through the United States in the early 1960s, a couple of them as far as Florida.

Once we were in the deep South, all things changed drastically. The people spoke in a strange tongue, and breakfast menus listed food I had never even heard spoken of before. Grits? Pecans? Dr. Pepper? Even more strange was the unexpected vehemence with which most Southerners we encountered spoke of the new American President, John F. Kennedy. In short, they mostly hated his guts. He was *Catholic*, you know, and took orders directly from the Pope.

Still, nothing quite shocked me as much as some of the outright squalor I saw on those trips ... places where I was told that black sharecroppers lived.

It was one thing to pass them by at 65 m.p.h., but another thing entirely when we had stopped for gas, and I had to ask where the bathroom was. I thought I had followed directions, so must have turned right instead of left, but indeed I did come an open door, nearly jammed shut, and a bathroom so *filthy* that you couldn't touch *anything*. I almost think I left the place cleaner just by pissing in it. I did my best to jam the door shut again, and before leaving, out of the corner of my eye I saw something I had missed before.

“Coloured only.”

A lot has changed since then. Toronto became more worldly and more sophisticated, and even coloured bathrooms have long ago become things of the past.

I only hope that I won't stare rudely at the first extraterrestrial I see in the LRT.

### **Sleeping with a wool rag taught me to cheat**

I was only four or five, and had just begun kindergarten. I was a precocious kid who could already read, and was disgusted with the other kids who could not. Our teacher gave us Dr. Seuss's "500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins" to read in class, which was my introduction to the writer. To my surprise, most of the students were not only unable to read, they could not even pronounce "Bartholomew!" I owe my precocity entirely to the funny pages, which my mother read to me religiously.

As I recollect, I only lived on that street for about a year. We were next to a high wooden wall that separated the street from the railroad tracks, and when the engines – not diesels, but steam locomotives – roared by, the tracks, the road and my entire backyard shook like a guttering candle. Even more amazing, black snow fell from the sky, even in the hot summer. Such were the fading glories of the Steam Age when I was four.

Out back of where I lived, there was a long field of uncut grass. It led from my home to my school, down the street. I didn't know it at the time, but in the field was an abandoned track, probably part of the system of local stations that once linked the city. I only knew that it was dangerously dilapidated, and I was told on no account to go anywhere near it. Naturally, all the kids were as curious as hell, and every one of them was dying to investigate. But it was clearly very spooky, too, so no one would go in the place. I was willing to take my chances by disobeying my parents ... but only as far as hanging around on the covered platform. The station building itself was entirely out of bounds.

Perhaps it was by flirting with one sort of disobedience that the idea was put in my head to attempt another act of disobedience.

I had recently been given a plastic toy rifle that I was in love with – the first of many toy guns that would follow me through my life – but I was upset when I was told to go to bed ... *and-put-it-away-until-tomorrow!* I lay in bed as unhappy as grilled cheese stuck to the pan, and just couldn't sleep for thinking about it. That was when I had a deliciously evil

idea. The potential was enormous, and it was so simple, and so perfect, that I knew it *had* to work ... even though I was disobeying my parents, and *could not possibly get away with it!*

The key to the caper was my “Woolie.” It was a woolly blanket that I had slept with longer than I could remember, and I would not go to sleep without it rolled up next to me under the sheets. It usually ended up as a wad at the bottom of the bed, but nevertheless I had to have it before I would go to sleep. As unlikely as it must seem to any grown-up lad of ten, I still had that “Woolie” years later. I absolutely did not actually *have* to have it by then, you understand ... but if I had my “Woolie,” I slept better. You wouldn’t want the monsters to come out from under the bed, would you?

But my scheme that night was to sneak quietly out of bed – so that my father wouldn’t hear – and take the toy rifle back to bed with me. He had already checked on me the previous night, the devious bastard. I knew that as soon as I had gone to bed, he would check on me again, so I unfolded “Woolie” and then rolled it up again around the rifle. Sure enough, my trusting Dad came to see that the light was off and to be certain that I had put the rifle away. He pulled the covers down to see that there was nothing but my “Woolie” in bed with me, tell me goodnight, and I was left to gloat over my duplicity. He hadn’t noticed a thing!

Evil is its own reward, however trivial.

### **How Far Will I Go For a Slice of Pizza?**

The fact was that I would do very nearly anything for pizza when I was younger. However, I rarely had any money for it. Victoria was usually pretty good about standing me for a double-cheese and pepperoni pizza – but for some reason, *she* didn’t care for it at all. Otherwise, I was pretty much on the mercy of other people I knew.

Victoria had only begun attending our club meetings that year, and she immediately made her apartment a popular place when we needed somewhere to hang out. For one thing, there were only a couple of other places where we *could* hang out.

The apartment she rented was in a high-rise over High Park – a fairly trendy place at the time. It had a good view to the west, with a small balcony. There was a separate living room and bedroom, but there was only a kitchenette. Victoria hated cooking, in any case. Her place was well located, close to a huge, semi-wild park full of secretive trails and wooded hills, and yet right on the main drag of Bloor Street. Subway service took us downtown in only a few stops. The apartment was not large, but it was comfortable and had a very large colour television, with a soft wall-to-wall carpet for those of us who preferred to sit on the floor when watching late-night TV. Victoria’s own room was largely off-limits at first ... she had a thing about closing the bathroom door when no one was in it. She also seemed to think it improper to leave the doors open on the TV when it was

not in use. Therefore, you would not be incorrect to think that Victoria was a *little* peculiar. Since all of us were, she fit in ideally.

Quite a lot of damn-fool things happened in that apartment over the next year or so. Some of them would be quite hard to explain, yet most of them amounted to little. For instance, there was the time we filled Victoria's humidifier with cheap perfume or aftershave. Another time, we took turns stuffing ourselves into a packing crate that had been delivered. High times indeed! But we also experienced not merely the absurd, but the sublime.

Late one night that summer, we crowded out on the balcony, attracted by something odd about the clouds. We looked at the dim shapes – all but lost in the glare of Toronto night lights – yet the more we looked, the more we became convinced they were *not* clouds. It dawned on us that we were witnessing a phenomenally active display of the Northern Lights. We crowded into Victoria's one-lung Volkswagen Beetle, to high-tail it out of the city as fast as we could, so that we could view the Aurora Borealis in their full majesty.

Most of the time we had no such justification for our being at Victoria's ... we were just the usual gang of idiots who hung out at Victoria's two or three weekends a month. Now and then, however, Mike Glicksohn accepted an invitation for an evening's entertainment. Bob Wilson baked something he called Chinese Enchiladas on one occasion, and on another we spiked his whiskey with something *very* green. Glicksohn was not above getting even, now and then, particularly over the cayenne pepper in his dinner. But Mike had truly found my special weakness. On the next occasion, Mike ordered a pizza to share with the rest ... but he laid a condition upon my having any.

I was a pretty straight-laced sort of guy, despite some oddities of character, and upon hearing his conditions, I was appalled. I could have a share only if I dropped my pants *and* shorts for everyone to see. Needless to say, being in the "altogether" for everyone did not appeal to me ... not even for a slice of pizza! So I sat and stared hungrily at the hot pizza, hoist by my own petard.

Eventually, Mike offered a compromise ... I *could* have a slice of pizza, and all I would have to do was just strip to my briefs. Honour was satisfied on all sides.

### **Why I ate Patrick Neilsen Haden's snot**

This was long before he could claim the dignity of his profession, his awards or any of that. Patrick was a kid of around 17 or 18 when he came to Toronto. He had been in Arizona, and after two or three years he would leave Toronto again for Ann Arbor, Phoenix, San Francisco and – I think – eventually New York. Most likely, he had mislaid a few other destinations along the way. But my business is strictly about the time that Patrick was in Toronto.

At that time, the local gang of unkempt and argumentative fans that I hung around with – who included Victoria Vayne, Bob Wilson, Janet Wilson, Bob Webber, Phil Paine, Patrick and a number of others – usually met at Victoria Vayne’s apartment. Not the expensive apartment where we first met her, nor the one after that, in the Jamaican neighbourhood that intimidated her, but the *really* cheap basement apartment. By then, Victoria had chosen the fannish way of life with a vengeance, selling her piano and buying a top-of-the-line Gestetner 466 instead. Overnight, Victoria became the centre of fanzine fandom in Toronto. Although I also owned a mimeograph machine, mine was a primitive model made in the 1930s. But Victoria’s 466 was precision-made for colour registration, ran automatically, and – I think - baked fudge brownies. Victoria served them often enough. The apartment was not without one or two disadvantages, though.

It was tiny. The two rooms were long and narrow, and you could only get to one room by going the full length of the other. Even a small number of people blocked the room completely. Incongruously, a small bar took up space that could have been better used elsewhere. None of us were known at the time for partaking of more than an occasional beer. At any rate, we were too busy talking each others’ ears off to be bothered with drinking, and besides we were too broke because we spent our money to publish fanzines. Among our fan group, we must have published more than thirty different titles.

We didn’t always have the serious purpose of publishing our issues when we got together, however. We did a lot of horsing around as well. On one occasion, Patrick found some old, stale candy under the sofa cushions, and – for laughs – he began to twist and bend it into different shapes while I was out of the room.

After I came in, I saw that Patrick had fashioned a ring from the stuff. “What’s that?” I said, eyeing it suspiciously.

“It’s some candy I was playing with,” he replied innocently. “You want it? Bet you won’t eat it.”

Well, obviously I would have to be a total fool to refuse bet like that. So I popped it in my mouth.

Immediately, everyone turned a bit green. While I was out of the room, I hadn’t seen that Patrick had stuffed the candy deep up his nose. I suppose you might say that we had a more intimate relationship at that moment than I would ever have desired.

There didn’t seem any way to deal with this development with any sort of panache ... so I finished eating it.

Strange to say, I have experienced no enlightenment from consuming othe snot of a future editor of Tor Books.

## One day I had to beat up my father

I suppose I liked my father. That's usual with most kids. But, to tell the truth, I'm not sure I did. He didn't spend much time with me that I could remember. I mainly kept my distance, because he had a temper and sometimes he would act funny. I didn't know it until later, but he drank too much.

As far as I can tell, his drinking was under control most of the time when I was younger, and he didn't tip over the edge into full-blown alcoholism until I was ten or so. In rapid succession, he lost his job as a veterinary assistant – the best job he ever had – and uprooted our family completely. There was one crap job after another after that, followed by long periods of unemployment, and moving on a regular basis due to failure to pay the rent.

By the time he'd smashed up two cars and been arrested for drunk driving, I had left school to help support my Mother and two sisters. It wasn't a good time to find employment, it turned out. For a time, I found work in the factory that manufactured paint equipment where my father also worked. They didn't seem to have much for me to do around the plant, so I was soon at loose ends again. I had gained a certain amount of raw cunning from my father by that time. Learning how the inventory system worked, I realized that I could simply package a first-rate spray system for any active hobbyist such as myself ... then I taught *my* father how it could be done.

Dear old dad, however, was just getting worse. He went through his pay every week by checking into a hotel, then drinking and gambling his money away. Some weeks he brought nothing home at all. Then Dad lost his job for reasons ... I didn't have to imagine very hard to guess. We had been still able to pay the rent from my check, but now there was nothing coming in from either of us. We bought groceries on credit, and finally we were eating from handouts. Behind in the rent, we moved again. Dad found some other kind of work. I can barely remember how many times we went through this cycle.

Having no job prospects in sight, it seemed like a good time for me to finish my last two years of high school.

Having returned to school, I lived in a small room upstairs, whose heating duct was broken. The neighbourhood was fine, but that single semi-detached we lived in was a one-house slum. The floors were unfinished and warped, the walls had holes that you could see the lathes through, and you could peel through three or four layers of linoleum in the kitchen. To make ends meet, we had to take in a boarder, and even with three bedrooms – me, my two sisters, and the boarder – there was nowhere for my folks to sleep. They had a fold-out couch. You could imagine that this did nothing to improve my father's deteriorating disposition. He'd come in at night so loaded that he sometimes couldn't manage the front door, and slept on the veranda. When he was less lucky, he'd find the bed, but get up in the middle of the night to bump into a wall, and piss on it. He'd bumble back into bed, where I imaged Mom cringed.



For laughs, Mom and I speculated about pushing him down the stairs. It would look like an accident, surely?

That was the time in my life when my mother advised me to lock myself in at night. When Dad was drunk, he would mumble about sneaking upstairs in the middle of the night, and bashing me in the head.

As it happens, I beat him to it. I hated hiding at night. It seemed cowardly, and I could hear what horrible things went on when I was in bed. Sometimes there was evidence of it the next day. But he finally made the mistake of laying into Mom while I was awake and downstairs ... and I turned on him. Punched him down two or three times, and left him on the floor. I'd like to say that he never touched her again, but he *did* seem to be bit more restrained after that. He got the last laugh – if you can call it that – by refusing to go to work for several days, while he got over his black eyes.

Not long after that, my mother got her separation, and Dear Old Dad moved into his own place somewhere of no interest to us. Then we couldn't afford the rent, crappy as the place was, so I had to get a job again, with high school still unfinished. My sisters were in a foster home for a time, and my mother moved in with a friend. It was a black couple of years while I worked as a security guard, and got together the down payment on a two-bedroom apartment that led eventually to my Mother and my two sisters being reunited.

I'm afraid there s no joke to end this on.

But *JESUS CHRIST*, it felt so good to paste that no-good son-of-a-bitch in the mouth, and I wish I could have done it all night.

### **I was propositioned by one fan while visiting another in the hospital**

To this day, I don't know for sure. It was at a con that I recall attending three or four times in the 1970s, and remember fondly. I don't recall which con it was – I haven't been to any of those cons in at least 40 years, so my memories of the hotel lobbies, parking lots and nearby strip malls aren't as fresh as they might be.

But it is impossible not to remember the afternoon of the convention, when Linda Bushyager lost her footing on the way to lunch, rolled down a steep, grassy slope and collapsed with a broken ankle at the bottom. She spent the rest of the con in the nearest hospital, having her leg set. Of course, people were eagerly lining up to visit, and at least one card circulated around the con for fans to sign.

How I managed to get a ride to the hospital with another fan, I don't know. I may have known her name at one time, but I certainly don't remember it now. We made small talk for the first little while, but then the conversation took a decidedly peculiar turn on the steering wheel.

“My boyfriends like rough stuff.”

Say what?

My driver then proceeded to describe how she enjoyed leaving deep scratches on the backs of her lovers, and how she got a kick from drawing blood from their penises. At this point in my life, I had not even seriously considered removing a woman's clothes below the belt. Drawing blood from anyone's balls was completely out of the question. Is this what sexually liberated women talked about with men? Was this why I was a 25-year-old virgin ... because I was so hung-up and unadventurous?

More likely, my driver was an out-and-out loonie.

Fortunately, before I had to listen to very much more of this, we arrived at Linda's hospital. I leapt out of the car, grateful to be on my feet and putting distance between me and my driver.

The fact was, I was scared silly that my driver might be coming on to me. Such outré suggestions were far beyond my comfort zone.

As an artist, I've dealt with far wilder things since then ... but fortunately, I've always had the advantage of keeping my distance from my customers.

I wonder ... have I been too careful? Naw.

### **A walk on the wild side of fishy**

There are times when you just want to be silly, when inspiration fills you with impetuosity, and the time for rational action is at an end. It is time, in other words, for clowning.

On fine summer days, our club sometimes forsook the stale air of our usual habitat, and went to the Toronto Islands for an outing. The islands comprised a scattering of sandy beaches, wild brush and well-manicured parkland, opposite the downtown harbor front – a summer Mecca that cost only a ferryboat ticket. In addition to Lake Ontario and the sun, there were a number of minor attractions. There was reportedly a haunted lighthouse, for example. The German keeper disappeared, and it was said that two soldiers had murdered him. There was a small village at the eastern end of the islands that, at one time, had offered a movie theatre, dance halls, a bowling alley, restaurants, stores, a hotel, tourist cabins and grand homes. Sadly, only a few dozen homes and no commercial properties remained from the previous century ... the result of zealous park officials who unimaginatively insisted that nothing remain but picnic blankets and Frisbees. However, a petting zoo was eventually added, an amusement park for children, a topiary maze and a few minor oddities that were largely beneath notice. For sporting enthusiasts there was a yacht club – members only – and there was once a baseball stadium.

The stadium had been burned down once or twice, and it was only a dim memory by the 1930s. All the same, it had a history of some importance among ball parks. That stadium had been where, in 1914, Babe Ruth had hit his first professional home run while

playing for the Providence Grays against the Toronto Maple Leafs ... incidentally, the Grays lost.

While there wasn't really much to see if you'd been to the Islands before, it was a simply a change of pace to climb up on the upper deck of the ferry, and let the breeze off Lake Ontario refresh you. The *Sam McBride*, the *Thomas Rennie* or the *William Inglis* would suddenly churn its stern screws, and we would chug across the the lake to Ward's Island or Hanlan's Point. The small *Trillium* – over one-hundred and seven years old – also serves passengers as the only side-wheeler boat on the Great Lakes. While not exactly the Atlantic Passage, I always thought it was restful to spend a little time on the water.

And yet there was something missing on one such club outing, something that I couldn't put into words. The picnic we packed was all well and good, and the long ambling walk from Center Island, past the lighthouse and all the way to St. Andrew-by-the-Lake Church was invigorating, as usual. But the imp of the perverse had not flexed his muscles. There was just something I *needed* to do ... once I could discover what it was.

That was when I found the fish.

It had not been overly fresh when it washed up in the Centre Island lagoon, some days before. The odour of stale cod liver oil permeated the air where the offending fish bobbed, but I was magnetically drawn to the spot. A length of rough twine came to my attention a moment later. Before I knew it, I had looped the string around the tail of the fish, and hauled it on shore. Swell ... I was the proud owner of a long-dead fish, already decomposing. What came next seemed to be the only natural development after that, which was to begin dragging the thing along after me. As a fan group, we were nothing if not cool about unusual behaviour, of course. No one batted an eye as I dragged my fish along behind me. Plenty of *other* people stopped to stare, however.

When I eventually abandoned my catch it was not because of the smell ... which would have been the sensible reason. My change of plan was due to something you probably wouldn't imagine – the *sound* it made would set your teeth on edge. The scales of a dead fish, dragged backwards along an asphalt path, sounded like a bag of rat-tail files pulled over coarse sandpaper.

This is the sort of vivid detail that is essential to any creative writer. You can't make up that sort of verisimilitude.



### **DAVE COCKFIELD**

It was good to get the soft pdf Vibrator 47 to usher in the New Year. However I was much more satisfied to get my hands on the hard tactile printed version that came mid-month.

What a wonderful non-politically correct cover. When I was a teenager I used to pick up those old salacious magazines from the market for 6d. The stories were crap but the wonderfully lurid artwork by some of the greats like Norm Eastman, Mort Kunstler and James Bama was to die for.

At first glance that looks like Ian Williams sheiking his whip but there isn't a cat in sight so I must be mistaken. Unless of course that is a cat o' nine tails he's flexing.

As Leigh Edmonds would say, "yet another cracking issue." Leigh mentioned how he found the Paris Metro quite agreeable. It has much to recommend but the actual journeys that I've taken, about a dozen in all, have all been marred by overcrowding. I have also had to fend off pickpockets twice.

The worst incident was getting to the foot of an escalator with two bags and being pushed in the back so that I landed flat on my face on the platform. Immediately two youths of ethnic origin, possibly Algerian, were on me and trying to nick my bags. A loud roar, lots of good old anglo-saxon invective, and a bull in a china shop physical charge managed to send them packing. I was completely ignored by everyone else on the platform. Fortunately I did not lose anything but my right knee was agony for a couple of days.

Your piece on the Zodiac murders has me looking for my copy of the excellent film directed by David Fincher that was based on a book by Graysmith that I've often thought about obtaining. In a sequel, Zodiac Unmasked, he postulates that the killer was Arthur Allen Leigh who died of a heart attack in 1992.

I really hope that your talk of turning Vibrator into a Dead Parrot is just a Pythonesque joke as it has become an essential monthly fix . If there is a pause let us pray that it is only a case of “he’s restin””.

My brief stint in fandom decades ago saw me produce one solo genzine, *Atropos*, that was mauled to put it politely. In hindsight with better production, some actual editing, and a proper working knowledge of the typewriter it would have fared better. As an active member of the Gannets I enjoyed picking films, creating fan quizzes, and games such as SF Charades for Silicons. But I doubt if I contributed more than a dozen locs in total to the myriad fanzines that I received. Meeting fans for the first time in a couple of decades and picking up that hard copy of Vibrator at Corflu in Newcastle somehow rejuvenated my synapses. So much so that my contributions to Vibrator have far exceeded anything I did before.

Okay if you cease production I’ll still have Inca, Raucous Caucus, aMfo, and ? but my life will never be the same.

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## **FRED SMITH**

Apart from legibility that cover looks great in the larger size, Just like the old pulp covers of fond memory and yet back then some would hide the covers (from parents especially!) or even tear them off! Now, of course, they’re much valued and boost the prices of the mags they adorn!

Your continuing series of “America the Damned” is beginning to give me the impression that you don’t like Americans very much. Could that be the case? Any that I’ve met in the flesh or corresponded with have been friendly, polite and all-round good guys. Maybe it’s just luck that I haven’t met any serial killers! Like the ones in this particularly grisly instalment. Horrible as the stories are you have to keep in mind that they are only a small proportion of the populace. The ready availability of guns doesn’t help but murderers will kill by any means, gun, knife, whatever, and we have known fans who liked guns, Dean Grennell, Bob Pavlat, who were indubitably good guys .On the other hand the seemingly ready sale of *machine guns* is criminal and can lead to mass slaughter, so some changes in the laws should be necessary.

Lots of detail this time about what you ate and drank at Christmas (and the very dry nature of it!). We, fortunately, didn’t have that problem. Son-in-law, Grandson and I travelled through to Edinburgh (by car) to stay and have dinner with Son Geoff and Daughter-in-law Kathryn. Apart from the five of us we had Kathryn’s Mother and Father. No children but two cats! Since none of us was driving there was no restriction on alcohol so I had my usual two large whiskies and a little red plonk with dinner. So, a satisfactory conclusion to the festivities; we slept comfortably and drove home to Glasgow on Boxing Day.

Travelogues about Paris and Berlin lead me to boast that I haven't been to either-- ..France a few times but never Paris and nowhere in Germany. Regarding underground trains (which are mentioned) I have, of course, used the London system many times and have also been on the Prague Metro and the BART, the Bay Area Rapid Transit, in San Francisco. Then there's the DART, the Dublin Area Rapid Transit, but who copied who? That one is a surface system anyway. Naturally, the most familiar underground for me is the Glasgow Subway, the third oldest in the world, after London and Budapest.

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## **JOSEPH NICHOLAS**

"Thanks for the parsnips by the way, although I found they didn't really conform to EU standards with regard to this vegetable, I suppose after Brexit they will be perfectly acceptable," you say in response to me. However, the standards in question have nothing whatever to do with the EU: they are imposed by the supermarket chains on their suppliers, in order to provide their customers with fruit and vegetables of a consistent size, colour, shape, texture and flavour. As you might imagine, this means that a lot of what's grown is rejected because of its non-standard appearance, although it will then go into the animal feed chain, either directly (as is) or sold to feed companies which will turn it into a compounded, pelleted form. (I used to deal with animal feed legislation, in the Food Standards Agency, before I retired from the civil service a few years ago, and wrote a note for its website on the typical diets of farmed livestock in an attempt to demystify the subject for the public. It may still be there, or the note may have been lost in the general move of individual departments' websites to an overarching GOV.UK domain.) Feeding animals in this way has been standard practice since at least the Second World War; as is the feeding of by-products from the production of food for human consumption, such as potato skins, carrot and onion toppings, fruit which has been crushed for juice extraction, and even broken biscuits and what the supermarket chains call "morning goods": croissants, muffins, crumpets and the like.

I can probably bore on about this stuff for hours -- it's no longer part of my daily life, but the basic knowledge never leaves one.

The imposition by supermarket chains of standards for size, colour, shape, etc. doubtless has some connection with the fact that the majority of today's population has no direct -- or even indirect -- involvement in any stage of modern food production, and will certainly have never visited a farm or know what goes on there. (Given the intensive nature of some systems of food production -- the milking of cows, for example -- I suspect that most people would not wish to know. And they certainly would not wish to know about what happens in animal slaughterhouses....) Nor, indeed, do they even know what "raw food" looks like -- some years ago, for example, a poll of primary school-age children discovered that they thought potatoes might grow on trees, and that meat typically "appeared" in plastic trays

(i.e., that they were unaware of its four-legged source). When and where the majority of today's population ever sees farmed livestock must be a matter of some conjecture -- pictures in newspapers, perhaps? Or on television, when a flock of sheep is buried by snow in some northern county? Or, if they're young children, in picture-books about jolly Old MacDonald-type farmers (who no longer exist anyway)?

(Which reminds me, tangentially, of the excitement exhibited by my younger brother and sisters when -- way back in the late sixties -- they saw a cow or a sheep in real life. This was nothing to myself and the older of my two sisters, given that we'd grown up on the fringes of the countryside and then in a small village, where we saw farmed animals day after day; but my younger brother and sister, growing up in a town, had never seen them as other than pictures in books.)

But I'll stop here. I depart for Australia in a little under a fortnight's time, so need to get this off to you before I go. Lots more still to do before then!

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### **ROBERT LICHTMAN**

What a classic men's mag cover you have on *Vibrator* #47! I wonder who the cover artist was, and which actual magazine you copped it from. I assume you changed the names in the blurbs "Andrew Darlington Scoop: 'My Life with Transexual [*sic*] Alligators'" and "Bizarre [*sic*] Flight of David Redd and His 48 Vestal Virgins" -- or did you? It would be a huge coincidence, but inquiring minds want to know.

"Shopping for gifts has been something which has historically always put me off about Christmas." My own record is mixed. When my four sons were young, it was of course necessary to give each of them something for Christmas and, also of course, for their birthdays. We mutually grew out of the birthday thing as they aged -- all are now in their forties, and it was long before that -- and with several years' delay we did the same about Christmas. Although occasionally we break the pattern, at least it's no longer pro forma.

Nowadays, however, there are six grandchildren to deal with, and a couple of them don't live in California. We don't necessarily see even all the ones who do live here at Christmas -- there's not always a big holiday gathering -- and having to buy half a dozen presents (after first either figuring out what to get or, failing that, asking their parents for advice) plus having to pack and send parcels to the out-of-state ones during the big-lines-avoid-at-all-costs time at the post office has led us to abandon Christmas presents for them, too. We continue happily to do birthday presents, though, and sometimes, like you, we bless Amazon for making this such an easy task.

Regarding glioblastomas, I certainly agree with you that "the idea that there is some correlation between the disease and sf fandom is false and an illusion particular to the very

specific nature of sf fandom itself as a community.” We are, as you write, a community of communicators and, as such, are more inclined to track and comment on what afflicts our members. And of course this particular affliction strikes – gradually and insidiously, as we saw with Randy Byers – at the heart of our ability to communicate.

The occurrence of glioblastoma is three cases per 100,000 per year. This statistic is courtesy of Wikipedia, where there’s also a long “list of people with brain tumors” – and since there’s more than one type of brain tumor those with glioblastoma are specifically noted. A few selected ones you may/probably have heard of: Sam Bottoms (actor in *Apocalypse Now* and *The Last Picture Show*), Ethel Merman (Broadway singer and actress), Robert Moog (inventor of the synthesizer that bears his name), Beau Biden (son of Joe Biden, US Vice-President and Senator), Edward Kennedy (Senator), John McCain (Senator, still hanging in there), “Tug” McGraw (Major League baseball pitcher), Terence McKenna (writer and “counterculture figure”). Other fans would include Lou Stathis and John Foyster.

Although I heard about the Zodiac Killer via the newspapers and radio, during the time he was doing his work (1968/69) my attention was largely elsewhere. Around the time he began his activities, I was discovering “hippie guru” Stephen Gaskin and regularly attending his Monday night open meetings. I also was somewhat involved in protests around the Vietnam War. And I still had “straight” jobs: credit analyst for Dun & Bradstreet, a stint as a mail carrier for the U.S. Post Office, and a mixed-duties job with the local sales office for Columbia Records. I paid little attention to the newspapers, and if I was aware of the Zodiac Killer at all I would have dismissed the reportage as typical media sensationalism. So your article told me more than I’d ever known about this aspect of “America the Damned,” and although I could easily have gone through the rest of what remains of my life I guess I’m somewhat the better for your rounding out this bit of previously unknown-to-me knowledge.

Andrew Darlington’s noting that Fats Domino is dead is the first mention of it I can recall running across in a fanzine. Admittedly Fats only left the mortal coil late last October, but checking the most likely place for such a mention – the “conversations” search InTheBar – the most recent is (perhaps not coincidentally) me back in March of last year on the occasion of Chuck Berry’s passing, about whom I wrote that he and Fats Domino pretty much defined rock/r&b for me. I have a lot of their work on cassettes and CDs. Berry’s stuff is on the former, dubbed by me from LPs that I didn’t own, and stored away at the moment so I can’t detail how extensive it is. But I’m sure I have more of Fats Domino’s music, if only because I own “They Call Me the Fat Man...Antoine ‘Fats’ Domino: The Legendary Imperial Recordings,” about which is written on Amazon: “This 4-CD box set contains 100 classic recordings, many available for the first time in originally recorded stereo. All tracks are digitally remastered. Also includes an 88-page 4-color book featuring extensive liner notes, complete track annotations and historical never-before-seen photos.” It is a truly amazing collection, and I actually own two copies of it. I first bought



the CD set, but when I was on the verge of transcribing it over to cassettes so I could play it in my car (which doesn't have a CD deck, being old) I found an inexpensive copy of the cassettes. That made me happy, although in the long run I've played the CDs more.

Leigh Edmonds writes, "I was educated and appalled by the financial calculations that Nic offered us this time. The woman who comes to clean our house for a couple of hours once a fortnight makes, by my calculation, about \$30 an hour. She probably doesn't work a full eight hour day, but even so..." That's a pretty good rate for housecleaning. The price of such household help comes up frequently on our local "NextDoor" discussion list. What Leigh quotes would be on the low end of what people pay here, and most pay significantly more. We have someone once a month who's here for three to four hours for a flat rate, which turns out when she's here the longest to be not much more than what Leigh' cleaner makes.

Lucky David Redd! "Where are the Reasons to be Cheerful when we need them? (Oh, junk email is down. That's good.)" Mine isn't, although it's variable from one of my e-mail addresses to another. For instance, most of the ones tied to a Yahoogroup get no junk at all, but others get quite a bit. The winners are my "real" address (the one where I "can be found"), the one where I conduct most e-business, and the one tied to my eBay activities, in that order. What the junk mail is about is ever-shifting, though having written that I note the leading quantities are always from the various on-line drugstores (with or without Viagra being specifically mentioned). Runners up include dubious-sounding "health supplements," nags about my not activating the warranty on a consumer product I don't own, sales and service department specials at car dealers in other parts of the country, offers from banks and other financial institutions for their products, and *always* "see this" offers to click links to see women with names like Stormy. Fortunately Yahoo is very good at sending all this to my spam folder for quick and easy deletion.

Wonderful "Tidings" by Nic!

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### **LLOYD PENNEY**

I gather you've been wondering where my Vibrator locs have gotten to, and frankly, so have I. This past September, I took a part-time editorial job in Toronto's north end, and no regrets on that one, for I have had some pretty full-time hours. Unfortunately for my bank account, the part-time job is pretty part-time these days, which allows me time to do some writing. Here are some comments on Vibrator 2.0.46 and 2.0.47. (I may be the only one who still uses the 2.0. stuff.)

2.0.46...Taral has a witch-cat with a feline familiar? Like putting Goofy and Pluto beside each other, why does one speak, and not the other? This argument is only for people who like arguments. Fine art, and let's go further.

I cannot say anything about the passing of Randy Byers that hasn't been said already. I only met Randy once at a Corflu, and dying of such a horrible disease...it isn't at all fair, and he should still be with us, cracking wise. As long as we remember him...

John Purcell, Yvonne and I quite enjoyed the London Tube, but I admit that we are quite spoiled in Toronto with our own subway. If I want to go from one Line to another, I will take an escalator or set of stairs, and I am done. In London, enter the station (I have Victoria station in mind), go down the speeding escalator, down the platform to another passageway, set of stairs, passageway, elevator, etc., and when you get to the line you want, you are exhausted, and you realize you are still in the same station. We learned quickly that if you want to get to Kings' Cross station, take a cab. It's certainly more scenic. I asked Yvonne if she'd like to go to Paris some time, and the answer is an emphatic NO. London is just her speed. As far as narrow stairs, tiny bathrooms and hotels with no lifts, well, I remember Holland well... In London, we stayed a week at the Grosvenor Hotel at Victoria station, and that is certainly not the Motel 6. We plan to return to London in 2019, and we will pack a little lighter this time.

The local...thoughts of suicide seem antithetical to being a reader, I'd think. We always want to find out what happens next, and the way you do that in life is to stay alive. My own loc...yes, I've been through The Great Canadian Bake-Off, and it's a pure copy of the British original. With some of the folks who are coming to Toronto this year for Corflu, I think that I will go. And, I will not babysit the con suite.

Around our home, when Dolt 45 comes on the screen, on goes the Mute button. A video Mute would help, too. Anything he labels Fake News has to be the truth, because he doesn't like it. I am 58 right now, and I am lucky to have some work. It doesn't stop me from looking for something better, but the older you get, the tougher it is to find anything. Retirement looks better and better all the time, but I have seven years left to fill. Yvonne has been my salvation.

2.0.4747...Well, that cover will get you some looks askance...no, John, wasn't talking about you this time. Christmas was a quiet affair this time around, with some nice gifts for both of us, and New Year's was spent at home. Parties are around, but it seems we're not wanted, we're just too strange, I guess.

A few days ago, there was news of yet another school shooting in the US. After that died down a little, it was revealed that the afore-mentioned shooting actually covered over the coverage of two other similar mass shootings. This horror has become an everyday occurrence, which is a horror in itself.

Hotels vary in quality...when we were in Lincoln, we stayed at the Castle Hotel in the cathedral quarter, and it was quite luxurious. We hope to return some day. I think we will be looking for Comfort Inns from now on. Over the last year or so, we've stayed at three of them, and been impressed each time.

It is near the end of January...2018 is looking busy for us, and we could have ourselves some real fun. As long as the money holds out, we will. Yvonne is now officially retired, and is busy shoveling out the apartment. We will celebrate our 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in May, and we may do something interesting for that, too. Again, money. Let Pat know that I have received a copy of *Raucous Caucus*, and I look forward to getting around to responding to that ish, too. Thank you for these two issues, and I am slowly catching up with everything. See you with the next.

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### **PAUL SKELTON**

Bloody monthly fanzines! I struggle to keep up. I always wait two-to-four weeks after reading a zine in the hopes that something interesting will happen or be read that will provide a relevant springboard to enable me to fashion a high-tariff dive into the issue in question. You know, something more than just ticking the 'Liked that, didn't like the other, tried it once but it gave me a limp, that reminds me of the time...' boxes. The trouble is, monthlies won't allow that sort of approach. I told Andy Hooper I wouldn't be able to cope when he started *Flag*, but he said he'd risk it. I didn't tell you because, oddly enough it didn't seem to be a problem early on, but lately I must be reading stuff that has less relevance to the material in your fanzine. I also know for a fact that little of interest seems to be happening to me in real life.

For instance this week's big news is that today I had a tooth out, which required two injections and an apparent eternity in the dentist's chair as she strove manfully (?) to get the fucker out, albeit in several bits. Even if any such response had been interesting you couldn't have printed it as it would have caused Ian Maule to faint-dead-away and be rushed to A & E, which would then have found Ian to be the final straw and collapsed from too much demand and too little resource, leading to headlines such as 'IAN MAULE RESPONSIBLE FOR DEMISE OF ENTIRE NHS SYSTEM' ...and we wouldn't want that, would we?

Anyway, I'd already figured I'd let issue 46 ferment until the New Year, but then **\*Real Life\*** intervened in the shape of Cas' illness, my illness, and the inability of one of my crowns to bite through a ham sandwich. So here I am sitting down to LoC Vibrator 46 only to find that issue 47 (the 'Whipping Scantily-Clad Nubile Women' issue) is already out and I've missed that particular boat. By the way, I do recall seeing that sort of magazine in newsagents in my youth, though in my memory the 'Whip-wielding Arch Fiends' tended to be Nazi Gestapo. Now I know it is not politically correct to say this, but it seems to me the women on the cover are partly to blame for their predicament. Surely if they hadn't been too lazy to get properly dressed but instead insisted in swanning around in sexy lingerie, they would have been far less likely to arouse the Sheik's perverted lusts.

Even so, I can't let issue 46 go by without commenting on Taral's superb cover. I wonder how many people appreciated his double underlining of the cover's 'magic' component. Obviously there's the basic magic element of a witch riding on a broomstick, but would many have appreciated that the posture depicted would have caused any non-magical being, with 90% of her body-weight on one side of the broomstick, to capsize and hang suspended upside-down by her knees? I doubt it, but even this extra allusion to magic does not mean that the cover is without fault. If human witches have cat familiars, then surely feline witches should have small humanoid gremlin familiars. It's only fair. Taral's tendency to go for the feline or squirrel has let him down this time. Otherwise, the cover would have been perfect.

Before moving on from Vibrator 46 I can underline another problem I have in responding to your fanzine; namely that I lead a life of almost compulsive triviality, where any responses to weightier matters raised by you or your correspondents seem far too banal to include. Take Taliesin for instance...in Caroline Knight's Essential FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT she writes...

'As it exists today the building has little of the original 1911 structure; it was burned down in 1914 when an insane servant barricaded all the exits but one, set fire to the building and waited outside the only door with a hatchet. He not only destroyed Wright's home but also killed Mamah and her children. Wright began to rebuild immediately.'

This version not only corroborates your take on Wright's priorities, but implicitly infers the author's sympathies with them. Now my banal response (included strictly as an example of my problem you understand) was that, along with Jon & Joni Stopa, we visited Spring Green (site of Taliesin) during our 1990 US visit. Again let me quote, this time from volume two of my own *Alyson Wonderland*...

'We'd mentioned to Jon & Joni our disappointment at not having gotten to see the Frank Lloyd Wright buildings in Oak Park, so Jon detoured to take in a restaurant Wright had designed. We didn't stop to eat, just looked around the outside, wandered inside, had a good old look around noting the various features, availed ourselves of the restroom facilities and wandered out again, all without any hassle from the restaurant staff. I tried to imagine how a British restaurant owner would react to such cavalier use of his facilities and establishment, and the face that sprung to mind was that of 'Basil Fawlty.'

Actually, now I come to think of it, whilst Spring Green was mentioned back then and sticks in my mind, I wonder if the restaurant actually was there or just in some nearby town, for if it had been in Spring Green it would surely have made more sense to have shown us Taliesin itself. Ah, *Vibrator*, the fanzine for destroying memories and clouding the mind...

I was particularly taken, in Vibrator 47, with Philip Turner's (not explicitly stated) revelation with his juxtaposition of the seas being awash with plastic and with lowland

coastal areas about to be gradually flooded by rising sea-levels caused by the melting of the arctic icecap, that 'Global Warming' is merely Nature's way of giving us back all our plastic.

The high-spot of the issue though was undoubtedly Nick Farey's column. I'm a sucker for this sort of humorous rhyming doggerel, and he almost does it to perfection. The only flaw being that his repeated rhyming of 'pass' and 'arse' shows that his time in the States is definitely beginning to effect his mind.

Paul Skelton can be found at paulskelton2@gmail.com

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# TALES OF A LAS VEGAS TAXI DRIVER

By Nic Farey

## ARSE OF THE ARSE

In some distorted fashion, the title *almost* seems grandiloquently appropriate for this, the apparent arse of the *SexToy*, calling to mind as it may some forgotten warrior of the battle of Falkirk Muir, McSpinge of the McSpinge, perhaps, a fitting sober historical reference to the '45 except that was a few issues ago, with the sharply curtailed run of this sublime fish-wrap extending to 48 McSpinges, a four-year span (which I first mistyped as "dour-year", which might even be better) of damnation, philosophy, low-life and a fuck of a lot of locs from some clearly pseudonymous scriveners ("Fred Smith", I mean really) who will now presumably have to find something else to do, some other award-winning fanzine to latch onto like limpets, or simply fade back into their true identities of secretive sleeper agents and former lovers of that dreadful old pouf Anthony Blunt, the famous Cockney rhyming slang phrase.

The topic of arse has tended to raise its ugly cheek round here, geographically apposite in a column which has typically appeared at the arse-end of the zine as a cleansing antidote to bloviating correspondents such as "David Redd" (real name: Calvin Harris), the usual reprint of the same loc that "Robert Lichtman" (real name: Sheryl Birkhead) has been sending out for the last 25 years but before Grah's typically whimsical and wistful sign-off in his best Private Frazer style.

Appropriately enough, there's been more arse, as in, I got slammed up the arse (and not in the Chuck Tingle manner) driving home from work two weeks ago. In upsell<sup>1</sup> taxi-driving fashion, I'd been taking a longer route home, going on the freeways (215 to the 95) rather than the shorter street route, since it is typically a bit quicker, although prone to some back-ups and slow-downs here and there, especially coming up to the 215/95 interchange. That point marks the actual end of the southern, eastbound bit of the 215, which British readers can equate with an unfinished M25. There's four lanes, which from left to right are (1) off to the streets leading to old Henderson, (2) ramp to northbound 95, (3 & 4) ramp to southbound 95 for Boulder City. (2) is my way home, and there's often a bit of argy-bargy

when the assorted free pickles find themselves in the wrong lane and have to get in, which usually backs things up a bit - I tend to get in lane a mile or more ahead (about at the Gibson Road exit), even though I could almost certainly nip in at the last gasp and piss off someone in an Audi, of itself a laudable aim, but ultimately not worth the aggro.

Just after the Gibson exit, the second car in front did a well sharp brake, and the one right in front of me had a go at the same but smacked into her. I gave it some serious anchor and stopped short of him by a couple of feet, nicely done, I thought, except the one behind *me* was apparently paying a bit less attention, and so was up me arse. NHP (Nevada Highway Patrol) was on the spot already dealing with *another* accident which presumably had occurred moments previously.

Over on his toes pretty sharp, the officer had a look before asking us to pull off to the shoulder. "Did you hit the vehicle in front, sir?" "No sir", sez I, being rewarded by a tiny gleam of admiration, as I refrained from adding "Because I'm a fuckin' *professional*". I called Jen, let her know what's going on, and we wait while the necessary paperwork is distributed, collected, tow trucks summoned (not for me) and all that. I hid the beer in the back, not too difficult a proposition since the van is full of shit back there in the form of old *Las Vegas Weekly* magazines, paycheck envelopes & such, and chainsmoked so the cozzers were less likely to get a whiff. After a bit, NHP comes over with the printed incident report containing my details and the arse-slammer, who it turns out (I am a little sheepishly informed by the nice officer) may not in fact have any current insurance. *Our* insurance supposedly covers for that, and I'm good to go, driving home with a bad fuckin' rattle coming from the arse of the van.

Turns out, after going to the insurance assessor yesterday, that apart from the fragile back bumper being knocked out of sorts, the exhaust and the spare tire holder have all been McSpinged to the point of replacement, and there's a \$500 deductible thank you and have a nice day. Thank you and fuck off, because it should all be covered, and this coming Monday the fiercely efficient Jen will be berating various flunkies on the basis of "get this fuck fixed, and we owe nothing". Except that she never uses the word "fuck", unless it's in a question.

The typical response to an incident like this, especially in Vegas, is to get lawyered up and look forward to an infusion of dosh from the poor sod at fault. I reasoned, however, that there might not be much to be had from an uninsured culprit, although we have been contacted by their last insurer of record. It's also a bit iffy for a fundamentally honest arse like me (yes, really, you cunts) to pretend that I'm suddenly all out of sorts. Got headaches? Yeah, had them before this, too. Neckache, backache, same story. I have noticed that the aches & pains I live with have been worse since the up-the-arse (not Chuck Tingle), though, and the tinnitus seems to be having a jolly flare-up an'all. Will I get any much-needed Benjies out of this? Doubt it. Office manager Steve passed on a card for his chiropractor, evidently a decent sort who works with cabbies' lawyer Adam Kutner. "You ought to get a couple thousand", sez Steve. My lifelong reluctance to seek medical help for anything short

of a limb actually falling off, or in the last year, "suppurating bum" (as the reader (J,Unc) so poetically described it) will however render this moot.

The Catch-22 for horny-handed sons of toil who are not affluent retirees has always been that we can't afford to *not* work, and if you can work, then you must be all right so no dosh for you, matey! Back in the unreconstructed construction days, you showed up, and if there was anything that might be an issue, you'd ask for "light duty", as I was offered when I tore up my left hand years ago, but declined since I'm right-handed anyway and would rather have been actually building shit than pushing a broom, which is what "light duty" often ended up being.

January's typically a decent month, starting out with CES which gave us a few very good booking days, and a few other business shows (a bit of which I'll miss because birthday bash), including 'World of Concrete' who are filthy, horny fuckers who schedule their trade show at the same time as the porn star awards (AVN) every year, patronize the strip clubs with reckless abandon and seem to tood around in a permanent state of arousal looking to be wanked off by any hand other than their own.

*That* birthday is coming up, and I've got a few days off booked such that I will miss a few potentially lucrative days, although the night shift ferrying the concrete contractors from one wank to the next will be coining it much more than my day shift, which takes them to meetings and gatherings planning the next wank rather than facilitating it. The birthday plan was, in part, to get me & Grah up in the "drink each other to death" scenario, one in which he has ultimately declined to participate. We are, therefore, going to live forever, unless some evil Braniac conspires to bring us adjacent, like a couple of nuclear isotopes which, when placed together, cause the immediate destruction of the entire Faniverse.

Is that it, then? The arse of the arse.

"Locs on the last issue of *Vibrator*" would make an article for *BEAM*.

FAAn award voting is open.

## **THE ONE AND ONLY FOR THE LAST TIME LICHTMAN AND NOT ALISON SCOTT MEMORIAL FOOTNOTE**

<sup>1</sup> An "upsell" is when a cab driver convinces (or attempts to convince) the passenger that a longer (possibly more expensive) route will be a better one. This can be quite legit, because at certain times of day the density of street traffic means that the trip will take longer, and perhaps even end up costing about the same as taking the freeway, given that you might be sat still both in traffic and at red lights at several points. Some drivers will naturally lie shamelessly to try to upsell, primarily saying that traffic is horrible at times when it isn't, or mentioning a fictitious accident or other problem. It's certainly better for the drivers to get on the route which takes the shortest time so you can be back on a stand with alacrity.

# VIBRATOR BACKSIDE

*And so farewell Vibrator  
Who can say what you were  
Or achieved what you wanted to be  
But you always wore your pants  
Outside your trousers  
And you have to be respected for that  
At least a little bit  
Although not much  
Because your pants were often  
Transparent  
and frightened the neighbourhood dogs*

*-E.J. Thribb aged 8 3/4*

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*(EDITOR: This may be the last issue of Vibrator, but I hope it will not prevent people writing me locs. I will even go so far as to publish them in a special loc-only issue for subscribers only. So, don't delay, write today to [graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk](mailto:graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk))*

*And this, my beautiful friend, is really THE END.*



illo: Rob Hansen