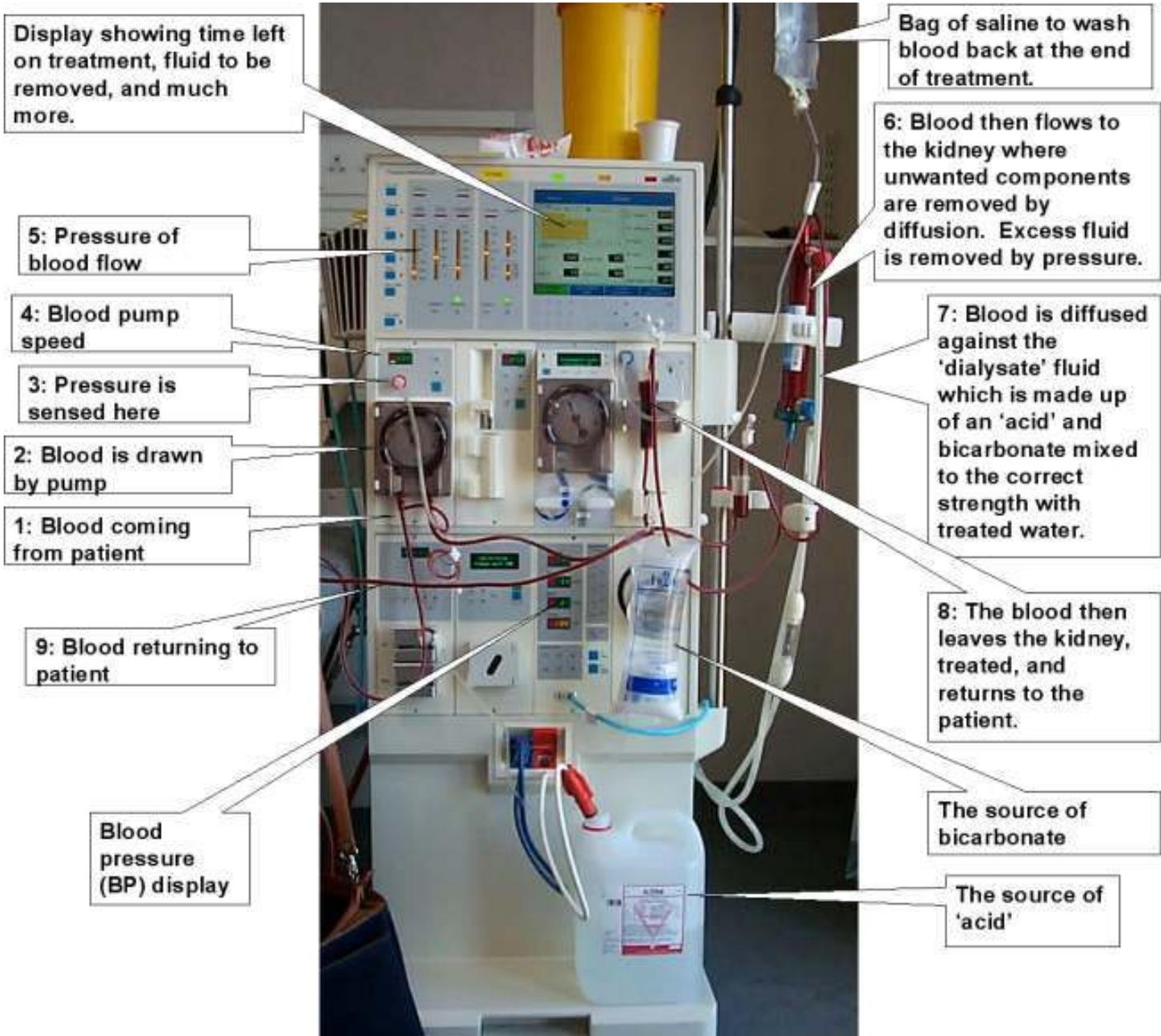




## December 2016



### THE BLOODY ISSUE

Well that was November that was. Soon be December and who knows what that will bring. How many more famous or infamous celebrities will die leading people to proclaim 2016 the worst year ever, as if it was really any different from any other year? Do people imagine all their heroes will suddenly cease to die and live forever? Well good luck to them.

What have I been doing? Well, the usual round of blood tests. Sometimes I'm surprised I have any blood left to test, but I gather it regenerates itself. How does that happen exactly? I used to be afraid of needles but now I'm so desensitized to them they are no problem (as long as you don't look at them going in). Speaking of blood, those of a sensitive disposition (Ian Maule) should avoid our lead article in which Uncle Johnny spills a lot of beans but not much actual blood, fortunately. Johnny was afraid most of my readers would find this tedious, and it is to a degree, but I am fascinated by medical procedures that I have no first-hand knowledge of.

My other on-going problem is with my bathroom hand-basin. The plumbing on this has become clogged and totally blocked, mostly I suspect with lime scale, and no scenario I can come up with can seem to clear it. I have even rung a local listed plumber but he sneered at me saying he didn't handle blockages. What kind of plumber worth his salt can't handle a blockage? I think he meant there was not enough money in it for him, but he neglected to ask me how much I would be willing to pay, which would have been a lot. I have ordered endless lots of tools from Amazon but none of them seem to allow me to dismantle the trap, which has limited access. I suspect I might have to replace the entire bathroom to solve the problem, which probably needs doing anyway. Pass the hammer.

I'm Graham Charnock at [graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk](mailto:graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk)

# BLOODBATH

by John Nielsen-Hall

I was sitting in a pie shop next to Graham Charnock. "If only you would write me an article," he said. "I've got the perfect title, but I can't think what it could be about."

"UNCLE JOHNNY'S BLOODBATH," he said.

I was shocked, shocked I tell you.

"Surely you don't want me to write about all that stuff?"

We both knew what stuff it was, only I knew about it with the benefit of practical experience, unlike Graham, who was merely wishing for a thrill akin to another slasher movie. The problem is, I can go on and on and on and on and on about this subject, until people

either run from the room hoping to make it to somewhere they won't make a mess on the carpet, or sleep an unquiet sleep. We are talking about: **Dialysis**.

So now you know. There is one such machine pictured on the cover. They now come with touch screens on the top reducing the need for any manual switches or valves. Despite what I might say when I want to unsettle you, it's actually a very sterile, clinical process. Very occasionally, there is a crisis of some sort and blood spurts everywhere. The worst thing about that is the damage to your clothes. It's better you don't turn up for treatment in your Sunday best. All the lines connecting you to the machine and to the saline supply are thrown away after each session.

The machines disinfect and sterilise themselves between each patient. The nurses wipe down the outside of the machine and the screens after every patient. If you walk in to a dialysis unit mostly what you hear is the high pitched droning of the pumps in the machines and a variety of annoying beeps and tones as the machines vie with each other to attract the attention of the nurses. Those, in fact, are Very Annoying. It's worse than a slot parlour in Vegas some days. But leaving all that aside, it's very far from a bloodbath. It's sterile, quiet (ish) and mostly boring, as the rest of this article will demonstrate.

Dialysis is a major commitment in your life. Some people get away with two sessions a week, but the majority, including me, will be there for three. Since, in my case, it's about an hour's drive to the hospital and another hour back, and it can take anything up to an hour to get connected to a machine, plus the treatment itself is four hours long, and getting disconnected and making sure the holes in your arm are not bleeding might take another half hour, you might as well write off the whole day to it. There is, in fact, a slightly less time consuming alternative. There is a "satellite" unit in the local hospital to me, the Great Western in Swindon. In fact, there are a number of these "satellites" in hospitals in Milton Keynes, Banbury, Aylesbury and maybe somewhere else I've forgotten. They are all run by the renal team in the Churchill Hospital, Oxford, which is where I go. Reading runs its own unit with "satellites" in Slough and Basingstoke. Due to bureaucracy, ne'er the twain shall meet. Ditto Southampton whose tentacles reach up to Salisbury also not that far away from me. But the Churchill is where I have always been treated for my kidney cancer and would have to keep going back to for appointments with my consultant, most of my scans, and so on.

Besides, as I say in reference to being treated in Swindon only half jokingly, I want to go on living!

I have been dragged into Swindon as an emergency more than once. I have never been entirely satisfied with my treatment. Being moved to a new ward at about one in the morning the day before I was to be discharged anyway was the last and most raw experience there. The Churchill Hospital is vast, and it has an interesting history. It was originally a joint Anglo-American Military Hospital founded in the run up to D-Day. In those days it was a collection of huts, American on one side of the site and British on the other. Both sides kept working long after the war- there were a number of American air bases and camps around Oxford until the early fifties. But the British side became more of a permanent structure and was de-militarised

after the foundation of the NHS in 1948. The roads that connected the two halves of the site to the rest of Oxford are still there- Roosevelt Drive and Churchill Way- and to this day, the Stars and Stripes flies alongside the Union flag in the little memorial garden outside the new main entrance, which building houses wards, imaging and theatres and is the only 21<sup>st</sup> century part of the site. By means of miles of echoing corridors this brand spanking new part of the hospital is connected to the intermediate parts built in the 70's, 80's, and 90's right through to the old late 1940's parts. There are still huts, but none as old as the 1940's. Quite a lot were put up in previous times of cash-strapped economic misfortune (i.e. the 1970's). Most of these are now empty and derelict. I used to attend Urology clinics in one set of them.

Nowadays, Urology is all in the shiny new bit. Renal medicine straddles the divide between old and slightly less old. If you enter from the nearest car park, you come in through a 1990's era low rise brick building which houses the Renal out patients clinics, and leads through to the 1970's flat roofed brutalist Renal Ward and "Day Case" unit. ("Day Case" is theoretically for minor surgery and one-off treatments. In practice it is often an overflow for the Renal Ward.) Across the corridor from the Renal Ward, the Main Dialysis unit stretches back into the 1990's building and occupies another 1970's blockhouse to the side. If you don't go in there but remain wondering where to go at the junction of the corridors, you have a choice; you can go down the corridor, turn left and then right through doors that lead you outdoors, or, if you would rather keep dry, turn right and keep going for a bit then right up a steep slope of a corridor then right again downhill. ( Phew! These corridors!) You will find yourself outside one or other entrance to the Tarver Dialysis Unit, which is where I currently reside. If you have come in from the outside, you come through the small 1990's extension into the 1940's part of the labyrinth, to be confronted with a small waiting area, preceding a big open ward with three side rooms, housing a total of fifteen beds. It's a smaller, quieter place than the Main Dialysis Unit which, if you visited it, you will find is three adjoining rooms with two side rooms holding some forty beds.

People do use Tarver as a short cut though, and some of the more senior nursing staff have offices off to one side before the doors into the corridor you would have used if you had opted to stay in the warm. So the "quiet" bit is relative, given that so many people come and go. Quieter than the Main Unit anyway - that really is like St Pancras Station.

The Churchill Hospital , despite the size of the plot it is on, and which it shares with the faculty buildings, lecture theatres etc. for the Oxford University School of Medicine, is not the main hospital in Oxford. If you get yourself into a medical emergency of any sort you will find yourself hauled into the John Radcliffe Hospital, ( known colloquially as the JR) a mile or so down the road. If you are too rich and too snobby to be in an NHS hospital more than you need to be, the private Manor hospital is also only about five minutes away. But should you need Dialysis in either of them an ambulance will haul you round to the Churchill. When you work all this out you appreciate just how much work the Renal department at the Churchill does. It's a very busy place.

So arriving on one of my treatment days from my distant fastness, I must first succeed in the “Churchill Challenge”, also known as “ Find A Parking Space”. Being a patient and a holder of a disabled persons Blue Badge, I don't have to pay, and have a special ticket that will get me through the barriers should I need to use Car Park 2, the car park right outside Renal. But there is next to no hope of parking in there unless you get there about six in the morning, which I don't. But I know of a special little space for about six cars close to Tarver Unit, in fact it is actually designated as “Tarver Dialysis Parking” in very small letters on a couple of signs. I enter the site along Churchill Way and head for the largest of the Staff Car Parks, taking a short dirt road out of this, past No Entry signs (“except for Tarver” say little signs attached to the poles) and round one of the hospital’s emergency power generating stations, and there they are. Mind you, this doesn't always work; the same right of way gives ambulance access to Tarver but it is so narrow and twisty, that you can come across ambulances backed up across where you want to park while they wait for one of their fellows to come back down after a drop off. Their task is made the more intricate by the crafty staff of Tarver and a nearby laboratory who park their own cars along the side of this little road. There is nowhere else for them. The staff car parks, like the ones for patients and visitors, are pretty much full all day every day Monday to Friday. Also if I've been struggling with the traffic on the way in, and I arrive late, I might well find this little cache of spaces is full of my fellow patients’ cars anyway, and I must return dismally along Churchill Way to Car Park 4 outside the “old” main entrance in hope of being able to park my car in some unconsidered corner there, maybe on the grass. If that happens, I have failed the Churchill Challenge, because it is a much longer walk down the endless corridors to Tarver from there. If I succeed, then it’s a short walk to Tarver, though via an uphill corridor.

Arriving in the unit at last, I am always greeted by the friendly nursing team. Most days they have a bed and machine ready and waiting for me. If not, I go to the waiting area and wait to be called – it’s not long usually. Theoretically, the unit has two shifts a day, starting at 7 or 8 in the morning through to 11 or 12, and then from 1 or 2 in the afternoon through to 5 or 6. (the Main Unit has three shifts up to 10 at night). In practice, because the majority of patients are brought in by patient transport mini-bus type ambulances or volunteer drivers or even taxis, it’s not possible to keep a strict timetable, especially when you take into account Oxford's notorious traffic congestion problems. This applies to me coming in by car as much as anybody, so my strategy is to avoid the rush hour by not setting off until around 10 in the morning, arriving by about 11 and hence I will be leaving between 4 and 5 with any luck- when the traffic is terrible but it only gets more terrible still later than that, so there's nothing you can do. The nurses themselves work what they call “short” or “long” shifts, having to do so many of each every month. “Short” means 7 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon or 11 in the morning until 7 in the evening. “Long” means 7 in the morning to 7 in the evening. There is one Senior Nursing Manager, one Senior Nurse Practitioner, one Trainee Nurse Practitioner, one Health Care Assistant (HCA) one Student Nurse and everyone else is a Staff Nurse Practitioner. The “Practitioner” part of their qualifications means they can prescribe a limited amount of medicines in addition to sticking big needles in you and being experts in the use of

dialysis machines. Floating around are at least three Doctors on call, between both dialysis units, the day unit and the ward, the Renal Matron, and about six “research” nurses, because there are a number of drug and treatment variant studies going on all the time. I am on one of these, to do with iron. I was prone to getting very anaemic, but nowadays not so much, due to regular additions of iron into my treatment. The actual dose and method of this treatment is the subject of the study.

While the Main unit and the ward have a very few male nurses - six or so, could be less - Tarver's staffing is all female and around half of them do not have English as their mother tongue. We have nurses from Albania, Bulgaria, Hong Kong, various parts of India, The Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Singapore, and especially Spain. (So many from there, you wonder who is running the Spanish health system.) I try to be as helpful as I can to the nurses, because really, they work like stink, on their feet all the time, rushing about from bed to bed, lining and programming machines, connecting patients, un-lining the machines, changing bed linen, cleaning machines and still dealing with ringing phones, porters, cleaning staff, doctors demands for tests, and, yes, bed pans. I fill out the worksheet in my folder on the table by my bed, go off and weigh myself, enter the weight on the sheet, compare that with my “dry weight” ( a more or less arbitrary figure representing my weight sans everything I have drunk since my last treatment), work out how much liquid needs to come off me, go and wash my arm where my graft is ( the bit that actually connects me to the machine), adjust the bed, take my shoes off and lie down. By and by, a nurse looks at the sheet, programs the machine, checks the lines, then opens a sterile pack containing paper, gauze, antiseptic “lollipop”, two needles attached to short lines of about twelve inches and a small bag of saline and disposable syringes. She takes the paper, puts it under my arm, then measures out six strips of sticky tape from the rolls attached to her lanyard, or residing in her tunic pocket, and sticks them to my pillow or to a corner of the machine ready for later, then takes the “lollipop” and squeezes it till it cracks and releases the antiseptic into the business end of the device, then swabs the graft area of my arm. She takes the first needle and short line which is capped at the far end and inserts it through my skin into the graft. If she has got it right (and she almost always has) blood can be seen in the line, pulsing along with my heart. She puts a clamp on the line, takes the cap off, attaches a syringe, releases the clamp and uses the syringe to draw blood up the line. She will ask me if I feel any pain, but I never have. Then she pushes the blood back away, clamps the line again, and repeats the whole process for the second needle and line. Then she attaches the first line to the machine, replacing the syringe with the outgoing line (incoming to the machine) , having first checked that the machine is showing “green man” for “ready to start”. If not, there may be some delay, until the machine consents that it is, in fact, ready to start. Then she tapes down the needle in my arm, padding it with gauze if necessary. While she does that, blood shoots along the line from my arm into the machine. The machine stops when my blood arrives at the artificial kidney itself, ( a cylinder on the outside of the machine. It gets thrown away with the lines) and waits while the incoming line (outgoing to the machine) is connected up. When the nurse taps the screen to confirm that and we have blood in both lines, the dialysis proper begins. The nurse tapes up the second line as the first and

sets the profile, which in my case is a steady 0 – 100 along the horizontal axis, meaning that it will remove more impurities to begin with and more and more liquid as the session goes on. I ask for a blanket ('cos I gets very chilly, you know) and a cup of ice water ( which I save to have with my packed lunch provided by my lovely wife) and then immerse myself in my reading, which is mostly e books on my tablet (mostly Space Opera. Don't tell anyone.)

Four hours later, the machine flashes its lights and plays a little tune to indicate it has finished. The nurse clamps the lines nearest the needles and then unscrews them and reattaches them to a little plastic joining piece which is in other sterile packs she has brought with her. She presses the icon on the screen that is flashing and the machine goes into cleaning and disinfecting mode. Then she untapes my first needle, then prepares a wad of actinic and ordinary gauze, and in a skilful manoeuvre, whips the needle out and slaps the wad down on the hole. Then I grip the wad as well and she leaves go and de-line the machine. By the time, she has done that, with any luck when we peak under the wad, it will have stopped bleeding. She prepares another clean wad and tapes it down. Now we repeat the process for the second needle only this time she can rush off to another patient while I hold the wad down, or if we are lucky, we can chew the fat about this or that, until she thinks we have let enough time elapse for a clot to have formed over the hole. This is the riskiest part of the whole day in many ways, because blood can literally spurt out of those holes, and it goes everywhere. Before a few seconds have elapsed the bed, the floor, the machine, to say nothing of nurse and patient, are drenched and the whole scene will look the denouement of a slasher movie. But that very seldom happens, thank heaven. Duly taped up, I rise from the bed, wait for the double vision to settle (my blood pressure is now very low), and then slowly put my shoes back on, and totter to the scales again. My weight should match the figures indicated by the chart, and generally it does within 0.1 or so. Gathering up my belongings, and saying my farewells, I totter off back down the corridor to the car, turnaround gingerly in the very limited space, and hurtle off (Ha!). And that's dialysis.

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## AMERICA THE DAMNED

An occasional series by Graham Charnock

In 1932 the aviator Charles Lindbergh was a national hero. In 1927, in his plane *The Spirit of St Louis* he had won the prestigious Orteig prize for the first non-stop flight between New York and Paris. On his return to New York he received a ticker-tape parade welcome. His exploits of course dominated the press of the time and he quickly became a celebrity and was feted and welcomed into the congratulatory New York social scene of the time. It is hard to underestimate his impact, via the national press, on the public thinking of the time. Lindbergh was selected as the first *Time* magazine "Man of the Year", appearing on its cover for the January 2, 1928 issue. The Press, primed by such events as the death of Rudolph Valentino,

had discovered the taste of the American Public for excesses of adulation, in a way that has not altered really since this first expression, but is now obviously maximized by Facebook and other social networking phenomena.

In 1929 the Great Depression hit America. This was an economic depression, but the seeds of an earlier cultural one had already been sown in such events as the West Virginia Mine War, and the whole rise of the IWF and the conflicts it engendered. At the time America certainly needed a hero and the country had not forgotten Lindbergh's exploits; they were still a source of national pride and his words of wisdom and moral guidance were sorely needed at this trying time. The Depression severely undermined the American ethic of self-sufficiency, with people queuing in food lines and at soup kitchens and many were driven to desperate measures to eke out their existence. Lindbergh, as a wealthy socialite, was immune to all this of course, and subject not only to adulation but a degree of envy by those who felt less privileged. It is fair to say he was not universally loved by those detached from his early achievements as an aviator.

In 1927 Lindbergh's enhanced social standing brought him into contact with Anne Morrow, the daughter of Dwight Morrow, a partner at J.P. Morgan & Co. They married in 1929 and their first child Charles Augustus Lindbergh was born in 1930.

On the evening of March 1, 1932, Lindbergh was targeted, undoubtedly because of his celebrity, and an intruder kidnapped 20-month-old Charles Augustus Lindbergh Jr. from his crib in the second-story nursery of his family's rural home, by climbing up a ladder that had been placed against the wall. The press reaction was of course instantaneous and overwhelming, and it became known as the 'Crime of the Century'. There were papers to be sold, after all, even at the height of the Depression. A note was left and negotiations took place and ransoms were exchanged. The body of the child was found on May 12, 1932, in woods four miles from the Lindbergh home. The cause of death was listed as a blow to the head resulting in a fractured skull.

The subsequent investigation soon centred upon Richard Bruno Hauptmann, who tried to pass gold certificates which were part of the original ransom payment. Hauptmann had illegally entered the US by stowing away on a liner. Landing in New York City in September 1923, the 24-year-old Hauptmann was taken in by a member of the established German community. Part of his defence was that he had discovered the bonds in the possessions of a lodger who could not now be traced.

Typically for something which had been labelled 'The Crime of the Century', Hauptmann was soon labelled by the press as 'The Most Hated Man in the World'. Throughout the trial Hauptmann maintained his innocence but the jury was not convinced, having been presented with a wealth of often shakey forensic evidence, and so-called "expert" testimony, and sentenced him to death, which was carried out, after numerous appeals, on April 3, 1936. He was executed in "Old Smokey", the electric chair at the New Jersey State Prison. Hauptmann's last meal consisted of coffee, milk, celery, olives, salmon salad, corn fritters, sliced cheese, fruit salad, and cake.

Did Hauptman kidnap and kill the Lindbergh baby? If he did, why was the attempt apparently bungled in its aftermath? As can be expected the case has attracted all sorts of theories. One claimed Hauptman could not have acted alone, so in a sense it became a precursor of the Kennedy Assassination case. Others claim, predictably, the FBI was complicit in stitching him up. His widow, Anna Hauptmann, who was a prime mover behind the campaign to assert his innocence and who worked tirelessly all her life in that cause, died on October 10, 1994.

Lindbergh himself died on August 26, 1974, at age 72. In the same month Soyuz 15 carried two cosmonauts to the space station Salyut 3. Aviation and exploration had come a long way and left many people behind.

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### **MALCOLM EDWARDS**

Mooching around the internet I came upon the most recent issue of VIBRATOR at efanazines, and found this:

*Bob Shaw wrote novels of ideas but his editor Malcolm Edwards soon went on to commission soul-less and idea-less blockbluster trilogies and Bob died soon afterwards with no markets left to him.*

It's not the first time you've tried to insinuate that my career decisions were in some way complicit in Bob's decline and death, but it's as nonsensical (and offensive) now as it was the before. Here are some facts:

I left Gollancz in October 1989 for Grafton (later HarperCollins)

Gollancz published Bob's ORBITSVILLE JUDGEMENT in 1990

Gollancz published Bob's TERMINAL VELOCITY (a fix-up expansion of VERTIGO) in 1991  
Sadie died in 1991, which understandably affected Bob and his writing.

Gollancz published Bob's WARREN PEACE in 1993

Bob married Nancy and moved to the USA in 1995.

Bob died in early 1996, leaving a contract with Gollancz for a further novel unfulfilled.

Richard Evans – my successor at Gollancz – was a fan of Bob's work and had published a number of his works in paperback before moving to Gollancz. The suggestion that Gollancz had abandoned Bob is simply untrue.

I really couldn't care less what you think about my subsequent career, but it is another fact that – although I renewed several fantasy authors' contracts at HarperCollins – I only ever commissioned one fantasy trilogy there, as far as I remember. It's done quite well. Jane Johnson was the principal fantasy editor there, and she was much better at it than I was. I did commission a fair amount of sf before my job changed in 1991, including Stephen Baxter, Pat Cadigan, Richard Calder, Chris Evans, Rob Holdstock, Nicola Griffith, Frederik Pohl, Bob Silverberg, Sheri Tepper, Lisa Tuttle – and doubtless others I've temporarily forgotten. Which were those other trilogies?

What happened to the convention about sending fanzines – or at least, links to fanzines – to people mentioned in them?

TL;DR – fuck off, Graham.

*(EDITOR: I'm sorry I have offended you. I fully accept your \*Not Me Guv\* rebuke that your career decisions had nothing to do with Bob's decline and death. But you seem to attribute it directly to the death of Sadie, which I find questionable, but then I didn't know him as well as you obviously did. The fact is that he wrote a proper novel in 1990 and then only one more before his death six years later. Sadie may have had something to do with his lack of enthusiasm but I think I am not out of order in suggesting there might have been other facts involved, perhaps even a disillusionment with the way he thought sf publishing was going. The idea that Bob's style of writing was becoming perceived while he was alive as old fashioned, does not originate with me but comes from my general conversation with other sf professionals. I think you defend your corner very well, and am more than willing to publicly apologize for any slur on your career although I wish you would address the general issue I was talking about, rather than concentrate on what you see as a personal attack, which certainly wasn't intended. I will publish your rebuke in Vibrator, including your unfortunate use of invective. And by the way, it has never been a tradition, as far as I know, for fanzine editors to send copies to people merely mentioned.*

*I think you should also perhaps, in the interests of full disclosure, and a meaningful substantive reply, mention those fantasy authors whose contracts you renewed while you*

were at Harper Collins as well as naming the one trilogy you commissioned if only so we can make our own judgements of whether it was *\*highly thought of\**.

Finally I was puzzled by your TL/DR reference and whether it reflected what you felt I might think or your letter, or what you in fact thought of my entire creative output for the last ten years or more.

By the way I don't for a minute buy your explanation that you found this reference to yourself simply by "mooching around the internet".

### **MALCOLM EDWARDS REPLIES**

I didn't intend to suggest that Sadie's death was responsible for Bob's reduced productivity, but I think it's fair to speculate that it might be a factor. His relationship with Nancy and relocation to the US might be another. Generally failing health might be a third. And there are others which I wouldn't want to speculate about publicly, not least because my contact with Bob lessened in the years after I left Gollancz.

I'm sorry if my language offended you.

*(EDITOR: It's a shame that your relationship with Bob lessened after so many years as his editor and I admit I find it odd no new commissions or approaches to him were made by you in your editorial capacity at Orion. But perhaps I simply don't comprehend the weird and wonderful world of Publishing.)*

Malcolm Edwards can be found at [Malcolm.Edwards@orionbooks.co.uk](mailto:Malcolm.Edwards@orionbooks.co.uk)

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### **PAUL SKELTON**

I try not to think about death. It would mean no more 'me', and I quite enjoy being me. Plus, of course, there is the fact there is bugger-all you can do about it anyway, other than in respect of the practical measures one must take regarding waste-disposal and estate-planning (a somewhat grandiose term in my case for little more than a few old pennies and a silver thruppenny-bit in the button-box). I was however caught by your remark...

"Some creatures of course never develop a sense of self, and are thus immune from fear of death forever."

What mainly intrigued me about that is just where in the evolutionary scheme of things that boundary might lie...and how would we know? Obviously if you go back to the amoeba you could safely assume no sense of self, because all amoebas are the amoeba, having technically been around since even before David Attenborough. Once you get as far as sexual reproduction though the uncertainty begins. In order to procreate any such creature must have some form of a sense of not-self in order to find a mate. Wouldn't such a sense of not-self require a de-facto sense of self?

Nor do you have to climb very far up the Tree of Life before we see small insects in the garden trying desperately not to get eaten by spiders or praying mantises (albeit admittedly not the latter in my garden). Moving higher up the Tree I am reminded of the video of the iguana trying desperately to escape from the beach where the rocks were home to an almost infinite number of pythons. Of course one can't say whether it evinced a fear of death, or simply of potential pain but, whichever it was, it certainly did its best to avoid it. There's a lot of self-preservation goes on in Nature, and surely a sense of self-preservation implies a sense of self.

Not that I am saying your meaning was incorrect, only that it's not quite as simple as a sense of self.

I take it to be awareness that with a beginning there is also an end, and that this must apply to self. Birds for instance raise their chicks, see them turn into other birds and leave the nest, even driving them away if they are still around when a newer brood appears. So they see the beginning, but do they remember that they too went through a similar beginning? Even if so, do they envisage an end, other than by misadventure? We know that **everything** must end, even the Universe itself according to our current understanding, but is even the most intelligent of the Great Apes aware that 'me' must eventually become 'not me anymore'?

So no, I agree, we are not likely to ever see a chorus of bunnies on the Sussex downs belting out *Bright Eyes*.

Your answer to my Barcon booze query was basically picking 'Stating the Bleeding Obvious' as your specialist subject, a la Sybil Fawlty. Does anyone know how much profit hotels tend to make on a pint of beer? It's just that Tesco sells some pretty good bottled beers at £1.50 (well, 4/£6 actually), and if hotels were happy with £2.00/bottle corkage you could still drink decent beer at the same price (or less) as the hotel would charge for its rubbish - just a thought (albeit probably a stupid one).

*(EDITOR: You are right of course that I should have qualified "sense of self" by saying sense of self awareness. I really don't think the flight or flight response which most animals display when threatened represents a true awareness of the long term consequences of that threat. It is simply a primitive survival mechanism, dictated essential by an animal's genes imperative to propagate themselves.)*

Paul Skelton can be found at paulskelton2@gmail.com

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## **JOHN PURCELL**

Still pubbing, I see, and using artwork from that nice, Hugo Award winning fan artiste, Steve Stiles, too. Congratulations to him, and now it will be some other deserving person's turn, I hope.

Starting off an issue talking about dead bodies is an attention grabber. In my lifetime I have only seen a few. The first time I was in junior high school, and the body was sprawled out in

the street, a massive pool of blood around it, as paramedics and police did what they could before covering the poor man. He had been riding a motorcycle, got clobbered by a car pulling out of a side street directly in front of the biker's path. Judging by the distance from impact and where the rider smushed into the pavement, he must have been exceeding the speed limit. Ever since that day I have never had any interest in owning a motorcycle.

After that, my experiences with the dead were stately affairs: funerals for grandparents and parents. Always sad, true, and these make one contemplate life. One starts to wonder what might Lie Beyond, but then I figure it's not worth wasting brain cells on it. I only hope that when my time comes, hopefully at least a couple decades from now, that I can accept it with the grace and dignity my parents displayed.

I have to admit that the story of Sacco and Vanzetti is one I've only heard of before mainly because my dad's family lived in Manhattan, and grandfather was in construction at the time of the Wall Street bombing. He might even have been working on a nearby building when the bomb went off. I can't ask him anymore - long gone - but it's possible he was in the area. Scary thought.

John Purcell can be found at [askance73@gmail.com](mailto:askance73@gmail.com)>

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### **JIM LINWOOD CATCHES UP ON VIBRATOR 31**

I'm currently reading Mike Moorcock's "autobiography", *The Whispering Swarm*, which is the first novel in a serial trilogy called *The Sanctuary Of the White Friars*.

In the novel the teenage "Mike", when editor of *Tarzan Adventures*, finds a gateway in the City of London to a parallel London called Alsacia full of Carmelite monks, highwaymen, musketeers, puritans, roundheads and cavaliers.

Later, even you make an appearance as "Graham Blount":

"Early in 1969, I passed the *New Worlds* reins to Charlie Ratz, Graham Sharp and Graham Blount. They had all been contributors and worked as professional journalists. I called them my triumvirate but wasn't surprised when only Ratz wound up as editor. I was never as well-trained as Ratz but he had no idea how I ran the magazine or worked out how a story fitted or kept the finances going. He thought I was incompetent. Actually, he thought everyone else was incompetent."

You, Charles Platt and Graham Hall are in good company there along with Jack Allard (Jim Ballard) and Rex Fisch (Tom Disch). Mike's wife is called "Helena" and he has a mistress in the parallel London called Moll Midnight.

The novel's title, *The Whispering Swarm*, refers to the character Mike's tinnitus affliction which I also suffer from. When he enters Alsacia, the annoying sound in his ears disappears. I wish I could find a similar remedy, although I would prefer a trip along the lines of Woody Allen's *Midnight In Paris* to meet up with Hemingway and Dali.

### PHILIP TURNER

There were a few positives in your tale of Sacco and Vanzetti. They had a bit of fun, they got to enjoy a degree of notoriety, they got free board & lodging for 6 years, they didn't have to agonize over the suicide question because the state took care of that for them, and they were hauled out of the dustbin of history and dusted off for a touch more notoriety in Vibrator. "Always look on the bright side of life . . ." (cheerful whistling)

Plastique fivers sticking together is not proving to be a problem for me as I never seem to have more than one at any given time.

Leigh Edmonds needs to turn the problem of his bonus tracks on its head, which should be easy for an antipodean. Play the bonus trax first then go back to the start of the CD and stop playing it after the last track on the LP. Sorted. That was a rather telling point about the characterization thing. Do we want adventures and inventions and bad guys being zapped? Or would we rather read about some miserable git with more personal problems than he can count? I know where my vote goes.

Dare I disagree with the illustrious Robert Lichtman? I don't think Donald Trump will give a rat's arse about being swindled out of the US presidency by a rigged voting system. He's an old bloke enjoying his declining years, and when the campaigning shindig is over, he'll just find some other way to annoy those who need it. Yes, we can! (but we can't be arsed)

BTW: Is it ICU or ITU? And does ITU stand for Infinite Torture Unit?

I hesitate to mention that I still have my 1963 Penguin PB (price 3/6) of *Mission of Gravity* and that it has been read twice. Also to be TIC are *Needle* (currently re-reading this), *Cycle of Fire*, *Ocean On Top*, *Through the Eye of a Needle* and *Iceworld*. On the back cover of *MoG*, it sez:

"Hal Clement's science-fiction stories are models of scientific ingenuity, excellent examples of the kind of 'pure' science fiction that delights critics and readers. *Mission of Gravity* is his best."

Someone is laffing at the back of the class; is it you, Robert?

As ever, Taxi Nic entertained me with his observations. Thank you for having such a rotten life, old mate, and for letting me know that the Universe hates everyone, not just me.

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

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## IAN WILLIAMS

Death, the only thing in life we all have in common (apart from life itself) as not everyone pays taxes (like the rich). Of course it's not a problem if you're religious and know you're going to Heaven. Does anyone, apart from Catholics, think they're going to Hell? And there's twenty virgins waiting for you. (Does Heaven ever run out of virgins, I wonder?) Then there's the group I sort of call in the middle: those who reject religion but believe in some sort of mysticism, a cosmic awareness which we become part of when we die. It's all very comforting which is, of course, the point of all of it.

But for atheists like myself, it's the end of existence. We're just not there any more. For some of us, our attitude is one of acceptance. For others it's *rage rage rage against the dying of the light*. In my life I've gone from one to the other and back again and back again and....

For a period during my thirties I suffered from intense angst at the thought of not existing any more; an infinity of nothingness. Which is, of course, stupid as when you are nothing you can't perceive anything. Despite being aware of this it made no difference to me and I would lie awake night after night tormenting myself with this. This frame of mind persisted for a few years and, with hindsight, I realised I was clinically depressed and was eventually referred for psychiatric help, though by then I was almost coming out of it. One doctor, at a much later date, said it sounded to him like an existential dilemma.

Then, as we get older (and if we're flexible enough, not everyone is) our perception changes and not just about our view of death. I went from the centre ground of politics to the far left. But death looms larger, not necessarily our own deaths, but our experiences when people we know begin to get old and die, or sometimes just die without getting old. What bothered me, more than anything, was not old people I knew and relatives dying but often the process of change before death. My mother developed dementia and eventually had to be moved into a home. But that wasn't the worst of it. That came with my realisation that it had been gaining its hold over her for many years. Sometimes it was just the odd strange remark but more seriously it was what I now realise was a form of paranoia which made the dark side of her personality darker.

What I began to consider is that if you stop being you, then maybe death isn't the worst thing that can happen to you.

More recently the osteoarthritis in my knees made me also consider that being old and dependent on others then maybe death could be a kindness. Just as we put our beloved pets to sleep to ease their suffering... Well, you can see where I'm going with this.

But I'm not going there. Yes, death can be a tragedy for many reasons depending on the individual, but it can also be a mercy at the right time, sometimes if it's even a little sooner. I've now reached a point in my life where death no longer scares me as it once did. Sure I'd like a few more years of being active so I can help rescue more cats and continue to give my own a good life, but after that...

Excuse me for a moment (or 48 minutes to be precise) while I take a break to play the latest Captain Beefheart album to arrive -Shiny Beast (Bat Chain Puller) - the sixth I've bought since the last issue of Vibrator. Ah, that's better.

Actually, no, that's it. I suddenly find myself in the mood to do some tidying up indoors and outside picking up all the apples fallen from my neighbour's trees.

At least we can breathe collective sighs of relief that Donald Trump isn't President-elect. Oh, wait. Shit.

Ian Williams can be found at [ianw700@gmail.com](mailto:ianw700@gmail.com)

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## **LEIGH EDMONDS**

Here is a communication from a person with an androgynous name from the antipodes. Don't blame me, it's all my parents fault and there's never been much I could do about it. Perhaps I could have chosen a new name for myself and moved to the Pacific North West, but I've never been that imaginative.

Vibrator 2.0.33 arrived in my inbox a week or so ago but I had to wait until I had to make a trip down to Melbourne on the train to read it. It's a tradition for me and is always a good way to pass the time as the country side flits by outside the window.

It doesn't seem a very happy issue one way or another. Perhaps your two opening pieces about death and people getting executed for something they didn't do sets the tone. Like you, the only dead people I've seen have been my parents but I knew more than a few people who died when I was younger so I learned to think about people who have died as those who are absent from life. My best friend killed himself when I was 12 or so and the main thing I learned from that was that he wasn't around any more. My marginal involvement with the drug scene in the late 60s also acquainted me with a few people who disappeared from drug overdoses. I guess other people had to deal with the bodies, I just had to get used to not seeing them around any more. The same with my parents I guess. There were funerals and that kind of stuff but the main thing as far as I was concerned was that they had disappeared.

Enough about that. I'm not denying that death is an important part of life, just that most of the time I'd rather think about life than death. I'm that kind of guy.

Lots of speculation in this issue about what will happen with the Presidential election. The result was a bit of a shock and we have to wait to see if the shit really has hit the fan. I have a theory about why what happened happened, if you're interested. And even if you're not. I reckon that the relationship between a US President and their electorate is a close and personal one, not so much like a wedding, more like an eight years affair. Of course, if the relationship really goes bad it only lasts four years and if it is truly terrible it can be cut even shorter, which is what happened to Tricky Dicky. We folk who live in sensible countries which have the Westminster system don't get to pick our leader, he/she/it (we have a spineless 'it'

at the moment) is picked for us by the party and we live with it as best we can - an arranged affair if you like.

My theory goes along the lines that the US electorate has chosen, in the past, a bunch of middle aged or older white males as safe and sensible partners, which gets boring over the years. We all want a little excitement in our lives and electorates do too. So, last time around they chose a black man in the hopes of getting some excitement into their affair, but he turned out to be a sensitive and understanding man who was something of a disappointment, despite what they say about black men. This time around one of the options was a woman, and the electorate still has to make up its mind about whether it wants an affair with a woman after decades of doing it with men. Besides, this woman is a granny, and we all remember what our grannies were like. And then the other option was Trump, who is a 'bad boy'. Lots of people can't resist bad boys when it comes to affairs, we know we shouldn't but we can't help ourselves. We know it will end in tears, but we do it anyhow. Those of us on the outside watching this new affair can only wonder how long it will be before the tears start.

I was amused by Milt Stevens comment on Samsung weaponising their smart phones. I don't have one, I've got something that we bought back around the turn of the millennium which is good for ringing up road-side service when we run out of petrol or we're running late for something. Our friend Robin Johnson bought a really smart phone a little while back and after playing with his for a while I've made a resolution to not get one for as long as possible. On his he has an app (whatever they are) which shows all the aircraft in airspace over Australia, all the ones with civil transponders who have filed flight plans that is. There is always something flying in the air in our vicinity and if you touch the little aeroplane icon some information comes up telling you all about the aeroplane, who it belongs to, where it came from and where it is going, its altitude and speed, and a picture of it too. We sit playing with it for a long time until I shake myself out of my numbness and give the phone back to him. If I had one with that app on it I reckon writing letters of comment would be lower on my list of things to do. Do you think that might be the cause of the death of fandom as we know it?

Tell Nic to keep writing about his experiences. I'll never take a taxi ride for granted again. A question for Nic. In Australia it is traditional for the passenger to sit in the front seat, a sort of egalitarian thing from our national past. Does this happen in Las Vegas? What would a Las Vegas taxi driver think if I hopped into the front of the cab with him? He wouldn't be happy with me I'm sure because when it comes to tipping taxi drivers I'm a confirmed stiff. The habit of tipping people in restaurants has made its insidious way into our national psyche, but not taxi drivers, so far, anyhow.

Leigh Edmonds can be found at [hhandc@hemsleypark.com.au](mailto:hhandc@hemsleypark.com.au)

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## FREDERICK SMITH

Many thanks for the November V. That's another striking Steve Stiles cover but it does look like it has been scaled down from a larger drawing to the extent that I had to use a magnifying glass to see the various creatures properly! And, anyway, what happened to the scan of the d/j of *Mission of Gravity* that you told Robert Lichtman was reprinted on the cover? (EDITOR: *Steve's illo arrived at the last minute, literally on the day of publication, and simply pre-empted the Mission of Gravity cover, but I didn't catch the reference in Robert's letter*). Incidentally, I would agree with Robert's assessment of that novel. I read it when it originally appeared but remember nothing about it. So much for the impact it made! I do think that Hal Clement did better: *Ice World*, for example. Not bad if not wonderful. While I'm "addressing" Robert (so to speak) would mention that I too have one of those Nokia pay-as-you-go mobile, collectible, phones which will only make and receive calls. It will also take photos of a sort but not the sort that you would ever want to look at! Virgin keep badgering me to acquire a new "smart" phone but so far I've managed to resist their blandishments. Who needs a computer that you can carry around?

Further to that brief bit of skiffy comment back there, Leigh Edmonds, but , to remain sercon for the moment, there's a deal of truth in your rebuttal to Joseph Nicholas and his "dusty days of old". However, regarding the "Lensman" series (and, yes, that's a "series", just as you don't like 'em, Graham!) I think I fell out with John Hertz a year or so ago by daring to criticise Doc Smith's excessive use of grandiose adjectives and daring to suggest that, while *Galactic Patrol* was fine, the sequels became overblown and ultimately boring. So, "dusty days of old"? Maybe, as far as Doc and Hal Clement are concerned but not the works of Heinlein, Sturgeon, DeCamp and some others who really made the "Golden Age" and are still readable today.

Still with Leigh who dislikes the cover of V.32 and says he could see "people who look like that" (in the photo) at "the happy hour in his retirement village". Now, for some reason I didn't get that issue of *Vibrator* but have now received it via e-mail (Thanks, Graham!) and can agree that it's probably better to keep the mental picture that we have of strong, fine, upstanding (but intellectual!) men (like a Rogers ASF cover) and beautiful women (like on a Bergey or Cartier cover, maybe!), than see the reality that the ravages of time have made on us all!

Talking of "Smart" phones again ( as Milt Stevens does this time), it's intriguing to learn about the kind that can talk and answer all sorts of obscure questions. My daughter-in-law has one of those but as far as I know never uses it like that. There is, of course, the highly amusing episode in "The Big Bang Theory" involving Raj (who can't talk to women) falling for his new phone which has a woman's voice. Could happen I suppose.

Gloom! Gloom! That's your doomy article about death and all the people we knew who are no longer with us (or with anybody, for that matter!). There's a photo of the band I was with at the Glasgow Garden Festival in 1988 and of the six of us I'm the only one who is still alive. And yet I was the oldest in that group! How do you figure something like that? Also, six

months ago I lost my oldest friend who phoned me just before he was carried off to hospital to say, "I wonder if this is the end". I tried to reassure him but of course it was. That's the last time we spoke to each other.

There's quite a lot about Sacco and Vanzetti in Bill Bryson's book *One Summer, America 1927*. As you say, the year they were executed in a travesty of justice. That's a very good book, by the way, if you haven't already seen it. It covers many of the events of that year in a most fascinating way. However, no doubt everyone will correct you in that it was J. Edgar Hoover who was head of the F.B.I. not Herbert Hoover, who, of course, was the U.S. President just before Franklin D. Roosevelt. (*EDITOR: Ooops!*) I don't know if they were related or if either started the vacuum cleaner company.

Fred Smith can be found at [f.smith50@ntlworld.com](mailto:f.smith50@ntlworld.com)

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## **JOHN PURCELL**

That is one motley crew gathered there on the front of your latest *Vibrator*, Graham. Barcon does seem to be my kind of gathering. For what it's worth, I have personally met six of these folks in the past, and most of those at Corflu Quire in Austin, Texas, back in 2007. Overall it sounds like you and your cronies had a fine time, so good for you. Should I win the upcoming TAFF election campaign - yes, I have officially entered, silly me - I hope to see you and Pat, and a whole bunch of Britfen in various guises and places. A bar would be the best option, definitely. You wear a necktie so I know you.

Rich Coad's deliberations over the music of the 1980s remind me just how video-driven popular music was then. Big hair bands and power ballads dominated, but there were some bright spots scattered hither and thither during that decade. Sometimes I believe that MTV did more damage to the music industry than helped it bring it to the masses: the best music has always been flying under the radar, so once you got yourself down there and started rooting about in the indie and bar-band scene one could hear some really fine music. I was living in Minneapolis then - with a one year diversion to Los Angeles that is best left forgotten - and not really into the local music scene there, but that was when Prince dominated everything, although you might get lucky and hear bands like the Replacements and Hüsker Dü in one of the Uptown Minneapolis bars. Then there were the multitude of Prince knock-off bands that tried to cash in on his fame that brought a lot of attention to the downtown Minneapolis music scene. Meh, I didn't care for that at all. Most of my time back then was spent flailing away on my guitar at Minneapolis fandom music parties, which was fun, albeit limited. Oh, well. I agree with Rich's assessment that the vast majority of popular music of the 1980s is best forgotten. As for Rich's listing of 10 Albums to have on a deserted island, good choices. I am not going to play that game, though. I have absolutely no desire to live on a deserted island. Unless, of course, I can have my guitar. That would make it bearable.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts about Brexit, Global Warming, and the privatization of space. All are hot topics for discussion, and in fact your bit of venting here would have fit in

with the other articles in *Shitgibbon: the Rant-thology* (safely ensconced at [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com)), if not raising the bar a bit content-wise. I have nothing to add here, except that your point about what corporate ventures into space could result in is a valid one. Holding those corporations and people accountable is going to be tricky.

Oh, well. I think I shall stop there and have another cup of coffee, then get onto to some grading.

Vote me for TAFF 2017! I plan to.

*(EDITOR: I certainly look forward to seeing you John when, not if, you win TAFF. Maybe we can get together on my porch, pull up some rocking chairs and swap some songs).*

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### **DAVE COCKFIELD**

I have been locadaisical as regards Vibrators 31 and 32. Partly because after enjoying them to the full I then managed to misplace them whilst completely forgetting their content. Short term memory is a bugger. I've also been suffering. As if Brexit and Donald Trump were not catastrophic enough I officially became old. I turned 65! At least I have the State (Old Age) Pension to help me over this hurdle which allowed me to celebrate my birthday in style with Kevin Williams and a few other friends.

I also had a five day holiday in Krakov. It is a wonderful clean city with just enough architecture, churches and a castle to occupy a short visit. The natives spoke English, were friendly, and happy to serve up copious quantities of food and very strong craft ales.

As a friend put it, "Why the hell would the Poles want to live in the UK when they have such a great place here".

Unfortunately after a long Saturday of indulgence in drink with no food I managed to flake out when leaving a pub. Fortunately it was intended to be our last one before returning to our hotel.

Since returning to the UK I have unfortunately been plagued by a nasty chesty cough, a seasick stomach, and the odd dizzy spell. Proof I think that I can no longer party like I did in my youth.

I admire Centrepoin't's campaign to help the homeless in London this winter but get bored with events such as their one night "Sleep Out" headed by Lib Dem leader Tim Farron. Not sure that this sort of publicity works as it just feels like a celebrity/political stunt. It was amusing though that many a participant acknowledged that even with copious amounts of clothing and good quality sleeping bags they were still uncomfortable and cold sleeping on cardboard boxes on the pavement.

I did this once when I missed the last train home. During a cold September I attended a signing by James Crumley, a brilliant noir style detective writer, and ended up going on a

bender with him. Copious amounts of beer and scotch later he disappeared and I found myself sleeping in a doorway in South Kensington.

I survived but I felt cold in my bones for weeks and just could not get warm. What pissed me off even more was my total disappointment with Crumley who behaved like an egotistical redneck, racist, ex Vietnam Vet all night. In the end I sold my signed collection of his novels and actually gave the profit to a number of homeless guys around London Bridge that I used to talk to on my way to work.

I really admire Richard Dawkins and have read many of his books. However, I was amazed to read that he has apparently advocated a ban on Santa Claus and fairytales to encourage children to foster a spirit of scepticism. Does this extend to other forms of fantasy. Surely this would also destroy creative imagination. Should we ban Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, Mervyn Peake and Paul Gallico? What about Oliver Postgate and Noggin the Nog, Gerry Anderson and Four Feather falls? 2001 A Space Odyssey, BladeRunner, and Darby O’Gill and the Little People. These were all formative influences in my life and I would not be the person I am today without my exposure to them.

Hmmm! Perhaps I should stop there before I start to embarrass myself. Seriously though, in this day and age it is virtually impossible for a child to grow up without the pressures of society corrupting them. Let them have their innocence if only for a little while when young.

Dave Cockfield can be found at [daverabban@gmail.com](mailto:daverabban@gmail.com)

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## **DAVID REDD**

Was tempted to begin as below:

Dear Miss Maria Warlord Ibrahim, further to your email entitled "My Beloved", at least it was a change from the Portuguese spam and the Canadian Meds...

But no. Thanks for Vibrator 2.0.33 which post-Novacon seems a long time ago. I recall good work from usual suspects including Steve cover, Nic column, Robert letter - could say this every time of course. Your article on Wobblies and USA justice gives the same sad/sick feeling as many human failings all pointing inexorably to mass extinction, ETA real soon now. I could respond with failings of British justice but our version is still preferable to many others.

Ah, money-making idea. Various letter-writers (inc myself) relegated to the Must Try Harder bin? Theirs would be ideal material to beef up your annual Lulu compilations, like CD bonus tracks, and tempt the contributors if nobody else. No worse than Kate Bush adding "Cloudbustin' - meteorological mix" to her Hounds of Love CD, surely.

My other idea, after seeing homes with Hallowe'en window-dressing this year, is a range of signs, "SATAN STOP HERE" etc, or saucers of chocolate biccies to tempt the Wild Hunt down. Cut me in on your royalties, hey?

David Redd can be found at [dave\\_redd@hotmail.com](mailto:dave_redd@hotmail.com)

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## **ROBERT LICHTMAN**

Steve Stiles's title, "Night on Bare Mountain," for this issue's cover made me realize that the object that all those delightfully spooky creatures are circling is not (as I first thought) a glowing volcano, but actually a very Rotsler-esque (in terms of firmness and size) breast. Am I the only one seeing it this way, or do I just have a dirty mind?

*(EDITOR: I confess the titling of Steve's art was mine not Steve's, and I did so because of its obvious Halloween connotations and not because of any mammary implications, honest, guv.)*

You write, "For some time now we have suffered from mice. Occasionally I glimpse them out of the corner of my eye as they scuttle in their greyness from one corner to another." I have never actually seen a mouse in our habitable rooms, with one exception. One time, when sitting at my computer, I spotted one out of the corner of my eye across the room to my right making its way slowly along the floor below the built-in bookcases. It appeared from behind the file cabinets to its right and then disappeared behind the bureau to its left. I quickly got up to see if I could see where it went, but it was gone. "We have put down various types of mouse trap, but so far to no effect." It could have been hiding under the bureau, which is open on its back side for an inch or two. I put down one apiece of the two types of mouse trap in that general vicinity and also secured some packaged food (dry pasta in bags, crackers in light cardboard boxes) inside the bureau as a precaution. I never caught anything, either, nor were there ever the telltale signs of mouse poop on the floor. Wherever it came from, it apparently returned. It never (so far...knock on wood!) reappeared. "Normally they do not bother me that much, except when I am lying awake at night and suddenly comes an immense noise of something shifting far out of proportion to a mouse's size or its ability to inflict damage on the architectural substructure. I know there is a phenomenon when during near-sleep auditory stimuli are amplified beyond their natural range." There's a crawl space between the ceiling of my office and the floor above, and at various times (happily, not often) I've heard big sounds coming from that space. And I've been awake every time. What could be making them other than rodents? There's a storage space adjacent to my office in which we've occasionally seen rodent poop. For many years we've had a couple of "Rat Zapper" traps, appealingly baited, out there, and from time to time we've caught both mice and rats. Check them out at <http://www.ratzapper.org/> – we prefer the "Ultra" model because of its longer battery life. They are available at Amazon and, no doubt, brick and mortar home and hardware stores in your area.

A footnote to the above: From time to time we've had our handyperson check out the perimeter of our house for likely rodent entry places, and over the years he's fixed a number of them. He was last here in early October and found a couple of rather impressive openings, which he sealed. Before that visit we'd had a few unwelcome guests, but none since. I check every day to make sure – easy to do because the traps flash a red light if something is caught – and once a month or so I test the traps to make sure the batteries are still working.

“The first dead body I ever saw, as I expect is the experience for many of us, was that of my father.” Me, too, although I could had the opportunity to see the dead bodies of both my maternal grandparents except that my parents wouldn’t let me come to their funerals because I wouldn’t cut my long hair. The only other dead body I’ve seen was my mother’s, some years later. “None of my friends in my immediate peer group were abruptly taken from me.” In my junior year of high school, one of my friends drowned face down in a fairly shallow fountain. He’d been drinking, the story goes, and slipped and fell on the concrete edge of the fountain hard enough to go unconscious and thus be unaware of his circumstances. I never saw his body, but along with many of my classmates I was affected by his death, especially the tragic meaninglessness of it. I don’t believe in life after death, and as I get older I think the best scenario would be a sudden one with little or no suffering – as you write, “in the end it’s a wink of an eye.”

You have an error in your interesting account of Sacco and Vanzetti that I hope I’m not the first to point out: It was J. Edgar Hoover, not Herbert Hoover, who was the head of the FBI. (Herbert was the one-term Republican president who gave us the Great Depression.) I recall learning about S&V when I was in high school, but I’m quite sure your presentation here was much more detailed and behind-the-scenes than the probably sanitized version I was taught. For instance, I’m 100% sure that I was never told about Will F. Hays ordering all the film of their funeral procession destroyed.

Hi, Owen! Like you, I can well imagine that the movement of flying cars would have to be regulated in the same way as surface vehicles. Perhaps they would be “driverless” in the same way now being worked out for surface vehicles but with the additional twist of *no* input by the people in them – entirely automated by some form of programming set up and enforced by Super Air Traffic Control. Yes, Graham, their movement seems to be well worked out in films like *Bladerunner*, but that’s one of those little shortcuts that make such films “work.” These days, I wonder more about the proliferation of drones for everything from aerial photography to pizza delivery, and how that’s being managed.

I suspect Greg Benford is right that back in the day “nearly everyone got both” *Cry of the Nameless* and *Void*. I certainly did. It would take a long and ultimately boring physical search to see if there were fans who had letters in one but not the other – not something I would want to venture to do, but perhaps in the 23rd century when all fanzines are digitized, searchable, and readily available on-line someone will give it a shot.

In Rob Hansen’s nocturnal LoC he writes, “It’s 3.40pm in the morning and I only got up to take a pee. Wonder if there will ever again be a night I \*don’t\* get up in the middle of to take a pee. Probably not.” Is that a rhetorical question? In actual fact, there may well come a time, Rob, when you’re happy to have only gotten up once. (And I’ll leave aside any comment about how it could be “3.40pm in the morning.”)

In my letter I made mention of buying a copy of the British hardcover of Hal Clement’s *Mission of Gravity* when one came up on eBay cheap “as much for the cover artwork as the sanctity of the \*classic\* novel,” and attached a scan of the cover for your delectation. In a

boldfaced editorial interjection, you wrote, “scan attached and reprinted on the cover of this issue.” I want to assure possibly confused readers that Steve Stiles did *not* time-travel back to 1955 to provide a cover for this edition. As a side note for those with a bibliographic bent, in researching this I found that ISFDB does not have an entry for this edition, although it is very much in evidence in an ABE search. (Perhaps you will find space for the cover in this issue?)

In Nic’s column, I’m pleased to read that Nic gets few stiffs during his typical day. I had never heard the term “arthritis” applied to “knockers.” But I do prefer that term to “rack,” which I find offensive. I looked in vain for “spaghetti bowl” in the glossary.

And please excuse me for having no interest in discussing the disgusting presidential election results....

Robert Lichtman can be found at [robertlichtman@yahoo.com](mailto:robertlichtman@yahoo.com)

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## TALES OF A LAS VEGAS TAXI DRIVER

### By Nic Farey

#### GIVING THANKS

It's the time of year when Merka celebrates the welcoming of immigrants to the country before they kill everybody, or something similar which President-elect Kim Jong Don will be putting a stop to, mark my words, as soon as he's finished practising his ISIS-kill plan on 'Hamilton' and SNL. It's also the time of year when thousands of taxis sit idly on stands because there's fuck-all business between now and New Years, apart from the annual visit of the rodeo and "Cowboy Christmas" the first week of December.

As such, I asked for (and got approved) a couple extra days off this week, Tuesday and Wednesday in addition to my usual days off of Thursday and Friday, so it's a nice four-day break, and I haven't had any time off (apart from the usual "weekend") since the wedding on Leap Day. Yesterday was typically not only deader than the proverbial can of spam, but pretty much deader than an actual can of spam which is, in fact, dead. Or deader than Leon Russell, Mose Allison, Sharon Jones *et al* (too soon?).

Not being a native of these shores, I get the usual pisstake from some of my driver mates who opine that I shouldn't be celebrating Thanksgiving at all, being furrin & that, a jovial attitude which reaches an unsurprising peak around the Fourth of July, which I'll observe by shouting "Happy Fuckin' Traitors' Day, arseholes" to the alleged Merkans, who to their credit generally respond with tolerant mirth, to me at least. However, I'm well into the aspects of Thanksgiving being a reflective moment of, well, giving thanks for what we've got and taking a

bit of stock of things. Despite my probably legendary perpetual skintness which has persisted apart from the occasional moments of monetary relief, despite the ongoing slow-motion train wreck that the reader (J, Unc) has described my life as (and regretted it publicly ever since), there's a fuck of a lot I really do have to be thankful for, not least that the train, while more of a clapped-out DMU than a Japanese bullet-job, does seem to want to stubbornly stay on the tracks and keep going at a deliberate if not spectacular pace.

In no particular order, here's the utterly incomplete list of thanks for now:

**Wifey** : The amazing Famous Author(tm) J L Farey, wifey #4, who consistently expresses her own gratitude for me churning out a 60-hour workweek so she can pursue her own endeavors, which now include a publishing house, Journey Fiction, no relation at all, thank fuck, to any similarly-named fanzine. As I am wont to point out, I just work the one job, she has four: writer, publisher, wife and mother. This week we can add job #5, dog-sitter for the kids' pooch, Bronx, while they're off to northeastern parts spending the holidays with Meagan's family. My love and respect for this woman deserves more than the glacial chug of the clapped-out DMU, but at least we can assert that the old bus is still moving along in directions resembling forward. Bronx, some kind of pitbull mix I think, is as slow-moving as our Lulu is nippy, and it's a bit disquieting to watch him waddle off with a flapping leaf-like vestige of nutsack forlornly hanging on behind an impressive todger the size of a can of green beans (20oz).

**Job** : I'm coming up on two years of steady employment, which is well amazing looking back over the last ten or more years during some of which I did all right (and a lot of thanks to my old boss Tyler Fadely there, who not only kept me at work while I was doing the jail time, but was instrumental in setting me up with my own little business). On reflection I've been luckier than others who never got out of the minimum wage trap, and *most* of the time the postal order did turn up when it was needed, although there've been some major rough spots an'all. I still (and likely always will) consider myself as "working poor", "working class" or whatever Marxist analysis certain Old Tories of my acquaintance (Unc, J) would tag it. I might even aspire to the label "middle-class", since although it's almost always paycheck-to-paycheck the bills are generally up to date, and we don't have to choose between rent and food. I remember an old "friend-of-a-friend" story about the bloke who inevitably got collector calls every day (been there, many times) who responded to a query about his plans to pay thusly: "Look mate, every month I put all my bills in a hat and pick one out to get paid. If you keep bugging me you're not even going in the fuckin' hat."

**Charnock (G)** : Yes, you, y'miserable old scrote, for continually saying nice things about my column, and indeed for encouraging me to start doing it in the first place. I've whined a bit elsewhere, I know, that I don't/didn't see myself as that prolific a writer, certainly having been more engaged with production and design the last few years, but having this monthly assignment has definitely got me back into the writing habit, and reminded me how much I do quite enjoy it. Speaking of which...

**The Reader** : Everyone's favorite Mad Uncle (J), who also says consistently complimentary

things about the Farey *oeuvre*, always positive and engaging even when we disagree. Also the other reader, Benford (G) and the egoscanner, Lichtman (R) all of whose feedback is always welcomed, punting more than enough 'boo in this direction to keep me at it.

**Facebook :** For being the means of getting me back in touch with some important people, not least my older son Sean Carey, and including but not limited to several old fannish drinking pals such as Dave Hod-me-son. Also the cause of today's moderately substantial hangover, having spent several hours at the Crown & Anchor yesterday afternoon getting nicely langered with a college mate, Colin "Proper Job" Anderson, whom I hadn't seen in 37 years. We have resolved to get together every 37 years from now on, though as Col pointed out that might be in the form of adjacent little boxes of cremated remains. Martyn, Col's very nice son, has been duly instructed to bring the boxes up to the bar of the Crown & Anchor and have them pull a couple of pints of Abbot. It occurred to me that in 37 years time Martyn will actually be older than either Col or I are now.

**Blood :** Ye Ed politely requests from his gilded throne that I should mention blood since it will give a desired symmetry to this ish of award-winningness, and since Grah is an Elder Ghod of Something and I'm not, I feel rather obliged to comply. So - er - I'm thankful for blood, probably in the sense that I have some, in acceptable quantity, coursing merrily through the alcohol stream and doing whatever it does that means I'm not obliged to swan off to Lausanne every week or two and suffer a total blood transfer with Keith Richards like Johnny does, although I'm obviously a bit hazy on the actual details of the process, no doubt to be enlightened by the arrival of thish. I'll be tangentially thankful if this paragraph doesn't read as very tenuous and tacked-on, but as Stephen Wright observed: "You can't have everything. Where would you put it?"

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Rich Coad says he has recently switched off Facebook because it stresses him too much. I must say I sympathize with him and often feel like doing the same. There is so much public expression of bile and hatred taking it over on whatever side. Do we really think it is worthwhile to spend our lives arguing and spitting at each other? People whom I know to be reasonably sane have not proved immune. Old codgers like Jim Burns I used to love for their eccentricity have dissolved under its pressure into Extreme Old Codgerdom and become snarling reactionary wrecks, actually listening to daytime talk-radio and quoting from it. Even Jeremiah Cornelius, that most moderate of men, has been known to get immoderately hot under the collar. I've always held that Mark Zuckerberg did more harm than good with his Fantastic Invention. I would willingly go back in time and assassinate his father to stop him being born, but the trouble is someone else would have the same miserable idea of making us all feel wretched by sharing our angst while he became rich.

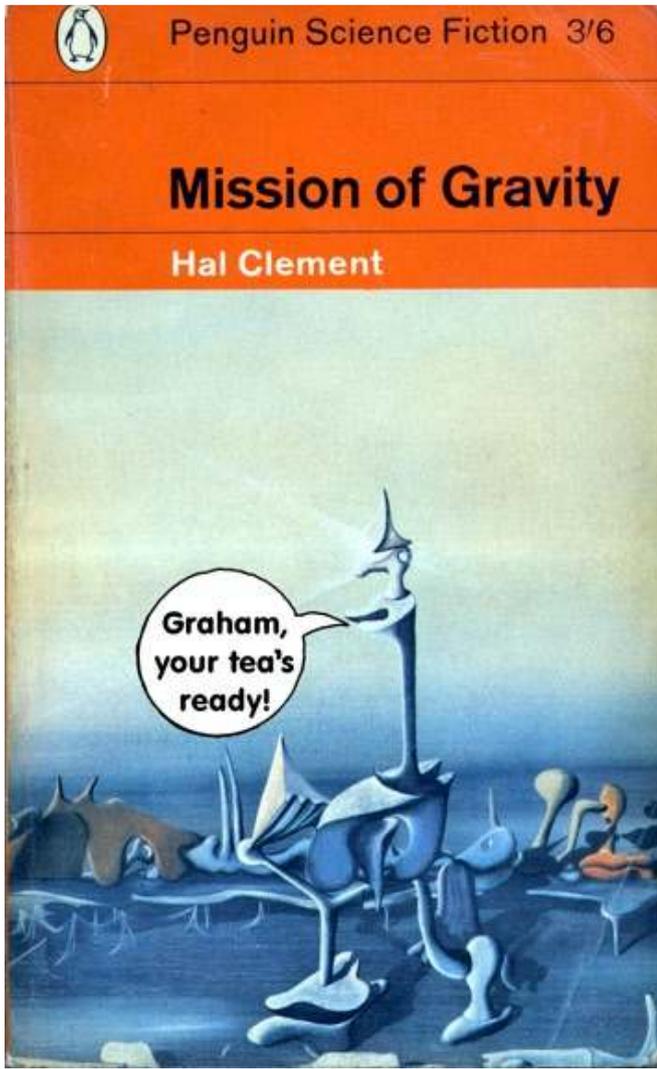
So what reasons do we actually have to be cheerful? Well Farage may go on an endless lecture tour of the USA thus taking himself out of our orbit for a long time. Again people of Facebook have been filching about this, not realizing that this is what politicians do when they have no real power, but a host of ideas they still think are relevant. Are there specialist agents out there who handle this sort of thing? I would like to think not, but I suspect there are. The ilk of Max Clifford may be imprisoned occasionally but their *raison d'être* does not disappear.

There seems to be a lot of panic these days about major political events. It makes lurking on places like Facebook a distinctly depressing process. I must say I don't think either Trump or Brexit will amount to a hill of beans in the broader perspective on the times in which we live when it will come to be considered by future generations. They will probably be more interested in establishing the supreme Godhead of David Bowie or whichever hero subsequent generations throw up the pop chart.

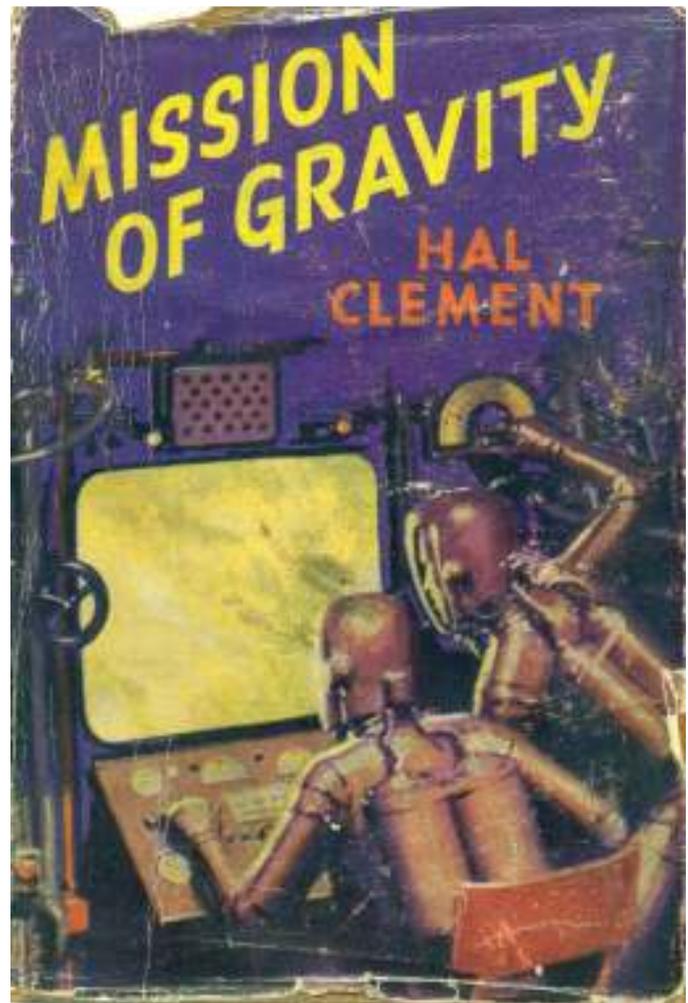
As usual I end up asking myself why do I bother? Why do I bother venturing my opinion on anything when people just write me off as grumpy? Why do they say I am contrarian, just because I disagree with their embedded points of view? Perhaps they do not take kindly to my constant efforts to prescribe dulcolax for the brain, to free the solid clogging turds of their stuck thoughts. Why do I bother continuing with this fanzine, when every month it pitches me into a deadline panic? Well, mostly because as Wilkins Micawber said, something always seems to turn up, if only a loc from Robert Lichtman and an article from Nic Farey.

But for the moment this is The End, my beautiful friend. Get your responses to me by the End of December and there may be another issue. [Graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk](mailto:Graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk).

# TWO MISSIONS



Submitted by Philip Turner



Submitted by Robert Lichtman