



**April 2017**



**Corflu 34. Pete Young and Randy Byers have been abducted by aliens.**

Wow, it's already April 30<sup>th</sup>, so time to start writing a new issue of Vibrator scheduled to appear on 1<sup>st</sup> May. Is this leaving it to the last minute or not? Throughout my entire life schedules have been the bane, and things which I think will eventually grind me down. I'm not talking about fiction writing schedules. I never write anything substantial enough that any either self-imposed or exterior deadline can threaten it. But a lot of the mundane jobs I have been involved in, mostly in advertising and professional book distribution, have been plagued by deadline stress. In fact I was ostensibly sacked from my first job as an advertising executive for missing a rather trivial deadline, although I maintain to this day it was really because I had not got to Harrow or Eton.

What have I been mostly doing between this and the last issue? Well, mostly relaxing from the sheer bliss of not having to attend hospital every day. Fill in between the lines of that as you will. I have been pursuing my policy of trying to write at least a song a day, sometimes even two or three, although whether a discerning listener would view them as songs is debatable. I have been watching Spring burgeon, though not spectacularly on my windowsill where the celery ends I leave in glasses of water fail to thrive, whilst the moss I have no control over seems to do very well.

If I survive the next 24 hours I might write more, or I might write less. I might spend so much time watching boring catch-ups of Corflu 34 through Rob Jackson's estimable site: <https://livestream.com/accounts/24977777> that I lose the will to live.

In other news worth mentioning Paul and Cas Skelton's wee West Highland Terrier called Westie called Bestie has sadly passed after a serious doggy illness. My heartfelt condolences go out to Paul and Cas. My brother in law has bought a Honda Jazz, and my Granddaughter Eloise continues her inexorable rise to political power by continuing to support and lobby for left wing cause, as well as continuing to dress up in her party dress and do silly dances.

Films I have watched recently: The Ipcress File, which didn't impress because Michael Caine didn't transform into a robot and go on a rampage through New York City flinging cars asunder, but which was in fact as noir-influenced as a spy film can possibly be.

I am Graham Charnock. I write silly songs and play them on my small guitar. I produce this fanzine and this is the 39<sup>th</sup> issue, although God Knows Why I do any of it. Write me [graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk](mailto:graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk)

## THINGS WERE NOT ALWAYS SIMPLE, a history of disillusionment

I'd be the first to admit I led a sheltered childhood. It was sheltered because I grew up in a nuclear family, which for the most part never considered itself dysfunctional. My father had a car, a succession of cars in fact, and always earned enough to put a Sunday roast on the table, well, at least on Sundays. He earned enough so that, as far I can recall, my mother never had to do a day's work in her life, and could concentrate on catering to a happily blissful model household.

Of course I was only ten then, as I seem to have been for most of my life, even when I was younger and, as I now am, older, so I believed in that safe secure image of family life. How could I not? It was all I had.

I was also under the spell of American TV, which kept me locked to my comfortable sofa in my comfortable front room in my comfortable suburb which also peddled this view, via Dick Van Dyke and Mary Tyler Moore.

And of course I was in thrall to good old Walt Disney where moon-faced doe-eyed maidens of the ilk of Snow White so easily transformed into tomboys like Doris Day in Calamity Jane.

In short I was sold the whole myth of non-stressful family values, and bought it hook line and sinker. I don't think I was actually waiting for my worldview to fall apart, but gradually, small slice by small slice it began to. I never wanted to, but slowly inch by inch I began to grow up.

Despite having being groped by someone in a cinema while watching a James Bond film, I still did not understand homosexuality let alone paedophilia (I was only ten remember). I simply couldn't conceive of people who would spend their lives in what was essentially so unfulfilling a manner. Yes, I'd had several homoerotic run-ins with my peers, which I was presumably sufficiently sophisticated enough to put down to simple adolescence. All those kids who exposed themselves to me weren't necessarily going to grow up into warped psychopaths far less predatory homosexuals.

I think the most significant shock to my system was when my mother had a nervous breakdown. She locked herself in the bathroom and refused to come out. She threatened to throw herself out of the window if anyone attempted to break in. I wasn't party to any of the details which had precipitated this event but in a sense I had been prepared for this scenario by what could be considered a considerable event in my disillusionment by a television series of plays called Talking to a Stranger, written by John Hopkins and which dissected the

undercurrents in just such a suburban family setup as I was involved in. It was a big factor in suggesting to me that *Things Were Not Always So Simple*, and moreover, that growing up and dealing with such situations was going to be a rocky but essential process.

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## AMERICA THE DAMNED: An occasional series

### LEOPOLD AND LOEB

In 1948 Alfred Hitchcock made a film called *Rope*. It was his first colour production and was based on a stage play written by Patrick Hamilton. Its origins showed in the staged single-set scenes Hitchcock used. Its plot was based around two arrogant, intellectual students who commit a murder as an intellectual exercise, simply because *\*they can\** and to demonstrate their superiority. The play (and film) plays out not as a simple whodunit, but in the way their arrogance and intellectuality ultimately expose their guilt, and exploited the tensions around James Stewart, their University lecturer, being in the same room as a hidden body and its killers.

The original play was written in 1929 but was based on events which unfolded five years earlier in 1924, when two young men, Nathan Freudenthal Leopold Jr. and Richard Albert Loeb kidnapped and murdered 14-year-old Robert Franks in Chicago. Leopold was 20 at the time and Loeb a year younger.

The early twenties was still an era of interwar exploration and technological development. On Apr 6, 1924, four open-cockpit biplanes took off from Seattle for a round the world flight. Two of the planes made it back. They flew 26,000 miles in 363 hours over a 175 days at an average speed of 77 mph. The US Congress had to approve the financing and the airplanes were built by Douglas Aircraft. If nothing else it signified that long distance intercontinental travel might be feasible in the then near future.

On Mar 20, 1924, The Virginia Legislature passed two closely related eugenics laws: SB 219, entitled "The Racial Integrity Act" and SB 281, "An Act to provide for the sexual sterilization of inmates of State institutions in certain cases", henceforth referred to as "The Sterilization Act". The Racial Integrity Act required that a racial description of every person be recorded at birth, and felonized marriage between "white persons" and non-white persons. The law was the most famous ban on miscegenation in the US, and was overturned by the US Supreme Court in 1967, in *Loving v. Virginia*. Virginia repealed The

Sterilization Act in 1979. In 2001 the House of Delegates voted to express regret for the state's selective breeding policies that had forced sterilizations on some 8,000 people. The Senate soon followed suit. The whole subject of eugenics was of course eventually taken up by Hitler's Nazi party, in the name of maintaining racial purity and superiority

Overseas the aftermath of the Russian Revolution rumbled on: on Jan 21, Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ilyich Lenin died at age 53 and a major struggle for power in the Soviet Union began. A triumvirate led by Joseph Stalin succeeded Lenin. By 1928, Stalin had assumed absolute power, ruling as an often brutal dictator until his death in 1953 of a brain haemorrhage.

Prohibition had been introduced in 1920 and the twenties rapidly became the age of the speakeasy which accustomed the public to enjoying illicit acts as secret pleasures. It also served, in most peoples' eyes, to fix the idea that morality and peoples' personal choices should not be underwritten by the law.

We can see several aspects of the "Rope" case working themselves out here historically. The idea of racial and intellectual superiority, the way issues of personal morality started to be seen as above the law.

Leopold and Loeb were in many sense a couple, loyal to and dependent on each other, as much a definition of love as can be found, and formed a pact of degradation where each bolstered the other, in a way that has echoes in people like Hindley and Brady, the Moors Murderers, and more recently the young child murderers of Jamie Bolger.

Leopold and Loeb lived locally to each other in an affluent district of Chicago, although their first meeting and attachment was formed at the University of Chicago itself. It is undeniable that they were both prodigiously intelligent in terms of IQ. At the University they became obsessed with the study of criminology, and also involved themselves in a host of petty crimes, most of which seemed to be testing the boundaries of what they could get away with. Their silly acts of vandalism and theft were largely ignored by the authorities who possibly thought of them as childish pranks. This lack of recognition not only irked them but increased their sense of invincibility and emboldened them to think in larger terms. Thus they conceived their plan of committing a perfect, motiveless murder which was seven months in the planning.

They decided upon Robert "Bobby" Franks, the 14-year-old son of wealthy Chicago watch manufacturer Jacob Franks. Loeb knew Bobby Franks well; he was his second cousin, an across-the-street neighbour, and had played tennis at the Loeb residence several times.

It is significant that Franks was not a random victim; they knew everything about him and his movements and his everyday life that they could possibly

know. It was a fatal mistake and flaw in their supposedly clinical intellectual approach.

Far from hiding the body in a trunk, as in the play, and teasing their university lecturer, however, the two young man disposed of the body in what they thought was a very thorough manner, concealing the body in a culvert beside railway tracks near Lake Hammond, after attempting to conceal the body's identity by pouring acid on significant features, like the boy's circumcised penis.

Unable to sit back and "enjoy" their exploit the boys decided to tease the family by submitting a ransom demand, a particularly cruel stroke, a twist of the knife if you like considering they were in no position to carry through on any demand, especially since the body was quickly discovered. They were finally revealed as the murders by a simple mistake: Leopold had dropped a distinctive pair of spectacles near the body which were ultimately traced back to him. So much for intellectual arrogance.

At the trial their defence lawyer the celebrated Clarence Darrow delivered an impassioned speech which in concentrating on the boys' youth and obvious shortcomings and pleading for mercy, inclined the judge to show a small degree of clemency and they were sentenced to life imprisonment instead of the death penalty.

As can be imagined Leopold and Loeb were not popular amongst their fellow prisoners and Loeb was attacked and murdered by an ex cell-mate James Day, who was subsequently acquitted because of suggestions of sexual provocation on Loeb's behalf, although who was the sexual aggressor has often been argued. Leopold visited Loeb on his death bed in the prison hospital and after he had died, washed his friend's body as a symbolic act of love. He later spent most of his life trying desperately to clear the name of his friend as a sexually motivated predator. Greater love hath no man, indeed.

Leopold published a biography which was criticized as being an obvious act to try and readdress his public image for the way it avoided details of his childhood upbringing and had no mention of the murder itself. Leopold was released from prison in 1958 and went on to lead as happy and fulfilled a life as a man in his position probably could, and exercised his redoubtable intellectuality through a number of academic ventures, before he died of a heart attack in 1971 at the age of 66.

Whenever a heinous crime is committed, in whatever country, people are tempted to delve into the psychopathy of the perpetrator, but America it seems to me, more than any other country, has sought to mythologize the psychopath in its popular culture, ranging from the Red Dragon books through a host of films about serial murders such as the Boston Strangler, and countless tv forensic

criminal investigation shows centred around psychopaths, even presenting charming psychopaths such as Dexter. Rope, both the film and the play, could be said to have started that trend.

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**GREG BENFORD**

“We've passed a rule that we don't buy any more books because we don't have room for them....How do we not buy any more books? We don't go into book shops and we don't even stop to look in the windows. It's not impossible, it can be done.” as Lichtman says...

But I solved this while still acquiring many 100s books/year: buy a condo, then two, then a storage facility. So have homes in Irvine, Laguna Beach, & Mammoth in high Sierra. Full of books, but can still walk around in them. Or go to the storage place, the size of a garage.

Someday, must prune...

Nic Farey always good. I read, thinking my life should be so interesting... then thinking not, really. Tantilizing" "...someone like myself with a ten years past quite extensive arrest and incarceration record in Maryland." Do tell!

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**LEIGH EDMONDS**

I imagine that you sent off Vibrator 38 in your evening, and here it is your morning and my modest response has arrived. Of course, it has been daytime all the time around on the other side of the globe and some of us have been busy doing stuff.

In my case, the stuff that I've been doing is trying to get finished this book I've been droning on the past couple of issue of your fine fnz. I spent the last two weeks working on the index, which has driven me certifiably nuts, and i sent it

off yesterday. Today I was talking to the publisher on the phone and she's decided that she doesn't like widow lines and they all have to go. Imagine what this might do to my index. Vibrator arrived around this time and so, rather than getting on with the job, I've been avoiding it and reading your fnz instead.

I derived some additional, what might call extracurricular enjoyment, from this issue by deciding to have a look at where you live. You have failed to give a postal address so I could not use Google Earth to look at your house but I did spend a pleasant hour wandering up and down Grand Parade looking at all the places you must see on your wanderings. There were a couple of dental surgeries that I didn't like the look of, there were a lot eateries that may have looked better than they are in the flesh. I spotted King Kebab and Yasar Halim too, so I have a fair idea of the environment in which you live. I was interested in the Kinos real estate place right next to the Kinos solicitor, both painted red. Have people no shame?

It all reminded me of the time Valma and I were on the underground from somewhere to somewhere else in London and got shoved off at some unknown station because of a bomb scare. We emerged onto street level to find ourselves in a built environment which reminded us of nothing more than the old 'Minder' tv series. Your neighborhood looks mighty similar. There are also parts of Melbourne, probably built around the same time, that look very similar to your Grand Parade but have much less grandiose names like Malvern Road and Whitehorse Road. However, if you wander down the side streets you get typical Melbourne single story bungalows (that are probably worth over \$1million each by now) whereas where you live seems to be all double story places jammed in together. In one of the side streets I came across a school (I can't read its name because there is a bush in front of the placard and I can't move the bush) with the puzzling signs hung from the fence saying 'Would You Park on these Zig Zags?' What strange lives you poms lead?

I was also informed by your description of the Wittington Hospital. This, doesn't sound at all alien except, of course, that all hospitals are alien. Even down to the bit where they keep on knocking down and rebuilding bits of them in different architectural styles. What used to be called the Ballarat Base Hospital has the original edifice at one end of the street which can't be knocked down because it's 'heritage'. But from then on up the street there are various bits and pieces that range from a small and modest 1950s building (that is sure to be knocked down real soon) to the buildabrick wards built at the other end about ten or fifteen years ago with, between these two extremes, the modern and sleek new general reception area that has just been opened (having replaced another 1950s brick building) and the gleaming oncology center next door which is now five or so years old. These two look more like corporate

office building than hospitals. Of course, when you get inside hospitals look all the same. I try not to go into them but sometimes we have no choice.

If I cut this letter short do you promise to write more interesting stuff like this at the front of Vibrator. I liked it more than just about anything else in the rest of the issue. Nic's column was interesting this time. Just now, as you will have noticed, everyone is saying what a rotten airline United is because of one instance of a passenger being dragged off against their will. There are some airlines in the world (like the old Aeroflot or CAAC, but flying 737 that have probably not seen a decent servicing for several years) that are so bad that I'm sure passengers would be pleased to be dragged off them. But somebody filmed it so it gets onto facebook and every tv news program in the world looking for something to show. What strange lives we all lead these days. Consequently, United is the worst airline in the world. The same applies to Las Vegas cab companies it seems.

Finally, I note that you are looking for photos of nubile young female persons to be sent to you. In the past week or so my email account has been swamped by emails from young ladies claiming that they are h00ties who want me to f\*ck them rig#d. They all exhort me to have a look at their kindly attached photos albums to warm me up. I can forward some of them on to you if you like.

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### NIC FAREY

A cursory egoscan of the latest ish gave rise to "'Ere, didn't I send a loc on the last one, as I usually do?", and a quick look at the Sent folder shows that indeed I fuckin well did, as loaded with fulsome praise as always. You've chastised me in ages past for WAHF-level succinctness, hence my genuine efforts to be more expansive in my responses to the multiple award-winning rag, shurely to be on the Hugo list *next year*, and while I know I don't cunt on at Skeltonian values of verbiage, nor do I engage in excruciatingly detailed Lichtmaninov-style analysis, but nevertheless as a good, faithful and humble contributor shurely I deserve some recognition? Perhaps you could revisit your non-WAHF policy, and simply append "Also: **Nic Farey** swore a lot and insulted people, "astonishing attack" ect ect." Of course, the omission of my salient, pithy and relevant comments might well have been due to (a) I was later than usual getting the loc in (not the same day), and/or (b) its inclusion would have fucked up the perfect page count and it wasn't that interesting. In which case, fair enough really.

Going shopping: I now live in a town which is generally 24/7 in terms of being able to obtain essential supplies such as Vodka(qv) and chips, though even in

Good Ole Rural Suth'n Marelun (sic) there was a 24-hour gas station/minimart a mere couple of miles away, which was even closer in French money, although its alcoholic content was limited to wine and beer due to regulations. I do appreciate the mild sense of wonder you exhibit that you can now obtain vital necessities at any time of day or night. Despite being a year or several younger than you, and indeed most of the ageing and ailing readership of this rag, I well remember most shops keeping bankers' hours, designed in that peculiarly British fashion to be as inconvenient as possible to the unwashed public.

Having lived in a gaff on the Archway Road for a while (around 1980/1), I remember the Archway Tavern as a bit of a hole, albeit a spacious one, which typically would have made for a Jim Linwood pub photo. The bloody big house I stayed at was separated into flats (me and the bloke I was sharing with, name long forgotten, had the ground floor/basement, which was quite spacious). Of note, the top floor flat was occupied by Mark Laff (Laffoley) who was the former drummer for Subway Sect and Generation X, who I persuaded to session drum at least once at rehearsals for the band I was in back then. Nice bloke.

A nice change of pace in your historical observations of Richard Whittington, though unlike other correspondents (who imply that they might be puzzled by your topics) I very much enjoy your 'America the Damned' pieces, since in ways reminiscent of the great satirists and polemicists of bygone years (Claud Cockburn particularly comes to mind), you stake out a viewpoint and relentlessly and unwaveringly attack your subject from that position. For the most part, there's a solid consistency in your worldview which, yes, may overdo the cynicism but nevertheless remains coherent in its confrontational style.

Locs, as always, extensive and with several points of interest. Leigh Edmonds' observation that Aussie fanzines were considered "dull" by UK standards might be considered to be due to their generally sercon approach and what could be seen as deliberate efforts to avoid beer-swilling and in-your-face Antipodean stereotypes, whereas the UK was much more likely to celebrate beer-swilling, fannishness and drunken altercations with occasional fisticuffs. Edmonds (L) must also win the prize (soon to be a FAAn Award Near You, shurely?) for Most Clueless Comment in a Loc, with: "The letter column had a lot of nice stories about Peter Weston. It's a pity he's not around to read them." Extended lecture on cause and effect *not* forthcoming.

As a coda to my atypically somber column: I personally haven't clocked any refusals to take a Lucky cab, since most visitors are unaware of the incident. We have, however, noted a drop in radio calls (local bookings) to values approaching fuck-all.

### **PHILIP TURNER**

There's nothing like a spot of self-promotion to start things off and set the tone. Ah, the difference in lifestyles between modern cosmopolitans like Mr. Charnock and the backwater residents of the St. Ockport area. He dashes out for kebabs and other exotic stuff whilst I reckon that in the time taken to go out, hang around and come back home, it's possible to cook something spectacular in the comfort of your own kitchen.

Another difference is that they've probably forgotten who I am at the local health centre and pharmacist after several years of loyal service. Thus I would appear to be the only septuagenarian in the country who doesn't have to remember to guzzle a handful of pills every day. Probably a purely temporary condition but one to be enjoyed.

In Romiley, there are more takeaways than you can shake a stick at, but none appears to flog guitars on the side. Or anything else unexpected and/or exotic.

FIO Mr. Charnock: a scullery lad is someone who used to polish oars, a.k.a. sculls, to make them glide smoothly into and out of the water. His modern counterpart would be someone who polishes the propellers of outboard motors for dinghies, etc.

Pat's story sounds unfortunately familiar; someone struggling to get along until things get so bad that she ends up in hospital, where they have the gadgets and the incentive to spot what's wrong. My mother was a typical example; she went into Stepping Hill to get a broken femur fixed and came out with a heart pacemaker and on half-a-dozen sorts of pills. Let us hope they have got the job done now in Pat's case.

Having spent a lot of time recently finishing off Rogue Shooter, in which there is rather a lot of telepathy, I ground to a stop on seeing 'mental telepathy' in Mr. Labowiz's LoC. Do people still call it that, I asked myself. And is there any other sort? Maybe I've become a kind of telepathy professional and blase about the whole business.

Thanks to Fred Smith for confirming that I'm successfully avoiding the frame of mind known as old fageyism.

Isn't it high time someone rammed a stake through the heart of that worthless old cliché which claims that if you remember the 60s, you weren't really there? The 1960s marked my transition from education to employment and having more than enough cash to enjoy life and buy lots of SF. Yes, I

remember; yes, I was definitely there; and yes, I have lots of proof on my bookshelves.

Crumbs! Taxi Nic was having a bad time of things. He survived going through a time loop on pages 22 and 23 only to plunge into a black hole at the end of page 23. Well, no one can survive something like that, so 'bye, Nic, we'll miss you! Clearly, expectations of Pat's ability to return to her prof of reading duties exceeded real life. But we can take away from Nic's final offering the message that FBI checks would appear to have the same value as all those clothes drying machines, which worked perfectly right up to the moment when they accumulated enough internal fluff to burn the owner's house down.

Apologies if I've rabbited on a bit, Graham, but you seemed to be sending out distress signals in Vib 38. So here's something to give a bit of volume to #39 -- should you choose to accept it and as long as this message doesn't self-destruct in the next 5 seconds . . .

*(EDITOR: Dear Mr Turner, I'm afraid I have no option but to Call Your Bluff on your definition of a scullery lad. A scullery maid is a maid who works in the scullery, therefore it follows that a scullery lad is a lad who works in a scullery. I can find no reference on Google or elsewhere to the need for oars to be polished to make them go through the water faster, a patently foolish notion, nor that a person male or female was employed is that specific task. This is the sort of fake news that out esteemed American friend Herr Trump rails against, and I am ashamed to hear it from someone I consider a True British Gentleman. Take care, sir, or you may find that your subscription to this journal which prides itself on printing only the truth, may well be withdrawn.)*

Philip Turner can be found at [farrago2@lineone.net](mailto:farrago2@lineone.net)

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## FRED SMITH

Many thanks for the latest *Vibrator* but what happened? In my copy anyway half of page 22 (Nic's Taxi Tales) from "turned up at her house" to the foot of the page is repeated from the top of page 23 and carries on from there to the bottom when the rest of the article is then missing due, presumably, to the space being taken up by the repeated half-page. Are all the copies like this or only mine? I trust that Pat is continuing to recover well from her operation and it's understandable that she won't feel up to proof-reading for the present , at least!

Enjoyed your shopping and Whittington stories although I haven't much comment to make regarding them, or in response to your letter hacks this time. Mainly because if i don't get this out now I'll miss your (presumed) deadline. One thing, though, you mention having watched all five of the Pirates of the

Caribbean. I have seen the first two but are the other three any good? Bearing in mind that you like pirates, of course!

*(EDITOR: Oh dear, another voice of dissent and dissatisfaction from our cousin in the Northern Provinces. If you are not careful I will stop sending you hard copies altogether and put you on my pdf only list. That'll larn ya.)*

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### **ROBERT LICHTMAN**

There are intimations lurking within and swirling around the pages of *Vibrator* 2.0.38 that you might be tiring of your relentless monthly production schedule. First, it didn't turn up until April 11th – perhaps the latest (without checking) you've ever been in distributing an issue. Second, you haven't as of today's writing (April 29th, also Trump's Horrible Hundredth Day) sent out either directly to me or as a post on InTheBar, your usual reminder that letters must be submitted by such-and-such a date in order to be in the following issue. Third, in the introduction to the issue you write, "it seems to be becoming harder and harder to keep to deadlines" and "it becomes increasingly harder for me to pad it out with the sort of rubbish personal recollections I specialize in." Finally, and as if that wasn't enough, you conclude the issue not with a request for letters but with "Bye bye, Graham, go to sleep now." So, is this missive fated to be the LoC that never saw print...?

Whatever the case, I feel compelled to write – and not just to keep up with having a letter in every issue since the first. I enjoyed "Graham Goes Shopping" with its background about how you and Pat happened to settle in the Green Lanes area and what sort of shopping destinations await you when you step out your door and walk the hundred yards to the Grand Parade. Your list of available ethnic restaurants is pretty awesome. It's so different there than in the shopping area closest to us here in Oakland, where people on neighborhood lists complain that there are far too many storefronts devoted to banks and other financial services companies and not enough fancy, exotic restaurants of various ethnicities.

Of your chemist (which we Americans call drug stores or pharmacies) you write that you "go there to re-order my various medications, you know the things every 70-year old needs these days (mostly in my case blood pressure and diabetes meds)." Being well over seventy, I have my own meds but not the same ones. One of them is for my thyroid, and rather than paying a higher price at the local chain drug store (of which there are two in that shopping area I mentioned above) I get it mail order. The other is an antiviral that I take in

tandem with my immunotherapy treatment for my multiple myeloma, and it's actually cheaper to get it locally than mail order. One never can figure out quite why the prices work out that way.

It's sad to read in "Adventures Through Time and Space in the Whittington" that you've become familiar with the hospital complex because of admissions by Pat and your son. Your story of parking difficulties around the hospital is a familiar one for many of us – as related most recently by Uncle Johnny and I've had them myself – but what was surprising was this revelation about the machines at which one pays for parking: that they "once accepted cash are now \*pay by phone\* only." Because I have a blue disabled person parking placard, I haven't paid attention to the comparable devices here of late, but so far as I recall they accept only cash and credit cards (and perhaps debit cards). If they've been upgraded to take phone payment only, it would be a new thing. Is the state of parking payment kiosk modernity in London so far ahead of us here that this is a new normal?

You're right that "N3F is not highly regarded as a fannish institution." For the most part, it's probably generally ignored – and yet it goes on year after year producing its various official publications, welcoming people to fandom, and trying to get its members involved in "round robins." It's kind of surprising that you got any response from listing *Vibrator* with the N3F, but at least your sole respondent is a recognizable name. Gary came into fandom around the time I was still technically active but mostly not, and continued his activity after I went off to live on the commune in Tennessee. I see from my list that I have just one fanzine of his: a 1971 issue of *Canticles From Labowitz* – a pretty catchy title, I think. I also get those e-mails from George Phillies with attached PDFs of various fanzines even though I haven't been a member since about 1962.

Gary writes, "Maybe I'll start an e-zine. I always have a lot of things to say. It's probably easier than starting a blog." I think so – with a blog you always have to be updating the thing to keep your readers interested (so they don't write your blog off at a bad job and stop visiting). But with a zine you can publish an issue, put it out into the fannish universe, and then start a new issue whenever you please. And with Bill Burns gladly hosting your zine, each new issue is announced in his periodic postings.

Like Leigh Edmonds, I read Rob Hansen's *Then* on my Kindle. Even though I bought a copy of the hardcover edition, it was easier than way. I finished it back in March, even taking the time to go through the fanzine covers and the photos of fans. I particularly liked that the latter were in alphabetical order, since in the book they're scattered here and there. Leigh wrote, "It's not a very exciting read (maybe Rob is a closet Australian) but it is of interest...it takes some skill to make such an interesting period of fannish history seem so drab." I didn't find it

that way myself, flagging only when Rob presented lists of people who were active in this or that local group but mostly never apparently got into fanzines because of how many of the names were unfamiliar to me.

Of his one-time fanzine *Small Friendly Dog* Paul Skelton writes, “I do though still hanker after producing one more issue of SFD, if only to confound anyone who thought they had a full set, though why I should have this aspiration given that only me, Cas, and whoever got Mike Glicksohn’s fanzines, have complete sets, unless Mike Meara kept his when he passed the rest of his fanzine collection on to me. I suppose I could produce just a single copy to ensure I had the only complete set.” If he’s speaking only of *SFD* and if the most recent issue was #24, then he can add me to the list of people with a complete set. I also have a run of its apparent predecessor, *Inferno*, from #7 on. Were #1 through #6 under yet another title, or do I simply not have them? (Oh, and it was Murray Moore who got Glicksohn’s fanzines.)

Nic’s story of the sexual assault by one of Lucky’s drivers and the media flap that ensued was an interesting read, especially the to-be-expected comments from some about the supposedly inadequate background checks of prospective drivers. Of that Nic writes, “the screening and background checking process might be getting a little lax, although it could be pointed out that if you take several steps back to see the forest, this is *one* driver out of probably 6,000 or more (on the basis of 3,500+ cabs, two shifts a day). That kind of simple math, however, doth not a news item make.” I wholeheartedly agree with Nic – this is the same sort of stupid complaint that comes up when someone mentally unbalanced has a gun and shoots up some people: that somehow disparate databases should be coordinated and therefore the person *should have been kept from owning a gun*. Good luck with that, though it would create a lot of employment if thousands of government employees were hired to do that. But that would involve money, and we have Republicans in charge who probably wouldn’t want to spend it.

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## **DAVID REDD**

Thanks for Vib 2.0.38. Tried writing something light and happy about 2017, but your phrase “Life often intervenes” seems especially true this year. Too many friends dying. Incidentally, the Philip K Dick novel you feel trapped in must be *Radio Free Albemuth* – presumably the bit about a dork President with too-close ties to Russia.

Other chords struck in this issue: Robert Lichtman's "Ideally I'd like to offload a book or two for each new one I allow to enter the house, but I haven't been very successful on that account." Me neither. Even selling the house doesn't help. But if you don't buy something desirable when you have the chance, you have regrets forever. Dave Cockfield has it right: "Buy and be damned rather than lose out." So the kids will have a heap of mouldering paper rather than an inheritance? My plan is that they get the boring finances now when they need the money, while I keep the fun vinyl and books I need. A good deal for all.

No "America the Damned" this, but vinyl of old Americana can fill the gap. Through Plainsong (70s country/folk band including Ian Matthews) and their cover of "The Goodnight-Loving Trail" I discovered the songs of Utah Phillips, and recently noticed that Phillips had attended the 1986 anniversary of the "Haymarket Affair" in Chicago. Followed *that* up and was back in "America the Damned". How little we know – one lifetime isn't enough when so many distractions hide the important stuff.

Liked your local-colour piece on Green Lanes, an unexpected sequel-by-another-hand to those great *Illustrated London News* pieces on changing London "villages" decades ago. No specialty Kurdish restaurants? Surely a specialty Kurdish barber or something? I saw one such barber-sign in Tewkesbury last year, when I could still drive distances. The mixed-shop commercial model you mention is well-known in Ireland (pub and general store) and has been seen in our own Celtic West of Pembrokeshire (fruit and computers, pet-food and bookshop, although the latter closed possibly due to dogs choking on old Jeffrey Archer novels).

As for Nic's musings on the screening of taxi-drivers, when Trump starts using Elon Musk's version of neural lace to measure *everyone's* thoughts against the ideal All-American profile, might not be just taxi-drivers being sent back over the Wall Around America. I wish this was still science fiction.

More depressing news for 2017: the Beatles *still* aren't going to reissue *Sgt Pepper* with "Strawberry Fields Forever" and "Penny Lane" in their rightful place near the end. Wait fifty years, and you still have to make your own mixtapes. That's global commerce for you.

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# TALES OF A LAS VEGAS TAXI DANCER by Nic Farey

## RIVERS OF BABYLON

It's that time of year, as they say. Why do "they" even say that? It's tincture of pure bollocks isn't it? It's never *that* time of year, it's always *this* time of year, unless you're jumping in your TARDIS and giving it "Set the controls for *that* time of year, yeah? Ooh, let's go to the gig I never saw and fuck up the Facebook posts..."

At *this* time of year, I get inevitable comments from visitors about how well nice it is, sunny, temps usually in the mid-80s (around 30 in French money), a "light breeze" (which in the Las Vegas valley can be 20mph, (32 in French money) with gusts up to fuckinell, really?). As the arriving punter inevitably sneezes massively in the cab (get out the Lysol!), I'll make some remark about the desert dust working its ethereal magic. What we do have is a mostly invisible enemy: vast, malevolent and possibly sentient clouds of pollen wreaking utter havoc on the respiratory systems of visitors and residents alike.

I've read that your allergies can alter as you age, and from personal anecdotal experience I would support that contention, to the extent that in these halcyon Spring months, the evial pollen insinuates itself everywhere, especially when you live in an old sieve of a trailer. Thus, as I lay insensible having the kip which is my just due, the snot factory cranks up to night shift 11, so the first thing I need to do upon waking at the Sign of Three (after a rehydrating chug of water) is blow out as much as possible, and yet maintain the vigilance of wiping the river of strings that may emerge from either or both nostrils as I spend a typical 15 minutes or so (Marine Le Pen in French money) squirrel-chasing and perhaps appropriately checking via iPhone whatever various inanities and insults that multiple award-winning editor Grah has snarled in my direction overnight. Since the factory is exceeding productivity targets by several miles (Charles De Gaulle's hooter in French money), the excess typically has to run down the throat into whatever biological holding areas exist, ready to be coughed up and gobbled out, a process which will often take at least as long as herding the recalcitrant squirrels, and is nothing to do with 45+ years (Les Miserables in French money) of chain-smoking the cheapest possible fags on the block, honest guv.

I have a routine in the mornings, as you might expect, which being the fart I am does not tend to vary, although there was an exciting development a week or two ago where I decided to put my teeth in immediately after dosing the pits with the Old Spice stick, rather than waiting until I'd got me trousers on. While

not quite as creakingly ancient as the idle millionaire retiree readers of this upmarket publication, there's still a process of remembering to take the Old Man Vitamin Pill (Centrum Silver, "Argent du mileu" in French money), a fistful of Advil (unproduced Sergio Leone remake) for the ongoing multi-year headache and associated other pains, including the right shoulder which is now fucked up to the point where I'm choking a scream every time I'm putting the shirt on of a morning. Famous Author(tm) J L Farey claims great interest in the varied Goon Show Grams noises which emanate from *ante meridiem* locations and orifices, contending that they're really quite different every day, although I personally suspect that they're identical, if somewhat re-ordered according to immediate need. I do not expect the audio samples to achieve international chart fame any time soon.

Us drivers do rely on each other for useful updates of what stands are working, so we're often texting and calling during the day, as well as the usual amounts of bullshitting when we get together. One of the blokes calls me up one morning to advise that we supposedly have a bunch of vouchers at South Point, so come and get some! Vouchers are issued by the airlines (typically Spirit, to whom this happens often) if a flight is cancelled or hugely delayed to cover ground transportation, hotel room and meal, and for transportation mostly specify one or two particular cab companies, typically and happily ours included. The compensation varies by airline. Spirit will reimburse the meter amount, and while they do state on the voucher that gratuities are not included, we don't get a tip at least half the time. The trick is to try to get the riders to share a cab so you'll get two or even three vouchers each go, all of which we claim, so if you get two vouchers for South Point to the airport at one go that ends up being \$30 (the approximate fare, 73 sous in French money) in pocket. It's not (ahem) unknown for a driver to run up the meter a bit to pad the amount. The friendly United airlines usually issues fixed amount vouchers, for that ride \$35 so we'll make a bob there too. However, they recently had a cancelled flight or an overbook where they were putting the people in Mandalay Bay, about a \$20 fare from the airport, but issuing vouchers for \$15. One of my mates from another company tried to refuse the ride on that basis, but was threatened with an 86 in no uncertain terms by the brownshirt. As expected, it proved impossible to convince the customer that the voucher didn't cover the entire fare, so he ended up out of pocket.

So after that digression, I'm off down to South Point where there are rather a lot of cabs, but I decide to wait it out for a while which turned into over two hours and arse. The ride I eventually got was a very drunk and mumbling young bloke of some Hispanic origins who gave me an address up towards North Las Vegas, a rather nice ride of about \$55. I was worried about getting paid, and about him, since he was mumbling, trying to make phone calls (being ignored)

and apparently quite unsure about the exact location of his destination, but he pulls out a well loaded money clip, so I'm all right. He asks me to wait a minute, and he's soon back out; I've no idea whether whoever's door he ended up at was in fact the bird he'd been on the phone with, but in he gets and off we go again, this time giving me a Paradise Road address which (as I had guessed) turned out to be the Siegel Suites there (downmarket extended stay joints), a known residence for some quite dodgy transsexuals. At this point I may have an inkling as to what he might be after. After he makes several straight-to-voicemail calls while sitting outside, I'm instructed to head back to South Point, eventually depositing the bloke at a rather nicer apartment complex several blocks away for another \$60, no tip (though I think he intended to leave one, just couldn't count), and by that point he was creeping me out to the point I was glad to see the back of him.

I've been known to attribute the occasional nickname or epithet to some individuals, and there is a new star in that firmament, to the distress (for other reasons) of No Knickers (and twice round the beltway) Cuban lady. Couple of months ago, Lucky bent a rule about not hiring drivers under 25 years of age to sign up this kid who'd been driving for YCS, on the basis of having a look at his trip sheet and its stratospheric book, achieved on the basis of long-hauling *every* ride. He's also an inveterate speeder (three tickets already) and perhaps one of the most annoying little rat-faced pricks it's been my lot to encounter, his already shifty demeanor not helped by the consumption of what appears to be 50 gallons (1 wine lake in French money) of Red Bull every shift, earning him the sobriquet "MethArmenia", because he's Armenian, you see, though not nice like my friend Arthur who gifted me that Vodka (qv). I've suggested that if he's going to be a fuckin' thief, rather than scream around the highways and byways for hours taking increasingly creative routes to nearby destinations, it would be shurely much more efficient to simply take a half hour and rob a bank.

Coda to last month's column: we haven't had any instances of punters bypassing our cabs on stands, most likely since the incident related was reported locally and not nationally, although in the couple of weeks following it was noticeable that the number of phone calls not from our few regulars dropped alarmingly and is still below previous levels.

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So endeth the month of Corflu 34, you know the one with the catchy name and logo. Well, I wasn't there (too poor you understand) so what I had to be satisfied with were various posts on various groups and finally the video streaming which Rob Jackson, after a great difficulty, finally managed to accomplish. All hail to you Rob.

If you are interested you can still find and view archive material at this url:

<https://livestream.com/accounts/24977777>

What did I make of it all? Well not much actually. I was disconcerted by an early post by Rich Coad proclaiming he was bored. Then I tuned in to see a roomful of attendees, half of whom I did not recognize. Reported attendance is 40, which is a bit shit for a CorFlu on the West Coast. All kudos to Marty Cantor for taking on the task, but I think his slanting of it as a games convention (with no other programming on the Saturday night) did him no favours, or favors if you are American. Also Marty is not a person with any awareness of how to promote and generate publicity.

Nice to see all round good guy Pete Young as the Corflu 50 delegate, and Randy, albeit as a rather reluctant GoH.

The presentation of the Faan awards left me less than satisfied, not that I didn't feature, I had planned for that by adequately queering my pitch before the event. Mostly it was Murray's soulless presentation of the results without any sense of enthusiasm or theatre or even of being in the same room as the winners. Murray also managed to invent four fictitious votes in the Best Perzine category, indicating he should certainly not be trusted with administering this in future.

And most of the panels, quizzes, I managed to catch were also exceeding lifeless. But easy for me to criticize, eh, having not being there to add my own brand of drunken sparkle to the proceedings (one day you will miss me).

This Vibrator 39, trudging towards the finishing line as usual. Write me at [graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk](mailto:graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk) if you feel inclined, and fuck you if you don't.

If Pat Charnock proof reads this you will shurely know. And don't call me Shirley.