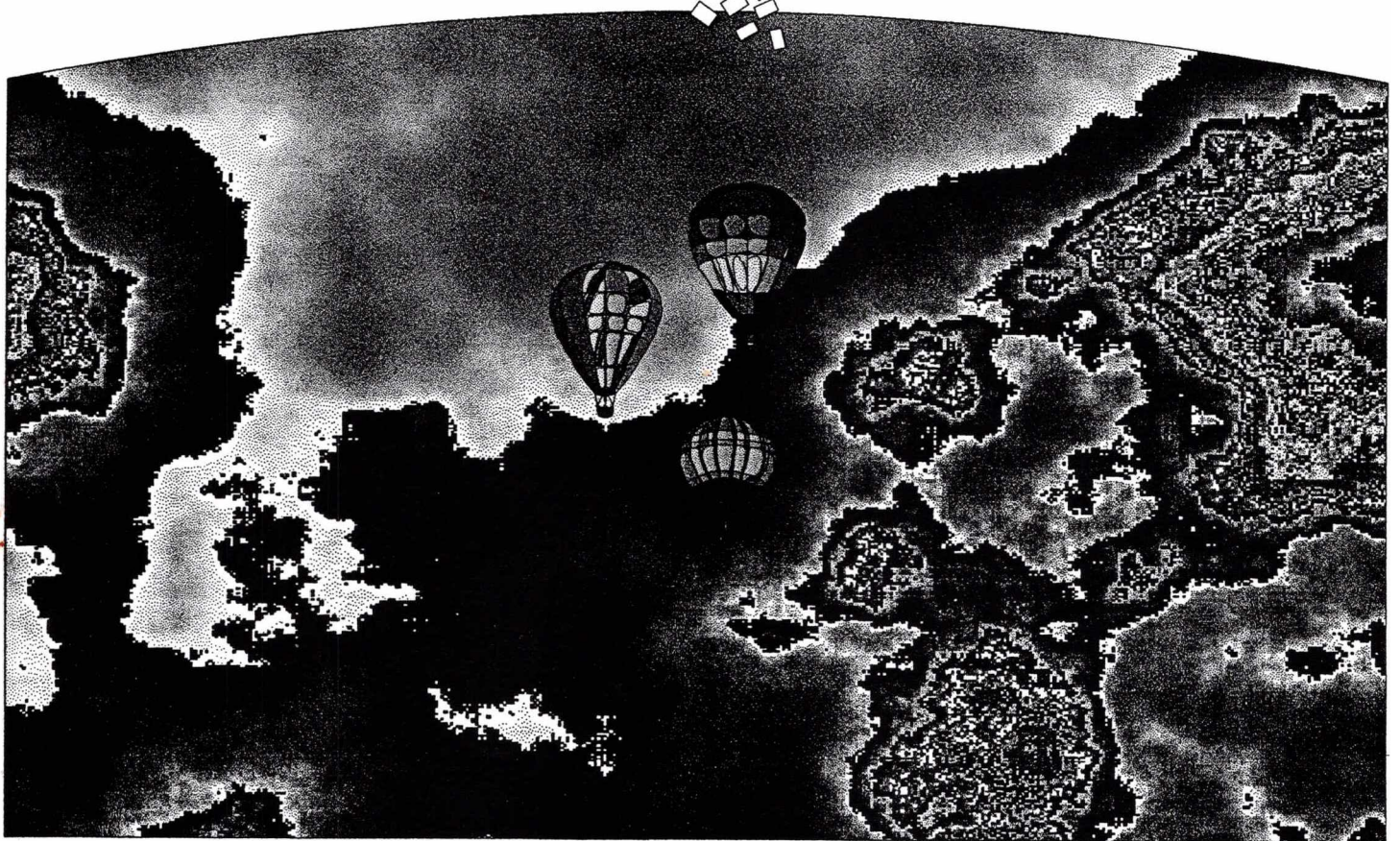




We are over Bristol. What now, Oh Master of the World?

Now, Captain West, we drop the Fanzines!!



BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 10

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 10 - the roundup

This fanzine seems to come in three parts - fannish, media and music - possibly with three different audiences. Maybe I should have commissioned three separate covers and offered a mix and match build your own balloon (a bit like "Build your own Rainbow" except without the bits where you analyse why your life's such shit. Though we could provide that too for a small extra fee). But, what the hell, it's an Eastercon, where fans of all persuasions get together to laugh at each other, avoid the filk programme and complain about the bar prices. (Or do all the media fans still go to a different convention? Why don't I *know* these things?). So, if you find at any stage that it sounds like somebody's speaking martian (phrase courtesy William Bains, cf lettercolumn), then just skip to the next section (or ask me and I will translate, or put you in touch with an expert who will indoctrinate you for a reasonable fee.) If you're already old enough to have made your life choices - and let's face it, most fans, however young are pretty doctrinaire about what they do and do not do - and know that never in a million years are YOU going to listen to any of the records Simon recommends, or care about Dr. Who's sexual proclivities (however distant from the TV Zone image) or wish to know what people do in Burnham-on-Sea in February, then tear out the section you don't want to read and return to the editorial address so that we can send it on to fans in Ethiopia (or the Yorkshire Water region) who are deprived of the basic necessities of life. Remember reuse, recycle and rediscover the inner fan!

Contents

Section One - Never commit yourself to paper

Fanzines found in a heap by my duvet	- Christina Lake	2
The Miss Lee letters Part 6	- Tim Goodrick	7
Postcards from Burnham-on-Sea	- Christina Lake	11

Section Two - You don't have to be sad, but it helps

Is Dr Who homosexual? - time and relative dimensions in sex	- Dr Skagra	13
---	-------------	----

Section Three - Who put the little baby swastikka on the wall?

Popsicle Madness	- Christina Lake	19
Flying Saucers Over Bristol	- Simon Lake	21

Section Four - We all join hands

Balloon Post	- Christina Lake (and readers)	23
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Artwork

Steve Jeffrey - cover
Dave Harwood - back cover
Sue Mason - p. 19 & 21
Dave Mooring - p. 27

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April 1996



The Macrame Theory Of Fanzines

CHRISTINA LAKE

If, as alleged by certain parties there really were thirty fanzines given out at Novacon, then I can only be relieved that I didn't receive them all. What do you do when faced with thirty fanzines? Leave them in a pile by your bed to gather dust? Count them to see if you got more than Ian Sorensen? Sort them into alphabetical order and refuse to receive any more fanzines till you've located them all? Or pick out the gems, read them desultorily on the bus to work then never get around to reading the rest.

Forget whether British fandom is big enough to sustain another Worldcon. Is it big enough to sustain thirty fanzines? That's what I want to know. Received wisdom says the more fanzines the better. Fanzines feed off each other, they create an atmosphere of emulation, they accumulate a buzz. Sure, they do. But what happens when so many come out at one time that there isn't enough interest to go round? My impression is that since Novacon, everybody's been so overawed by the pile of fanzines they carried home that they don't know where to begin. Maybe I'm wrong and everyone's been busy locating each other, and we'll see the results at Evolution. Or maybe I'm not, and the post-Intersection wave of fanzines will turn out to be an anomaly with new enthusiasm stifled through lack of response.

I suppose in the end it will depend on why people put out their fanzines. If it was to be hailed as the great new talent of British fandom, then unless they're called Alison Freebairn, they're likely to be disappointed. If it was to gain admittance to some 'in' crowd, they'll probably find that there is no such crowd, or that it wasn't worth joining in the first place. If it was for their own creative pleasure, then maybe they'll go and be creative some place else. The common thread between the crop of Novacon fanzines was Intersection - what it did to people, why they didn't go, why we shouldn't run another. The fanzines were like a great communal sigh of relief - thank God, we can get on with our lives. It's almost as if the fanzines were some form of therapy - basket weaving or macrame. But after you've woven a few baskets, or made a few knotted owls and plant pot holders, what happens? You go back to your old activities refreshed (and if truth be told, slightly bored). We shall see.

This guide to the post-Intersection fanzine scene comes complete with a handy loc rating, to help those paralysed with indecision over which fanzine to write to first. Just look down the list till you find a fanzine you wish to encourage. If the rating is "low", write them a letter. What could be simpler?

The glittering prizes

Zorn. I like the confidence of the man. On the back of my copy of Zorn 4 it says : "Please make some response by issue #16 if you want to keep getting Zorn". I'm not sure whether I'm alarmed or reassured to know that I can be sure of getting the next 8 issues of Zorn even if I

spend the intervening time in a coma on the living room floor, listening to Iggy Pop records. In fact, I see that Mike Scott began issue 2 with a detailed explanation of the economy of Zorn, how many issues you can earn for different activities. Twelve for a fanzine, though he doesn't mention that your second fanzine in a year will only earn you one more issue. Maybe this means that instead of trading fanzines with Mike I should hold on to them till my credit is nearly out, and then send him a copy to get another 12 issues? Or will Mike deduct points for fanzines published by people on his mailing list, but not sent to him? Oh the joys of having a system, *and publishing it*. Of course, if Mike did give out 12 points per fanzine, I would now be on the list till issue 39, which really would be silly.

But enough of this minutiae - I shall resist the temptation of asking why Mike prints e-mail addresses ahead of postal addresses, and why Mike is on his own list of e-mail recipients - and look at the fanzine itself. Zorn seems to have tapped into some crucial vein of British fandom that the normal fannish fanzine can't reach. Its strength is talking about issues that the mainstream British fan cares about eg conrunning (cf the success of Conrunner, which in terms of subject matter could easily be characterised as one the most boring British fanzines ever.), books and electronic media. "This fanzine goes to a lot of people who are not primarily fanzine fans," Mike says himself at the start of issue 3, and perhaps that's the key. There are a lot of people out there with opinions, who don't want to talk about Las Vegas fandom or Walt Willis, but do want an excuse to say what they think about... well, anything. Mike, by a crafty mix of topic selection, comment hooks, and simply being perceived as one of us (i.e. the non-fanzine producing majority) has incited his rapidly expanding mailing list to write in on whatever takes their fancy (and for those who can't manage to raise an opinion on conventions, there is always the option of talking about spiders or giraffes, so that's all right.) Some of it is interesting and seems to be advancing an argument of sorts, but much of it comes over exactly like the kind of conversations I hate at conventions : a group of people competing with each other to put forward *their* point, *their* anecdote, *their* joke, regardless of whether anyone else will be interested. This lack of common thread or sense of development, even within the comments ostensibly on the same topic, combined with the columns of small print, rarely leavened by any intervention from the editor, tends to make the mind glaze over so that I end up skipping through the text looking for a paragraph or writer that interests me.

Mike writes some good articles - the contentious article on Eastercon in his opening issue, the giraffe whimsy, the review of Teresa Nielsen Hayden's Making Book, but it's beginning to feel like he's running out of steam. The delayed fourth issue contains a one page review of Novacon that gives very little idea of what the convention was like either from the point of view of atmosphere or (as one might have expected) conrunning logistics. Instead we get a fair amount of generalities on the hotel (smokiness, mundanes in the bar and two paragraphs in separate parts of the report saying how small the bedrooms were). Maybe this is deliberately bland, akin to Mike's policy of not commenting on the letters, to ensure that everyone can write in with their favourite bit about Novacon without him having pre-empted them. "Alternate Worldcons", a sample of models for changing the format of Worldcons was more imaginative and humourous, but I have a horrifying suspicion that they were meant to be contributions to a serious debate (and even if not, readers will debate them as such). Clearly Mike has plenty he wants to say about conventions, but does he have enough of anything else to sustain a general interest frequent fanzine in the long term? Maybe he should go back to talking about books again, just to vary the tone. Otherwise I might be tuning out from all the letters by issue 16 (or asking for my fanzines back).

Loc Rating : High

Trinketry, edited by Mike's ex-wife Alison Scott, has an air of being put out in reaction to Mike's zine. "Look," it seems to say, "this is how to do it, Mike." Effortless. Anecdotes. No agenda, no points system, no minute type. Just a trinket. "I'd always planned to do fanzines one day," Alison writes, "when I had something to say; and suddenly I realised that I wasn't ever likely to have anything to say. Trinketry is the result." Alison may not have much to say - though to be honest, she has as much, or more, to say than the majority of fanzines - but, she says it very well. It has that intimate feeling of good fanwriting, an eye for the inconsequentialities of life that make a good story. Trips to IKEA (which if the conversation at MisSaigon was anything to go by, tapped into some kind of zeitgeist), a cycling holiday round Holland (I want to do it too), an account of Alison taking the civil service exams ("Finally a fanzine that tells me something useful," said Lilian Edwards when she read it) and my favourite, the christening of the ambitiously named baby Isabelle Scarlett ("The priest started by explaining that he would ask Paula and Michael two questions he already knew the answers to. The first was "What have you decided to call your baby" Isabelle Scarlett, they explained. Steven whispered ...*and the second question is "What on earth possessed you?"*)

Loc Rating : High (Alison will go round demanding locs till people give in and write them)

Paying your dues

The Croydon fanzines - Mark Plummer's *Banana Skins* and Claire Brialey's *Waxen Wings* were apparently conceived on the same occasion, the Monday night of Intersection. Very dodgy, since both claim to have partners of their own secreted away in Croydon. Mark does give some corroborating evidence to this theory by his vivid description of what he refers to as one of Claire and Noel's "domestics", raging like performance art through three floors of their house. Apparently they all hang out in each others' houses in Croydon anyway, eating pasta, so perhaps it doesn't matter much who lives with whom. This, of course, does not mean the fanzines are interchangeable. *Banana Skins* is all about Mark, but only his life as a fan. It's well written, entertaining, fannishly anecdotal, but curiously forgettable. *Waxen Wings* has more of an edge to it, maybe because Claire has dilemmas, like why she can't avoid looking down on the media fan she's forced to share an office with. Poor Claire feels guilty because she can't stand the woman (I suspect. Claire doesn't put it that strongly), but thinks not wanting to be perceived as being like her makes her some kind of elitist snob. Relax, Claire, there's loads of SF fans you wouldn't want to share an office with either. It's Claire's propensity to worry about life that makes her fanzine rather endearing. "Wibbly Wobbly", an article about a work trip to Brussels, sums it up - I'm dead jealous of Claire for hob-nobbing with environmental policy makers in Brussels, but because she writes with such wide-eyed amazement over it actually being HER, THERE, doing these things, I can almost find it in my heart to forgive her.

Loc Ratings

Banana Skins : Low (Mark's far too reasonable)

Waxen Wings : Fair to middling (Claire trails more comment hooks)

Snufkin's Bum Don't be put off by the fact that the title of this zine refers to the posterior of one of Maureen Speller's cats. Most of the content is not about cats at all, but about Maureen's responses to art in the form of classical music, theatre and a disconcerting artistic installation known as HG. At first glance, this may not appear relevant to fandom since it doesn't talk about books, other fans, beer or Intersection, but in its exploration of what an audience contributes to the art they are sampling, she goes right to the heart of the convention experience. Why is the audience there if they don't care about, or understand, the event they have just paid to attend? Why do people prefer to talk and be seen than actually engage in

dialogue with the artform they ostensibly claim to love? To relate this to conventions is to hijack, and no doubt trivialise Maureen's argument. She is quite comfortable to let it stand on art alone, without dragging fandom into it. She describes her reverential approach to theatre-going, her despair over a concert audience who don't realise when they are in the presence of greatness, and her conviction that in a certain frame of mind, all of life can be treated as art. Not many anecdotes, but eminently readable, and, a rarity for a fanzine, actually poses questions that are worth thinking about.

Loc Rating : Low (apart from the members of Acnestis)

Those creative juices

If there hadn't been so many fanzines at Novacon, people might have started to wonder why they all seemed to come from Alison Freebairn. Not content with putting out another issue of Kelpie's Pool and contributing to Tony Berry's Eyeballs in the Sky, she co-produced two fanzines with Mike Siddall : **Malachite Green** and **One Step Ahead**. I'm a great fan of inventive formats for fanzines, so after I'd got my head round the concept of Mike and Alison as collaborators, I dived in to see what it was all about. The idea is that they each start from a common theme - in this case "Driving Along" - write an article, send it to the other, who mulls it over, then writes another article sparked off by the one they just read, and so forth, till, lo, they have filled two whole fanzines. Well, it sounds like a good way to jump start the writing process, though I have my doubts that either Alison or Mike really need this. It also seems like a good way to burn yourself out. And sure enough, by the end of both fanzines the articles are tailing off into what look like slightly desperate attempts to finish their writing assignments. Not that any of the articles are actually bad, just that it's noticeable that the strongest material is Alison's first article in **One Step Ahead** and Mike's first article in **Malachite Green** and his follow up to Alison in **One Step Ahead**. Though I did quite like their debate on the nature of grand gestures, romantic or futile in **Malachite Green**. It almost seemed like some of the synergy they were hoping for was happening. Overall, though, it felt a bit like they'd spent all this time and effort inventing a format that gives results not unlike writing for an apa. Maybe if they've got so much writing energy, they should try it some day.

Loc Rating : Low (Alison and Mike are having too much fun to need any help from us)

If, like me, you were wondering what Alison Freebairn would do when she runs out of exotic and character-forming bits of her past to make into fanzine articles, take a look at **Pognophobia**. This is where Alison shows her roots - not the duplicated twiltone quarto of fannish legend, but the punkzines of the 1980s. Here's a format where Alison's street cred and music biz nous can really shine through. It's fun, lively, slags off Michael Jackson and talks about beards. What more could you want?

Loc rating : High (all fans love lists)

The Old Guard

Anorak Redemption represents Nigel Richardson's welcome return to the fanzine fold from wandering in hyperspace and trading zines with leather clad bimbettes. He's still not very happy with the traditions of fandom, but, what the hell, he's going to give it another go. This issue, Nigel discovers that rubber fetishist parties can be boring, finds true love with an American babe, tells us what we should be listening to instead of Blur and Oasis, and even reviews a couple of fanzines.

Loc Rating : Low (there aren't enough cool people in fandom to write to Nigel's themes)

Empties 16. Martin should have his hand chopped off for this effort - or, if it wouldn't be too harsh a fate for Simo, he should be forcibly removed from the TAFF race. Never in the annals of human history has there been a more boring theme for a fanzine than "Laws, Rules and Regulations." I thought "Banks", a recent theme for Tony Berry's *Eyeballs in the Sky* was bad enough (though in the event, the fanzine itself was quite good), but this is just an invitation to ennui. Martin might just as well have said to his contributors : "Please be as boring as you like. Write about software, taxonomic systems, jurisprudential anomalies, scientific trivia. Don't worry, we'll still get a good rating in *Apparatchik*." To be fair, there are a few honourable exceptions. Claire Brialey's article about the Environment Act wasn't *that* boring - but then I happen to be interested in the Environment Act. Bob Shaw, bless him, managed to find humour in the necessity of wearing a colostomy bag. And Helena Bowles was allowed to write completely off theme and tell the gory details of the birth of her son Daneesh (for which common sense decision I suppose Martin earns a modicum of forgiveness.)

Loc Rating : High (all those letters of complaint)

Eyeballs in the Sky 10. Only Tony Berry could run a theme issue about sex and relationships without a single revelatory article about anyone's sex life, or in fact much on human relationships at all. Vicki Rosenzweig writes about her relationship to a city (New York), Jack Cohen discusses sperm banks (an apposite hangover from the previous "bank" theme issue) and the normally deft Helena Bowles writes a rather turgid essay on sexual behaviour (it turns out she wrote it six years ago, which would account for the style). The star article of the issue is Alison Freebairn's account of her relationship with her Egyptian aunt and cousins. Tony Berry's fanzines are a classic example of what happens if you sit on the edge of fandom with a begging bowl, hoping someone will drop in a few articles. You get a genzine that's usually worth reading, but with very little consistency or direction. Is this what fanzines are about?

Loc Rating : Medium (Tony has a lot of friends)

Where to write :-

Anorak Redemption - Nigel E. Richardson, 35 Cricketers Way, Kirkstall Lane, Leeds, LS5 3RJ

Banana Skins 1 - Mark Plummer, 14 Northway Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 6JE

Empties 16 - Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, off Clarkes Lane, Willenhall, West Midlands WV13 1HX

Eyeballs in the Sky - Tony Berry, 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, Warley, West Midlands B69 4EP

Malachite Green - Mike D Siddall, 133 Duke St., Askam-in-Furness, Cumbria LA16 7AE

One Step Ahead - Alison Freebairn, 19 Wateryetts Drive, Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire, Scotland PA13 4QP

Pognophobia - Alison Freebairn, 19 Wateryetts Drive, Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire, Scotland PA13 4QP

Snufkin's Bum - Maureen Kincaid Speller, 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ

Trinketry - Alison Scott, 42 Tower Hamlets Road, Walthamstow, London E17 4RH

Waxen Wings - Claire Brialey, 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7HA

Zorn - Mike Scott, 2 Craithie Road, Chester CH3 5JL

by Tim Goodrick

I can't remember exactly when all my hair fell out for the first time, but it was certainly after I moved into the flat above Miss Lee. The doctors never seemed very interested in the cause of my alopecia, only in making jokes about Kojak and male virility. When they prescribed some lotion for me to rub in and I found out that it was a hormone based product, I was surprised when no tit-head jokes were forthcoming. So, having been left guessing by the experts, I tried to form my own theories as to my sudden hair-loss. Miss Lee went straight in as number one suspect. Although the letters are laughable, the constant stream of them did begin to wear me down and if my hair hadn't fallen out I suspect I might have torn it out myself.

*First Floor Flat
Sunday 19th Oct 86*

Dear Mr. Goodrick,

A thief has been into my flat some time during the last few days and taken a new pair of stockings, also from my handbag a gold small padlock__ I am wondering if you or your lodger (the one who has been in top flat since Dr. Howe) heard anything suspicious. The thief seems to get in when I am at home __ It is awful to think that I have to be turning around all the time. When the police were in the hall flat, my gold chain was stolen, also a small gold clasp, which belonged to my great aunt in Swansea. He, the thief, also went to the dressing table & took a white nylon boudoir cap recently. If you have any idea who is being so spiteful __ Please try to stop it. From

*Yours sincerely
Miss Lee*

Dr. Howe was the previous owner of my flat. As far as I knew, he never had a lodger. I never had a lodger. By that time I was no longer amused by Miss Lee telling me which of my non-existent lodgers might have heard a non-existent thief committing the crime-that-never-was. Still, the vision of Miss Lee spinning round in an attempt to spot the illusory thief provided some compensation for her constant sniping. Rather reminiscent of the followers of the Church of Christ the Kidnapped in the Vonnegut book (Breakfast of Champions, I think).

And now the return of the Pink Plastic. Well, not so much the return as the return of the report of the theft. Definitely a case for Inspector Clouseau, though.

*First Floor Flat
October 23rd '86*

Dear Mr. Goodrick,

The builder is returning in a few days to finish & clean up after the leak in lead pipe. He will notice that the very big length of pink plastic has been taken away __ He will know straight away that a thief is getting into my flat __ so I ask you if you know who has taken it __ please ask for it to be returned. __ In the summer a white plastic towel rail was taken from my bathroom __ So I know that some person is entering __ & recently even a competition card for winning cars & etc. has been taken from my table in hall. I do wish this could be stopped. It is so unchristian & I find it so very upsetting__

*Do any of you know anything about these takings__ yours sincerely
Miss Lee.*

After this letter, I felt obliged to point out to Miss Lee that one didn't have to be a Christian to behave in a socially responsible way and that it was very wrong of her to stigmatise non-christians in this way. The point crops up in her next letter (which persons with nervous stomachs may wish to avoid).

Dear Mr. Goodrick,

*About 10 days ago I left my Dr. Scholls foot skin scraper in the bathroom. I had been keeping it packed away as I know some person comes in and looks around and takes things__ like dusters, rezine bags etc. etc.__ Immediately I saw the thief had taken it__ You say that you are not a Christian but I am sure that you know right from wrong. Now please would you impress the person doing this__ that I need this and this is why I bought it. I am sure you will understand and do your best to have it returned.
With kind regards*

From Miss Lee

After a pleasant break of a couple of months, the letters began to flow again on New Year's Eve. I informed Miss Lee I'd be having a party and this was her response. There is not much thievery in it but regular readers will note that the light motif is back.

First Floor Flat

31st December '86

Dear Mr. Goodrick,

I hope you enjoy your New Years Eve party. Could you please very kindly see that your last guest does not leave my light on in hall. I do not expect to be going out tomorrow. The noise or music will not worry me at all. The last thief went off with a very large black dust bin bag it seems.

With best wishes for 1987

Yours sincerely

Miss Lee

If the foot skin scraper letter made you feel queasy then DO NOT READ THE NEXT LETTER. Amateur detectives amongst the regular readers of these letters may wonder, as I did, if the green wool blanket mentioned in the letter below is the same one that vanished five years previously. But there is also mention of a blanket that vanished when she first moved in, a few years before I arrived in the flats. I used to laugh at the Bermuda Triangle, but the Clifton Triangle is something else entirely.

First Floor Flat

4th January 1987

Dear Mr. Goodrick

Some week ago on my return from shopping_ to my amazement I noticed that my green wool blanket had been taken from my bed. I have been to tropical climates and so notice the cold weather in England & kept a small blanket to cover my feet. I have athletic feet which is very contagious and have been told I will always have it. The person who has

*stolen this has really committed a double crime_ thieving and passing on athletic foot. I have 3 guest blankets, which my cousin used when she stayed with me, but she arrived with both legs bandaged up to the knees as she was suffering from ulcers. So I really do not care to use the blankets she used. I think it is vile for any young person to steal from an older person also most evil & vile for a man to steal from a woman. __ As I had a blanket taken from this flat when I first came probably it's the same person doing this kind of thing. I employ older workers who would be well equipped for everything, & would not stoop to steal forks, knives, nutcrackers, tea strainers, magazines or Digest Condensed Book, plastic glasses (drinking) carols printed on pieces of paper__ All these things have been taken from my flat also two small clocks one a Cyina [once again I am defeated by Miss Lee's handwriting, Cyina means nothing to me, but it is the closest I can get] & the other a travelling clock in a red leatherette case__ These last two items were packed with cloths & the whole suitcase of things was taken. It will cost a lot of money to get these things replaced. Of course everything is marked & most bought in my parents time. I am telling you this so that you will know the people around. __ I hope you have a happy 1987.
Yours sincerely*

Miss Lee.

I presume she meant that the clocks were packed with *clothes* in a suitcase and not *cloths*. Actually, knowing Miss Lee, perhaps not.

*First Floor Flat
21/2/87*

Dear Mr. Goodrick

*On Thursday morning I was using my plastic ruler but it disappeared in the hour I was using it__ As it has my name deeply scratched on it, I hope the one who took it will kindly put it back__ It is so inconvenient to have to buy things a second time.
Excuse writing but my pencil is broken.*

With kind regards,

Sincerely,

Miss Lee

The letter was, of course, written in pencil and no more or less legible than any of her other letters. Apart from a lengthy letter about the stair light being left on, things were quiet for about a month. In all the time I'd lived in the flat, excessive noise was something that Miss Lee had never inflicted on me. That changed when she bought a television. She seemed to have some uncanny knack of knowing the precise time at which I would begin to fall asleep after I'd gone to bed and switch her TV on at that moment. I can only assume that her set had a volume control marked only with LOUD and OFF. I bore it for a few weeks, thought of 'doing a Ron', but just complained instead. When reading the next letter, bear in mind that a lot of what she says may be explained by the fact that she was partially deaf.

*Clifton
28th March 1987*

Dear Mr. Goodrick,

I have now a small T.V. set in the back room of my flat

and I do sincerely hope that you will not be bothered with the volume__ I do realize that you are out working all day & therefore appreciate quietness. I've had it placed in the back room as you said you lived on your own without any lodgers so I presume the room above my back room would be unoccupied! During all the years that Mrs. Addison lived in her ground floor flat, I was never once disturbed with any kind of noise__ not T.V. (although I know she owned one.) or young Martin rushing around. In my flat I do have carpets with thick linings in most rooms, which I think does help to keep out noise.

If I do not get the noise from hall flat you should not really be bothered with sounds in my flat __ as I imagine all the walls and ceilings would be all of the same building materials.

With kind regards

In great haste

Miss Lee

Well, that'll teach me to complain. Now here are a couple of questions before the next letter. What happens when you use soap? Yes, it eventually vanishes. What happens if you leave meat around when there is a cat in the room? Yes, it vanishes.

First Floor Flat

May 15th 1987

Dear Mr. Goodrick,

This morning a piece of soap I was using disappeared. Sometimes the cat knocks things to the ground __ but this evening a piece of meat I bought for my cat is missing. I've just bought it from Sainsburys.

With kind regards

Miss Lee

The next letter goes some way to explaining why Miss Lee's soap may vanish rather more rapidly than thine or mine.

2nd June '87

Dear Mr. Goodrick,

It seems some person is still getting into my flat, recently I missed a long nail file, a pair of eyebrow tweezers, and today my soaps(white plastic container) has gone__ The cat does sometimes knock articles on the floor. I use soap washing my hands I suppose between 20 and 40 times a day in the kitchen and so would notice immediately if it has gone. I do wish this could stop as it is very bad for my nerves. Some person must be getting in__ If you know who it is please do kindly stop whoever it is. With kind regards

From Miss Lee.

The soap saga continues in the next few letters but, as in all soaps, you are going to have to wait until the next issue of *Balloons Over Bristol* to find out what happens.

Postcards From Burnham

Birmingham fandom ran a small convention in Burnham-on-Sea in February, the third (and possibly last) of a series. Having failed to convince American fan Frank Lunney it was worth the airfare from America, I decided to send him a few postcards to let him know what he was missing. Here's what I wrote :

Friday evening

Dear Frank

Managed to wangle a lift down to MisSaigon with Anne Wilson (v. English red head with birthday the same day as yours). Her car is so sporty that Richard (Bristol group) had to bend almost double to travel in the back. Sound system was cool though. At convention, I told everyone I was Alan Dorey (coz I'd bought his membership). It seemed to break the ice. They all told me they preferred me to be Christina. I don't think this is a great tribute to my popularity. Everyone's in a quiz at the moment. The great MisCon tradition of participation strikes again! Bar conversation with Eileen Weston, mainly about men and why Lilian Edwards isn't here. Later: TAFF candidate Simo is compeering a silly game with balloons. No-one's paying any attention.

Christina

Saturday Morning

Dear Frank,

Went out to buy some more postcards and found myself in a second hand bookshop with half the rest of the convention. Impressive H G Wells collection, but I bought Georgette Heyers instead (cheaper). Maureen K. Speller ran the traditional SF debate by herself as Paul K. ill. Should short stories be expanded to novels? Is "Beggars in Spain" worth reading? "Yes," says Jilly Reed. "Stick to the pulps," says Greg Pickersgill. Does it matter that only trash SF is published these days? Do we even need any more fiction? No-one seemed very sure. Suspect they were thinking : how can we make a decent stab at collecting the stuff if people keep writing more? I disagree, of course.

Christina

Saturday Afternoon

Dear Frank

I'm getting postcard writing lessons from Steve Green. "Write them small, write them brief..." "And above all make sure they have a sexy picture on the front," says Phil Greenway, producing a crumpled picture of a blonde from his trouser pockets. "Frank knows that already," says Steve. "He sent me a picture of some nudists." "Oh, did he. He just sent me a picture of a seal." "I don't think you're meant to put dialogue on cards," adds Steve. "There's not really enough space for narrative diversity." Steve then demonstrates how he had cribbed his signature style from Stan Lee, while I ask Maureen and Ann about their sex lives. I never claimed that drinking real ale all afternoon was a good idea.

Christina

Saturday Evening

Dear Frank

Martin Tudor has been put on trial as a witch. Bridget Hardcastle and I sit in the front row & hiss "Witch! Witch!". Main charge is inciting unpractised people to drink - with mind altering consequences. Maybe he did the same to you? The charges stand & Tudor has his hand chopped off, which means we can all go out to dinner. Arrive at the French restaurant (the only

decent restaurant in Burnham) to find Richard & Pam Wells already ensconced in cosy tete a tete. They ignore us, which is difficult as Alison Scott is being very noisy. But after 3 bottles of rioja, who cares? I'm probably being v. noisy too. Back at the convention, I discover I'm drunk, but only Greg seems to notice. Action condenses down to 2 tables. I wander between them, but everyone seems to be telling bad jokes about Welsh sheep. Time to head back to the guest house.

Christina

Sunday Morning

Dear Frank

It's Sunday & I had to get up for breakfast to clear my room by 10. The joys of a British B&B! At least Alison Scott looks worse than me at breakfast. But that might be because she washed her hair in shaving soap. Not much to do for a couple of hours but walk on the beach, read the papers & talk about laptops and Ikea (not a hip Swedish movie but a chain of DIY furniture stores). At noon, there's a product launch. Mike Sidall reviews all his old fanzines, then unveils name & marketing plan for the new one. ("If I want to write about SF I will. Want to make anything of it, eh?") Is it all an elaborate ploy to avoid admitting that Drivel & Drool was a crap name for a fanzine, I wonder? Must stop writing postcards - beginning to feel like the heroine of one of those epistolary novels. I wonder if this is what it's like for Steve Green?

Christina

Sunday Afternoon

Dear Frank,

The Harveys are talking about their forthcoming trip to Washington & Corflu. I retaliate with my itinerary for Australia. Pam trumps this with plans for her 40th birthday party in Australia in 1999. Fortunately this exercise in mutual jealousy is brought to a close by Greg's annual rant. The word "communality" not heard since the mid-80s slips out, and suddenly we're discussing why we're here. Back in the mid-80s it would be because we all had fanzines in common. Now, Greg demands that we all care about science fiction. Steve Lawson suggests that a mutual interest in beer is enough. The conversation flows back into well-worn channels - fans are special, fans are much like any other interest group, the world is fragmenting into fandoms etc etc. How many times can people produce these points and still pretend they're new? And somehow Greg's original argument that there should be more to conventions than good conversations about sex, jokes with friends and drunken trips to restaurants, gets lost.

Christina

Sunday Evening

Dear Frank

No trains out of Burnham for two hours, so forced to get another drink. Just settle down to talk to Langford when Caroline Mullan offers a lift back to Bristol - if I drop everything and leave instanter. I decide this would be too much of shock to system - so finish my pint instead and talk about TAFF feud & why there's no Hugo ballot forms round British fandom ("I could distribute them," says Langford, "but then everyone would think I was asking them to nominate Ansible." He sounds serious. The pressures of winning too many Hugos.) People haemorrhage out of the convention. I catch the train back with Richard and quiz him on his date with Pam, but Richard remains coy. (Knows me too well - I'd only write it up in a fanzine.) It's only a 3/4 hr trip back to Bristol. I'd have probably missed all the MisCons if they hadn't been so close - I never feel like going, for one reason or another. But as usual, I really enjoyed myself. You should have been there.

Christina

Is The Doctor Homosexual? An Inquiry by Doctor Skagra

or: Time And Relative Dimensions In Sex

No-one knows the secret of the strange traveller known only as the Doctor. The hero of the BBC's long-running television programme 'Doctor Who' is an enigma. We all know he is a Time Lord from Gallifrey, that he has two hearts, can change his appearance, and that he travels in an amazing time machine called the TARDIS. But what we don't know far outweighs what we do. Why did he leave Gallifrey? Why did he spend so much time with UNIT? Why did he travel with more female companions than male? What is the secret of his relationship with the Master?

I believe that answer to these questions, and indeed the key to understanding the Doctor's entire character, is that the Doctor is homosexual.

The Female Companions

For evidence, you need look no further than the Doctor's choice of travelling companion. The vast majority of these are young, attractive, sometimes even voluptuous young ladies. He has travelled with about thirty women, but only seven young men. Why is this? The obvious answer is that the Doctor is gay. Women feel safe with the Doctor as he doesn't threaten them sexually. The Doctor's relationships with his female companions is purely platonic. They see him as an avuncular figure and he in turn wants to protect them, guiding them through the wonders of the universe.

If the Doctor were heterosexual, he would never travel with women. Being cooped up in the TARDIS in close proximity to attractive young females such as Jo Grant, Tegan and Peri would be too much for the Doctor and he would eventually resort to making sexual advances on his companions, causing embarrassment and bringing shame and disgrace on his noble Time Lord character. Since he is homosexual, women feel perfectly safe with him and can therefore travel with him without arousing his sexuality.

The Male Companions

As a homosexual, the Doctor can trust himself to travel with women - but not with young men. He therefore finds it safer to avoid travelling with them. His first male companion, Ian Chesterton, was pugnaciously heterosexual, pairing off with his fellow schoolteacher Barbara Wright. The First Doctor was too physically old for sexuality to play any significant part in determining his character, and he could therefore travel with Ian quite amicably, with occasional lapses into petulance, stemming from jealousy of Ian's youth, and his inability to possess the schoolteacher sexually. The same is largely true of the second male companion, the space captain Steven. Eventually, the tired, spent First Doctor regenerates into a younger, more libidinous body.

Jamie

The second incarnation of the Doctor spent almost all of his time with a young Scottish lad called Jamie. This was the Doctor's one great homosexual love affair and it is the key to understanding his character. The Doctor introduced Jamie to the joys of homosexuality, awakening the young Scot's latent tendencies. It is clear that Jamie possessed such tendencies - how else could he have travelled with beautiful young ladies such as Victoria and Zoe and not be attracted to them? The Doctor and Jamie only had eyes for each other. They had regular anal intercourse, which Jamie facilitated by not wearing underpants beneath his kilt (though this

was never shown on screen). They loved each other deeply, Jamie trusting this kind travelling hobo implicitly, the Doctor on fire with lust over this strapping young Scottish lad. (Check also the diaries of Joe Orton for further proof of Jamie's homosexual attractiveness).

This affair came to an end when Ben and Polly joined the TARDIS crew. Both heterosexuals from the London of the 'Swinging Sixties', they were unaware of the Doctor and Jamie's love, but they unwittingly caused a rift in the relationship. The Doctor rapidly became jealous, believing that Jamie was in love with Ben, whom the Doctor believed to be homosexual (he was a sailor, after all). The relationship soured, the Doctor became bitter and twisted and Jamie became sad and confused at his partner's unpredictable mood swings. Tragically, the situation was never resolved as Ben, Polly and Jamie were returned to their own time streams by the Time Lords, their memories wiped, and the Doctor was exiled to Earth in a new body.

The Men from UNIT and the Master

The Doctor's third incarnation was, in appearance and manner, a camp, outrageous old queen, very fond of flamboyant, frilly clothes. He never thought about Jamie - together with the knowledge of how to pilot the TARDIS, all memory of his lover had been temporarily excised from the Doctor's mind. He had no male companions - instead, he had three female assistants whom he 'mothered' and who in turn trusted him totally. He became very attached to Jo Grant (sexual plaything of Captain Yates and Sergeant Benton) and was most upset when she left to marry a hippy professor.

This camp, foppish Doctor enjoyed hanging around men in uniform, which is the real reason he joined UNIT. Sergeant Benton, Captain Yates and of course the Brigadier all featured in his fantasies, but he never made any advances to them, fearing rejection. For all his bold, arrogant outward appearance, the Third Doctor was very shy sexually. It is likely that during this entire incarnation he failed to have sex at all. Instead, he may have resorted to his sonic screwdriver for self-relief.

During these years of exile he encountered his arch-rival, the Master, many times. He told UNIT that this renegade Time Lord was a deadly enemy from the distant past, and that they had once been friends, attending Academy together. The truth is that the Master was the Doctor's first lover, and the real reason the Doctor left Gallifrey was because of a bitter argument between them. The Master is now consumed with hatred, and desires only to destroy his former lover.

It is possible to observe, in the stories featuring the Master, that even though they are now sworn enemies, the two gay Time Lords still have feelings for each other. The Doctor always appears reluctant to kill his enemy, often showing a grudging admiration for the Master. The Master vanishes from the scene after eight encounters during which nothing is resolved, only to return again and again in further contrived and abortive attempts to destroy his former lover.

The Third Doctor is forced to regenerate after facing his greatest fear (spiders - which tells you what a sissy he really was) and the era of the Fourth Doctor begins...

The Perverted Incarnation

The Fourth Doctor is far more complex and sinister than any of his forerunners. In his first story, we observe that his love of men in uniform has abruptly vanished, and our newly regenerated hero quickly settles on the square-jawed macho medic Harry Sullivan as an object of lust. Harry's tenure in the TARDIS is short-lived, as the Fourth Doctor is far from backward in coming forward. Whilst his immediate predecessor was 'all mouth and no trousers,' this new Doctor is pornographically frank about his homosexuality. Furthermore, he is a dedicated sado-masochist, a highly-motivated sexual pervert, full of dark, debased desires

and obscene lusts, which he masks under an attitude of clowning eccentricity. He often used his trademark long scarf in kinky bondage games, and his toothy grin, staring eyes and proffered bag of jelly babies enticed many a young boy into the TARDIS to become subjected to the Doctor's vile sexual experiments.

This Doctor had many female companions, one of whom dressed in close-fitting animal skins - but he ignored the charms of them all. They little suspected the perverted nature of his sexual games, as the objects of his lust were male, such as Davros, helpless victim to the Doctor's attentions. However, it is doubtful whether this Doctor found many such outlets for his obscure desires, as most he approached found him unnerving in the extreme.

Romana

The (asexual) White Guardian entrusted the Doctor to find the six segments of the Key To Time, and along came Romana to assist him in this quest. Their relationship remained professional, sometimes lapsing into icy bitchiness. This was because they had once been lovers, when Romana had been a man. Proof of this is in 'The Ribos Operation' when Romana says she hates her name and prefers to be called 'Fred.' The tension was almost too much for both of them, and Romana was glad to leave. As a mark of affection rare in this incarnation, the Doctor gave her K-9 as a parting gift.

Adric - The Love That Transcended Regeneration

Towards the end of his Fourth Incarnation, the Doctor took the young Alzarian boy Adric under his wing. This was because he brought back bitter-sweet memories of Jamie due to his uncanny resemblance to the Scot. The Doctor was gradually becoming sickened at his own perversions and longed to settle down with someone like Adric. The Doctor did not make any advances at first; he wanted Adric to be special, and didn't want to scare him away. He planned all the romantic things they could do together, and dusted down one of Jamie's crotchless kilts for the young Adric to wear. These plans did not come into fruition because the Master turned up again and tried to kill the Doctor, forcing another regeneration.

The Confused Incarnation

The Fifth Doctor was very, very confused. He was, at heart, a caring, sensitive soul, struggling to come to terms with his sexual nature, tortured by guilt and self-doubt over the gross perversity of his previous self. He still longed for Adric - the love he felt was strong enough to transcend regeneration - but he was concerned that any advances he made would shatter the boy's child-like innocence.

What the Doctor didn't know was that whatever innocence Adric possessed had been vigorously removed long ago by Tegan and a jar of Vaseline. Tegan was a high-spirited attractive young Australian woman, who naturally sought an outlet for her desires, finding them in Adric and Nyssa (an aristocratic young lady from the Union of Traken, who was a dirty bitch at



A lovers tiff?

heart). The three companions would frequently indulge themselves in frenetic bouts of three-way sex, usually in Tegan's room, which was next to the Doctor's.

The Doctor became greatly troubled on hearing the noises emanating almost nightly from Tegan's room. He would cower in his bed, clutching his stick of celery, trembling and weeping with confused, suppressed desire. He half-suspected what was going on, but he dared not stare truth in the face lest it shatter his beliefs about Adric's chastity. The Fifth Doctor became vulnerable and edgy, never quite at ease with his sexually active companions, and never knowing quite what to do about Adric.

Adric's Death

The death of Adric at the end of 'Earthshock' came as a crushing blow to the Doctor. He had worked himself up to declare his love for the young Alzarian, but he left it tragically too late. He watched impotently, as Adric plunged towards Earth in a spaceship (which destroyed the Cybermen, and the dinosaurs, or something), anguish racking his Time Lord soul. After this, the Doctor was plunged into despair and confusion. He sought release from his grief in the shape-changing android Kamelion, who became his willing sex partner, but the Doctor remained emotionally barren.

Turlough - the Cuckoo in the Nest

The Doctor was soon joined by another young man, the creepy, alien, ginger-haired Turlough. He was initially placed amongst the TARDIS crew by the evil Black Guardian (whose sexual advances the young Doctor once spurned) to destroy the Doctor. Even once this was resolved and Turlough pledged allegiance to the Doctor, no-one liked or trusted him. He was a shifty, suspicious, sinister fellow, and to this day we are unsure of his sexual orientation. What is clear is that Tegan and Nyssa did not fancy him at all, resorting for their thrills to the TARDIS' vast collection of exotic alien sex toys (about which the Doctor was oblivious). The two girls left as soon as they could after Turlough's arrival, Nyssa preferring to end her days on a gloomy space station full of lepers rather than spend another minute in his company.

As for the Doctor, he hardly even noticed Turlough, so consumed with grief was he over Adric's demise.

Planet Of Fire

This is a key story for the Fifth Doctor - it reintroduces his former lover the Master (yet again, he loses his companions Turlough and Kamelion (neither of whom he misses in the slightest) and gains a new companion, the young, vivacious, huge-bosomed American student, Peri Brown.

Kamelion came to a very sticky end in this story. Much has been made of the shocking ease with which the Doctor kills off this companion - but the reason for his callousness is simple to explain. During one of their frequent bouts of anal intercourse (which were never shown on screen), the shape-changing metal man had assumed the likeness of Adric to please the Doctor. This so enraged the Time Lord that he had no compunctions about killing the android.

Turlough is re-united at last with his own people, leaving the TARDIS crew at the end of the story. The Doctor is never to have another male companion (on screen, anyway...)

As for the Master...he seemed to perish at the tale's climax, consumed in searing flames of Numismaton gas as he foolishly seeks immortality (or something). His 'last words' (until the next time) as he faded from existence were: 'Won't you show mercy to your own...' The final part of that sentence, never heard on screen, has caused endless debate within fandom.

Was it 'own kind?' 'own brother' - or something else? I can exclusively reveal, as conclusive proof of the exact nature of the relationship between the two Time Lords, that the Master's 'last words' were 'Won't you show mercy to your own...lover.'

Brief Reversion to Heterosexuality

Soon afterwards, the caring, sensitive Fifth Doctor 'dies' in saving Peri from spectrox poisoning. He regenerates, commenting that 'it feels different this time,' and we are presented with a very unstable incarnation of the Doctor, who is initially virtually insane. This insanity eventually settles down and we realise that the Sixth Doctor is a brash, arrogant, selfish, insensitive bully. With appalling dress sense.

His behaviour is so extreme that we can only assume that it is an attempt to compensate for a lack in some area of his personality. We don't have to look far. What this Doctor lacks is his homosexuality, which, for the duration of his sixth incarnation, has been subverted. For the first and only time, we have a completely heterosexual Doctor. It really is 'different this time' as the Doctor finds himself lusting uncontrollably after his busty young companion Peri.

Peri is, at first, terrified of this demonic Doctor, but eventually submits to his advances, curious to find out what a Time Lord is like in bed. The Doctor cannot resist this most voluptuous of companions, and gives in to temptation every time. On several occasions he orders her to bend over the TARDIS console as he mounts her from behind (though this was never shown on screen). This causes great turmoil as the Doctor's inner self is homosexual, and this inner self is revolted at what the Sixth Doctor is doing. One day, he would be punished for this disgusting reversion to heterosexuality...

The Valeyard

This reversion to heterosexuality, and the chaos into which it plunges the Doctor's psyche, has far-reaching and drastic consequences. In the 'epic' 'Trial of a Time Lord' season, the Sixth Doctor is put on trial for his crime of interference in the affairs of the universe. This trial is a complete sham - he has been tried for the same thing before - and the real reason for the Valeyard's accusations is to punish him for his betrayal of his homosexual soul. The Valeyard is the Doctor's final incarnation (or something) and, in reviewing his life, chooses to punish his sixth self for his heterosexuality. The Valeyard therefore manoeuvres Peri into a situation where she is killed/married off to Brian Blessed (depending on which version of the story you believe) to punish her for tempting the Sixth Doctor. The Valeyard's punishment for the Doctor? Forcing him to travel with a companion played by Bonnie Langford - rather too extreme a punishment, I think.

The Tragic Incarnation

The Sixth Doctor, tired of being trapped in the TARDIS with a sexually unattractive companion and unquenchable heterosexual desires, decides to regenerate so he can be gay again. So he deliberately falls over, bashes his head against the TARDIS console and promptly regenerates.

The Seventh Doctor, though regaining his homosexuality, is a bit of a sexual enigma. He hides his homosexuality beneath an irritating veneer of clownish eccentricity. He avoids male companions (until Chris Cwej in the New Adventures - but these don't count, arguably) and ditches Bonnie Langford for a gung-ho overcharacterised walking bag of clichés tomboy called Ace. He seems to have no need for sexual relief - unless that question-mark umbrella hides some perverted secret.

But, as the years progress and the writers become desperate, the Doctor's character

darkens. He begins to confront adversaries from his past never hinted at in the first quarter century of the programme's existence. He becomes a moody, miserable sod, best illustrated by the change of the colour of his jacket from cream to dark brown.

So, what's eating the Seventh Doctor? It is obvious. In 'Ghost Light,' the Doctor tells Ace that one of his greatest fears, alongside 'burnt toast' (don't let the Daleks know that or they'll arm themselves with toasters instead of sink-plungers!) is 'unrequited love.' This is clearly a reference to Adric. The Doctor, after his initial burst of post-regenerative jollity, remembers Adric and grieves afresh - something his insensitive former self could never do. He chooses to remain celibate, and changes into a sadder, jaded, worldly-wise character, roaming the universe, trying to escape the pain he feels inside.

In the final televised story to date, 'Survival,' he encounters the Master again - this time, his former lover seems to have gone quite insane, turning his attentions to cats. Bestiality not being to the Doctor's taste, they fight on a dying planet, but it is not made clear whether the Master perishes or not (yawn).

The last we see of the Doctor on our screens is as he strolls off into the sunset with Ace. But the story is not quite over...

Into The Future - The New Adventures

The Doctor has been given a new lease of life in a series of original novels published by Virgin Books. The Doctor's character remains unchanged, but these books introduce adult themes of sex, swearing, violence and sexuality into the narrative of Doctor Who. We can at last read the word 'fuck' in a Doctor Who book and enjoy scenes of characters having sexual relationships with each other.

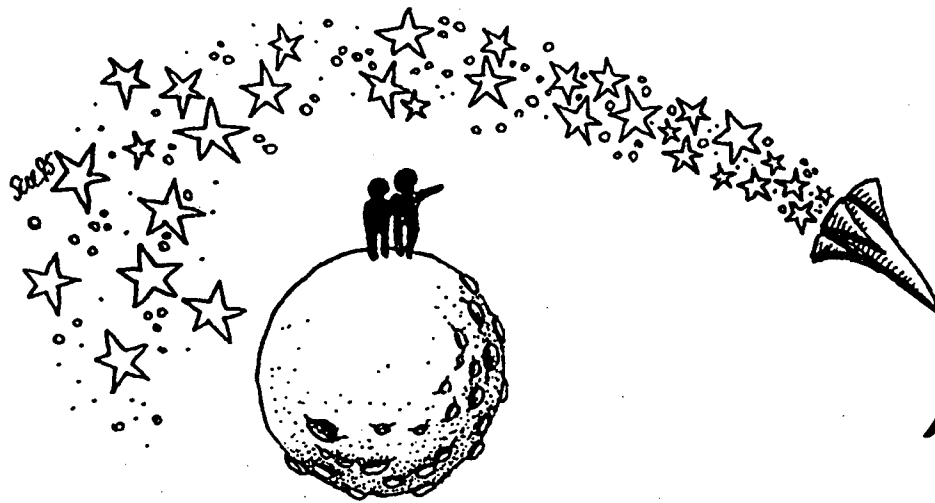
The Doctor is joined (not Biblically - he is still celibate) on these New Adventures travels by Bernice Summerfield, a strong-willed thirtysomething female Professor from the future with a penchant for sarcasm and booze. Benny and the Doctor share the deep platonic relationship typical between the Doctor and his companion. More recently, the Doctor has been joined by Adjudicators Cwej and Forrester, tough gun-totin' cops from the future who are hard as nails and will shag anything in sight.

Interestingly, the Doctor pays no heed to the sexual carnival going on all around him, so that even in the hands of these Cyberpunk/New Age authors, he still remains under the shadow of Adric's death.

Waiting In The Wings - the Eighth Doctor

At the time of writing, an Eighth Doctor has been confirmed: Paul McGann, star of 'The Monocled Mutineer', 'Withnail and I,' and the bits of 'Alien 3' which ended up on the cutting room floor, is to star as the Doctor in US/UK co-produced two hour TV movie later on in 1996. Nothing is known of the script or plot - but could it be that, at last, we are going to see, on screen, final and incontrovertible proof of the Doctor's homosexuality?

Only time will tell...



Christina Lake

POPSICLE MADNESS

Free tickets to see Swedish wannabes, the Wannadies, have been on the turntable since Revolution Promotions put BoverB on their mailing list last year. But the gig, as support to Sleeper, came and went to only passing regret by the folk at Balloons HQ (well, we'd already seen Sleeper at Sound City). "I think you have to phone up for the tickets," said Simon, perceptively. After all, he's been in the music business for years and knows this type of thing. So, when the announcement came through that the plucky Swedes were going to gig Bristol again, this time in the elevated company of ex-Pixies frontman Frank Black, Simon picked up the phone and went to work on blagging us some tickets. "Do you want to do an interview?" they asked. Simon said he would get back to them on that. Meanwhile, we enlisted Tim to drive us to the gig on the offer that we'd split the price of the extra ticket three ways. "And you can come and do the interview with us," I added, mischievously. Tim, never one to shrug off a challenge, said that if we were doing an interview, then he wasn't coming.

A few days before the gig I asked Simon whether our tickets had arrived. "No," said Simon, who knows about these things, "they're putting us on the guest list." This sounded all right till later in the week, Simon announced that he had to work that night. Since he'd be late, he proposed to take the one ticket we had bought while Tim and I went in on the guest list. Unfortunately, the names down on the guest list were Simon Lake and friend, so Tim would have to pretend to be Simon. Tim, true to form, was not very happy with this. But he was willing to give it a go, marching brashly through the security cordon on the gate, asserting that we're on the guest list (though much of our brashness, if truth be told, came from it being too glacial outside to hang around dithering). "Guest list, name of Lake," said Tim, feeling that this way he couldn't be caught out attempting to impersonate soon to be famous music biz personality Simon Lake. In the event, they didn't give a damn whether or not any of us could own to the name of Lake since Simon's name wasn't anywhere on the list. "But they definitely said they'd put us down for tickets," I said, implausibly taking over the lead role in this discussion, as I had at least been in the room when the telephone conversation took place. They scrutinised the list some more, shook their head, and suggested that we buy tickets.

At a loss for any better alternative, and since there's not much you can do when you're not even the people you're claiming to be, we shelled out our money and went inside. "At least you'll have something to write in the review," said Tim, as we stood in the bar, drinking our beers. "Yes, I'll make Revolution Promotions sorry they ever messed us about," I said

peevishly. "Better not do that," advised Tim. "You might not get any more free CDs. "I bet they'd have let us in we've agreed to do the interview," I said, regretfully. I was to feel even more regretful once we were in the hall watching the band.

Boy, were the audience cold. Bristol outside was freezing, but this lot looked like they'd just been chipped straight from ice. Two people in the middle were dancing, I was dancing and Tim was kind of swaying slightly. But the rest of them were not moving. At all. Hey, I should have had that guest pass just for being one third of their real audience. Unperturbed, the band belted out a lively version of one of the songs from the album. "We're The Simple Minds from Glasgow," said the singer, encouragingly, at the end of that track, before launching optimistically into another song. The band kept up the pace and gradually a few more human icicles thawed out and began to drip into action.

There was something seriously kooky about the band, I decided after a while. The only one who spoke, singer and gravedigger Par Wicksten, looked like he had failed to register that European pop stars don't have to pretend it's still the '60s. The guitarist next to him looked like he had just escaped from Abba, while the token woman didn't seem to know that Linda McCartney had given tambourine playing a bad name. The other two band members faded into the corner trying desperately to give the impression that they were just normal people up there on stage to earn a living and nothing to do with the bad rock cliches that were cavorting beside them.

"We're Roxette," suggested the singer, next time there was a gap. A few heretofore interested onlookers gave up and went to the bar. The singer decided it was time to mumble incomprehensibly into the microphone, sixties style. The female changed from tambourine to ocarina. The single went down to mild success. Then, just when it looked like the audience might be going to get into it, the band said an abrupt goodbye and left the stage.

"I don't think they'll be back," said Tim. "They've played everything off the album." Which at 35 minutes seemed to represent the extent of their repertoire. I told Tim I wished I was interviewing the band after all. "You can't think of what questions you want to ask till you've seen them play," I said with the easy confidence that you get once you know you're not going to be called on to deliver. "But now I know how mad they are, I think it would have been fun." "You're right about them being mad," said Tim. "I heard them interviewed on the radio and they said they liked to have cornflakes, beans and chips for breakfast, all on the same plate." Clearly this interview had been as incisively music-oriented as mine might have been. In some ways it's easier to make fun of The Wannadies as an extension of decades of Eurovision jokes, than to take them seriously as purveyors of some damn fine pop (particularly "Do it all the time" and "Dreamy Wednesdays") But then, perhaps their pop has only received any attention, in spite of its quality, because it is so easy to make fun of the band.

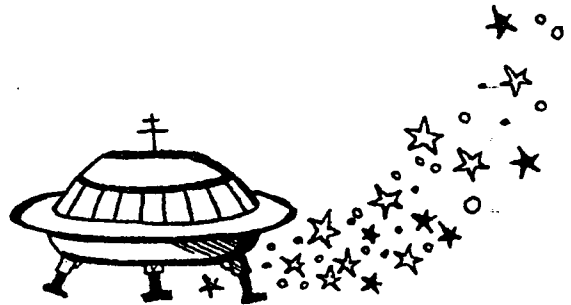
As we waited for the next act (or for Simon to turn up so we could lynch him over the ticket fiasco), Tim filled me in on some information about Frank Black. Among other things, he warned me that Frank Black was larger than him. Never having seen Frank Black, I supposed this to mean someone of Meat Loaf proportions. In fact, when Frank Black came on stage, I was stunned to find that Tim was completely wrong. Frank Black was not bigger than Tim, but exactly the same size. In fact, he WAS Tim, or a very close doppelganger - short, round and bald (though a slight dark shadow suggested that Frank's hair was shaved). He was so uncannily like Tim, I had to check behind me to make sure that Tim was still there.

After the first shock, I settled in to the music. Unlike for the Wannadies, the audience were warm and lively and there was no shortage of positive feedback for Frank and his band. The other difference that was very evident was that Frank Black was an experienced and charismatic performer. I didn't know any of his music - I've never heard anything by him, except back when he was with the Pixies - but it didn't matter in the slightest. I was drawn in straight away. I loved it, the changes of tempo, Frank Black's voice, the tight backing of the band. It was a premium performance, and all the more effective because I was only about 10 people's depth away from the stage, so in the heart of the action, but not crushed or blocked by other people. Frank played a good one and a half hour set and though I might have liked to hear him play "Monkey's gone to Heaven", it didn't really matter in the end. What he did play was so good that I just wanted to dance and clap and hear more.

On the way out, Tim was stopped by four different people asking him if he was Frank Black. If only we'd known - we needn't have bothered with all this business of being on the Wannadies guest list or trying to impersonate Simon Lake. We could have walked straight through by saying we were Frank Black and friend.

Simon Lake investigates:

Flying Saucers Over Bristol



Help! Can someone let me out! It's gone 10 o'clock. I'm sure I'm missing something important on the telly. Probably Newsnight. Or Prisoner Cell Block H. Or the world figure skating championships...

Okay, I give in. I guess I better review this heap of shiny CDs supplied by those wonderful people at Revolution Promotions. Jesus, you wouldn't believe how many young Brit-Pop bands there are out there. Still, it's interesting to note that none of them come from Bristol. Cool, eh?

In fact Bristol's top band Flying Saucer Attack are closer to the sound of Jarvis Cocker turning on his Hoover than any of this Oasis-style sixties nonsense. To suss out their influences you need look no further than the knowingly titled 'Popul Vuh 3' from their 'Chorus' album. Yes, FSA are actually out to recreate the strange early '70's scene that was Krautrock. In fact for all their weaknesses - they lack much of the colour of their mentors - their soothing feedback mantras are a welcome alternative to ...well, practically everything else that's around at the moment.

Bristol's other recent discoveries are the equally uncommercial Movietone. Lovers of the off-kilter pop of new wave acts like the Raincoats won't be able to resist the simple charm of their debut lp. Movietone are actually an off-shoot of FSA, but work with a wider palette of sounds to give them the edge over their better known cousins. Both bands could make further strides this year, but will doubtless continue to remain out of the limelight and let the music speak for itself.

Beyond the west country divide it seem there is an endless supply of wannabe Brit-Poppers. Top marks for sheer bloody cheek have to go to Jubilee who don't so much pastiche their '60s idols as recreate them note for note. 'So Sad About Us' has a ragged guitar riff that's certainly been heard before. 'Isle of Wight Sands' is pure psychedelia, sounding rather like Jubilee might have grafted their own lyrics over an old tune by someone like the Move. 'Song to the One' is more beat pop, vaguely Beatlesy. Something so obviously retro ought to appal me (on a certain level it does), yet the songs are bloody good and I feel great every time I play it. And believe me, that's what counts for good music round here.

Next up I have to congratulate the 60ft Dolls whose debut single I slagged off in my last piece. Their follow up, 'Stay' is gloriously good. It has one of those classic shouty choruses (again I suspect I might have heard it somewhere before) that sticks in your head for days. Why it wasn't a huge hit I don't quite understand. But the difference between this and their debut single shows they've really honed their song writing skills. The music press are still drooling over them, John Peel loves them and I'm sure they will make it this year.

Similarly blessed with mega media backing are Mansun, whose fine debut single we raved about last time around. Well now they've joined the big boys at Parlophone and have a 4 track ep to precede their coming album. The titles are great, things like 'Egg Shaped Fred' and 'Ski Jump Nose'. Unfortunately the music seems to have drifted towards that artless early '70's rock sound. The closing song 'Thief' is by far the best, but by then it's too late.

Sheffield's Longpigs are another new band chasing a similar market. Perhaps less derivative than Jubilee or 60 ft dolls, but lacking the instant pop thrill of the above bands. That said 'Far' is not a bad debut record. It takes a few listenings before it works its charms on you. 'Amateur dramatics' is a pleasing windswept ballad. Maybe not one to dash out and buy, but the potential is there.

To finish this round up of hip new bands - we guarantee that casually mentioning a few of these people in the right circles at certain Camden pubs could get you a job freelancing for the NME - lets consider Kill Laura. They seem firmly rooted in the Elastica/ Sleeper camp on 'Glossy' - a clever take on the vacuous world of the supermodel. Not exactly breaking the mold, but done well. Unfortunately the other three songs here rather fall into the non-descript strumathons of early Cherry Red bands. Actually they reminded me of Leicester band Po! who have been doing this kind of thing with more finesse for some years. (And have just released a fine new LP of their own, fact fans)

Finally we have our Swedish friends the Wannadies. Despite huge press acclaim, they're still looking for that elusive hit. 'How Does it Feel?' is a fine pop tune, but if 'You and Me Song' didn't do it for them, then I doubt this will. Unlike their last single they have the good grace not to massacre one of my favourite Go Between songs, so thanks for that.

Okay, can I go now? I'm sure that's Jeremy Paxman I can hear calling...

BALLOON POST



In spite of the Novacon fanzine glut, this seems to have been a bigger post bag than usual, probably because I did a separate mailing for America when I was over there. Not surprisingly therefore, the debate on the size of American fanzines continues...

Jerry Kaufman, 8618 Linden Ave N, Seattle, WA 98103 USA

I was disappointed in your review of US fanzines, as you made this big deal to begin about the size of our zines, then waffled about not knowing what it all meant. If you're going to present a Big Observation and pose a Big Question, you ought to have a Big Theory to explain it all. However, many of the small observations you made about the style and editorial presence of *Habbakuk* and *Blat!* were well-observed, accurate and cleanly expressed. That makes up for your blatant hook-baiting.

Sure, Big Fanzines deserve Big Theories, but at the end of the day I didn't have anything big enough to fit the phenomenon. Fortunately, some of my readers have their own ideas.

Brian Earl Brown, 11675 Beaconsfield, Detroit, Michigan 48224, USA

Why are American fanzines so large. There are as many reasons as there are large fanzines. *Habbakuk*, as you've noticed, was consumed by the Lettercol That Wouldn't End. It's nice when everyone who writes gets something into the lettercol (something I try to do when I'm editing) but not every single word from every single letter. *Lan's Lantern* suffers from an over-achiever. *Lan's* first fanzines were 24 page contributions to a monthly apa, including crossword puzzles. *Lan's Lantern* merely allowed him to solicit material from everybody and print it all. Other fanzines, like *Blat!* or *Mimosa* are large because they have as their guiding principle professional magazines like *The New Yorker* or *The Atlantic Monthly*. Into their mix is the need for a variety and number of articles. They can't be small because their inspiration is large. But as a publisher of a number of fat fanzines I seem to recall that chiefly the reason was that I wasn't publishing as often as I'd like. I was doing large two or three issues worth of material at a time to make up for the two or three issues worth of time between issues. The proof is in the lack of publishing — *Stet*, *Blat!*, *Habbakuk*, *Idea* haven't appeared since your writing, *Mainstream* and *Mimosa* just put out issues after long intervals.

William Bains, 101 Beechwood Avenue, Melbourn, Royston, Herts SG8 6BW

Big fanzines - my very limited experience is that US fanzines are thicker because the paper is thicker. It is the reverse of the Russian Photocopy syndrome. (I am the proud possessor of reprints of several Russian research papers, and they are printed in rather thin toilet paper in ink made from recycled coal ash. But the science is brilliant.)

Jilly Reed, Hill House, Moats Tye, Suffolk IP14 2EX

I enjoyed your piece on American fanzines. I've not seen very many but those I have fill me with gloom. As an answer to your question ("Why Are [They] So Big?") I'd suggest it's the same impulse that makes American academics footnote their work to death: it may not be the most exciting study but by God it's thorough. There's a national appetite for seeing the evidence of hard labour and it ruins appreciation of that which appears slight. (Even though

the amusing squib can be much harder work than the earnest epic.) It's why Gene Kelly was more popular than Fred Astaire; Astaire made it look effortless but you could see Kelly sweat. What it boils down to, sadly, is that in America size really does matter.

Or, at least, size of mailing list, according to Robert Lichtman :

Robert Lichtman, P.O. Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA

I laughed out loud several places while reading your article, "Why Are American Fanzines So Big?" - a question I sometimes ask myself, and over precisely the same titles. At least with *Lan's Lantern* you can browse through and read anything worth reading that might have crept into the issue, but with zines like *Habbakuk* and *Blat!* there's no ignoring any of the contents lest one miss a buried gem. However, I don't think that size has much to do with whether or not a fanzine becomes a perennial (or even one-time) Hugo winner. Circulation is everything. *Blat!* may not have gotten on this year's Hugo ballot because its circulation is "only" around 300 or so, but the last *Habbakuk* to come out went, I understand, to around 600 people. In the past I've read that *Lan's* circulates to around 1,500 people, and *File 770* goes to around 500 I'm given to understand. By way of contrast, *Trap Door* goes to around 235 people these days, down from around 260 at its peak. (I print 250 of each issue these days.)

*All of which is way above *Balloons Over Bristol's* circulation which used to be 80-100, but is these days pushing 150 (we did a large print run for the Worldcon, then I did a separate edition of the last edition for America when I was over there last October).*

Interesting observation about the difference between my fmz's lettercol with relatively few comments (though I've increased them in recent issues) and *Blat!*'s with many comments. I think the difference is that Ted and Dan don't discourage controversy, while I encourage discussion without rancor. But it's true that my method leaves more room for the reader to come in with his or her own response. In the nonconfrontational atmosphere I attempt to further, if I cover every little point with my own observations there's less room for others to put in their own bit. None of this is to say I don't enjoy reading *Blat!*'s lettercol, though; I definitely do. I would call *Blat!* my favorite American fanzine currently being published with any regularity.

*This was written back in October when it still seemed possible that *Blat!* was being published with some regularity. I'm beginning to feel bad about criticising *Blat!* - not because I don't think my comments were valid, but because I wanted it to be there to prove me wrong. What's even more frustrating about the non-appearance of everyone's favourite behemoth is that as I understand it, Ted and Dan have written and put together most of the issue, but can't put it out because they don't have a printer. This seems tragic, and surely something that someone in fandom could help out with? (Or are they trying to save it to be their great unpublished issue for some future "fannish archive" publishing project?)*

I like *Habbakuk*, too, though with similar qualifications to the ones you mention here: my lack of engagement with Debbie's book review column, but total absorption in Ted's fanzine review. I agree with you that the lettercol is far too long and lacking in sufficient hooks to maintain one's interest in many places. There's too much repetitiveness as Bill runs one letter after another where the writers express near-identical opinions. And I share your discomfort in the trashing of Abi Frost, who I enjoyed meeting and spending time with in 1989 and with whom I had a great time when she visited Glen Ellen before the Worldcon and at the con itself.

Chris Murphy, 7 Mullion Drive, Timperley, Cheshire WA15 6SL

Perhaps Bill Donaho's 45 pages of letters is excessive (although he still has a list of WAHFs!) but I feel it is better to print reader's comments in bulk than ignore them altogether. One of the joys of fanzines is the feeling that there is a dialogue between readers and editors. Write to most professional publications of any kind and you get your views pinned to the Letters Page like a dead butterfly. Back in the UK, Martin Tudor, who has been guilty of some letterless editions of Empties recently, proposes doing an all-letter issue to compensate. Good for him. TUDOR FOR TAFF, by the way.

Jane Carnell, 63 Montgomery Street, Edinburgh, EH7 5HZ

I wondered for quite some time (long enough to get three issues) why I was getting somezine called *Habbakuk* from someone called Bill Donahue, which appeared to consist entirely of anecdotes about people I didn't know and probably didn't want to know. Then I discovered that Bill had borrowed Chuck Thingumybob's mailing list. There's always a rational explanation for everything, no matter how bizarre; in Simon Ounsley's latest *Lagoon*, he proves this by suggesting that the rational explanation for tales of alien visitation and abduction is that the people involved were being attended by spirit healers. Makes sense.

If you say so, Jane.

Harry Warner, Jr, 423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland, 21740, USA

I have much the same problem as you with large fanzines, although my motivation is somewhat different. If the fanzine is enjoyable, the more there is of it, the better, in theory. But in practice my eyesight isn't what it once was so I must stretch the reading of all but the clearest-printed large fanzines over many days and I frequently bog down before I've gone far enough to inspire a decent loc, at which point I decide I'll wait until the next issue and loc both together, and when it comes I feel I must finish the previous issue first, and my eyes water more than ever and sometimes the loc never does get written. In recent months, almost all my locs have gone to the bite-sized fanzine that I can read in a fraction of an hour and often can loc on just one piece of typing paper. There is also the trouble someone mentions in BOB, the feeling that a normal length loc isn't adequate for a very large fanzine, then the problem of finding enough time to write four or more pages about it.

It doesn't bear thinking about... But, enough of the Xtra Large American fanzine scene and on to our own pusillanimous efforts. Here's Jilly again :

Jilly Reed

I strongly disagree with your opinions about *Attitude* as expressed in the editorial of *BoB* 9, Perhaps I haven't seen enough fanzines to get a feel for what they 'should' be like and am over-influenced by the standards I normally use, viz, admiring the well-written more than the slipshod and a clear layout more than a scruffy one. It is sad but true that these require planning. Hence I jibbed a bit at your use of the word "contrived" - with its overtones of insincerity and artifice - to condemn it. If fanzines are worth doing at all, why not do them with all your heart and soul? Or are things only sincere if done badly? Is incompetence evidence of integrity? Because in that case I hope to goodness the next doctor who treats me is a lying toad. Yes, yes, I know I'm pushing it a bit far but the argument that sincerity of feeling is evidenced only by roughness of expression leads to dangerous idiocies like *Forrest Gump*. Now there's a pernicious film. Spontaneity is a lovely idea but not even genius produces good stuff without forethought. To condemn *Attitude* for possessing what in any

other publication would be praiseworthy *because it's a fanzine* is to offer a comprehensive insult to fanzine writers everywhere. Aren't they worth the best you can do?

Absolutely. And I don't believe that I suggested otherwise in my editorial. What I was trying to say (perhaps unsuccessfully), was that Pam, Michael and John were possibly more interested in the project and schedule for Attitude, including the target of winning a Nova in 1995, than in doing a fanzine for its own sake. But then again, maybe there was just the tiniest element of doubt in my mind that a fanzine so professionally programmed could possibly include the "heart and soul" element you mention.

But at least someone understood what I was attempting to say :

Linda Krawecke

You wouldn't believe how many words you've taken straight out of my mouth re *Attitude*! If I used the word "contrived" once, it must have been a dozen times in a dozen letters and phone conversations. I've just been too chicken shit to write it in a loc anywhere.

Well, you're out in the open now Linda! Hope the Attitude bunch will forgive you (well, they're still talking to me)

Robert Lichtman

Who needs a Nova? This seems to be one of the mainstay subject matters for British fanzines, just like American fans periodically anguish over the relevance of the fan Hugo awards. Even though I'm not old enough to be your father *{{reference to an article I sent Robert for Trap Door}}* I've been around in fandom long enough that these sorts of discussions usually make my eyes glaze over. But there are points to comment on here. Does frequency merit award? Well, if so I guess Langford's *Ansible* would win year in and year out these days.

Like he does in the Hugos? Well, if he'd only stop winning those space rockets, we might start considering him for the Novas. (Incidentally Dave did come second in the writers category.)

No, I don't think frequency is the main criteria, since in years past Novae were won by fanzines appearing quite infrequently, like *Lip*. I think quality - that subjective marker, meaning something different to everyone - is the main criteria. A large circulation probably doesn't hurt either. *Attitude* has both, and deserves its '95 win. I'm sure Simon Ounsley deserves his, too, though I wish my copy of *Lagoon* No. 7 would finish its crawl to my mailbox so I can read it. As for West, goes without saying. Since the death of ATom, no one in British fandom can top him.

No, you're right, frequency doesn't seem to have much to do with it (well, it didn't help Balloons Over Bristol much in the poll. The group fanzine did a lot better when it was called Blackbirds Egg and wasn't published at all). I reckon a couple of good issues in a year are sufficient for a fanzine to be in the running, but unfortunately, these days, the main criteria for winning the Novas, second to quality, seems to be having enough of your friends at Novacon, and being prepared to go around blatantly persuading them to fill out their ballot forms in your favour. It is to Attitude's credit that it still managed to win its Nova without obvious arm twisting and in the face of a campaign by Ian Sorensen to prevent it winning. I would like to see an overhaul of the points apportioning system, which gives too much comparative weight to first place votes. It seems to me it's much easier to put in a fix for one

name or title if first place votes count more than four third place votes combined.

Steve Jeffery, 44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon OX5 2XA

"Who needs a Nova?" Me? But apparently West ran off with this one by a wide margin according to Pam Wells in her *Apparatchik 46* Novacon report. Hey, and I missed Nic Fairey getting his head shaved, but we had to leave Sunday, immediately after the awards. God knows what Dee Ann thought of having to take him back through U.S. immigration with 'Tudor for TAFF' shaved into his scalp.

Maybe he wore a hat. The truth should be told.

Jerry Kaufman

I was amused by the front page news scoop, and almost thought it was the straight goods. Your editorial clarified everything. Now that the Novas have in truth been awarded, do you feel Okay with the results?

Yes - after all, they were exactly as predicted in my editorial.

Ken Lake, 1A Stephen Court, Ecclesbourne Road, Thornton Heath, CR7 7BP
You do realise, I trust, that NOVA means "it doesn't go" in Spanish. But for all that, congratters : we, er, knew you had it in you all the time. Mere frequency of publication isn't enough: *Zorn* is neither so readable nor so legible, and that matters. "Efficient" and "purposeful" ain't enough: *BoverB* has sparkle and panache and a damn good team.

Well, we'll get to see how good the team work is when the next issue comes out without me. In the meantime, one of our most valuable team members is coming in for more than her fair share of stick...

Jackie Duckhawk, 11 Hayster Drive, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 4PB

Like some of your other correspondents, I am uneasy with the continuing saga of Miss Lee. I have seen a loved and lovable elderly lady sinking into the same paranoid, confused world that Miss Lee inhabited; some form of dementia must be responsible. My "aunty" (acutally step-great grandmother) believed that her neighbours were stealing flowerpots from her locked garden shed and were spying on her through holes concealed in the pictures on her wall. She was worried about the little man who lived in the bird bath, and driven to distraction by the "mice" she kept seeing. Worst of all, she believed the post man and her neighbours were posting pieces of her (recently deceased) sister's body through the letter box and hiding them about her house. I have every sympathy for the people who had to share a house with Miss Lee and I could read an account of it if leavened with a little more sympathy. But I can't laugh at her.

I think Tim had to laugh or go mad himself. Also, whatever the cause of anti-social behaviour



by neighbours, it's hard to perceive of it as anything other than victimisation when you're trapped on the receiving end of it.

Steve Stiles, 8631 Lucerne Road, Randallstown, Md. 21133, USA

By great coincidence I was reading the Miss Lee letters while watching a documentary on an Alzheimers patient. I can't claim to ever have had such a spectacular downstairs neighbor as Tim Goodrick's, but I have had a few I could've cheerfully strangled. When I signed up for my first Brooklyn apartment, a second floor flat, my new landlord informed me that the tenant below coveted my apartment and so, if I was willing, perhaps a swap could be arranged. Thinking that it would do no harm to talk it over and size up his place, I went down to 1A and knocked on the door. It opened a small crack to reveal a suspicious eyeball peering over the lock chain. Old New York custom. I explained the possible swap proposal. "No hablo Ingles," said the eyeball as the door rapidly closed in my face. Amazingly, my downstairs neighbor quickly mastered the language. Within a few weeks I was bombarded with a steady stream of complaints. I walked too hard. I played the radio, the stereo, the television. My cat was noisy. My friends talked. My bedsprings squeaked. Each complaint was invariably accompanied by an irritating and ingratiating smile of pure hypocrisy, always beginning with the perfectly articulated words "My friend, I like you very much, but...". How I grew to hate that "but..."! Other things soured on me on that building; the mailboxes were broken into, the beautiful marble staircase was slowly being reduced to rubble by the neighbourhood tykes, and Charles Platt once stepped on a couple copulating on the floor of the building's lobby (luckily Platt was barefoot that morning). I decided that this was no place to entertain guests and found other rooms. As I was moving out furniture, my dear first floor friend stood outside to watch, making sure I noticed the great big smirk of triumph. Later I returned to turn over the keys to the new tenants; a family from Pakistan. There was the husband and wife, the grandparents, four or five kids, and an uncle or two. Sometimes there *is* justice.

Chris Murphy

The 'Miss Lee Letters' have become boring. We get the message, Tim Goodrick was harassed by a demented old woman who kept sending him silly and repetitive missives. I would rather read about the rooftop father and rat-hedgehog he says will have to be excised.

Jane Carnell

I'm glad I've been getting Balloons, because otherwise I would have been spared hearing about Miss Lee, and I always wondered what she did after she stopped being an Oxonian pirate on Dragon Island. (*Swallows & Amazons* in-joke.) Clearly, whatever else may be wrong with her, she does practice Safe Sex (well, I can't think why else she'd have rubber gloves in the bedroom, thought they ought to be latex for fullest sensation).

Steve Jeffrey

I am just pondering the implications about what Miss Lee considers 'the wrong purpose' for a stick of *Valpona*. Actually, I don't want to think about it, but the thought keeps returning like a bad itch. And what might happen in the hands of a non 'god fearing person'. There's a throwaway line in the letter of August 30th, "my intelligence tells me that people who do wrong.." that would normally go by, except when taken together with the above. It puts a slightly different slant on the meaning of 'intelligence'. Does Miss Lee talk to angels or 'good spirits', I wonder?

Harry Warner Jr

Since I didn't see the first three parts of *The Miss Lee Letters*, I don't know if Tim Goodrick has eliminated one possibility. Has he dusted the soles of his slippers with chalk or stretched thin thread across his flat door to make sure that he hasn't been suffering spells in which his conscious mind blacks out and he wanders down to Miss Lee's first floor flat, moves things around, then returns to his own flat and snaps out of his trance with no memory of what he did? This unfortunate personal problem would eliminate all thought of Miss Lee suffering from Alzheimer's and instead would reveal her as an elderly woman of infinite compassion and manners so good that she has adopted this method of trying to make him aware in the most gentle manner that he is the culprit?

It would certainly make a good twist. Let's just hope you haven't anticipated the conclusion of Tim's final episode (should we ever get that far). Harry also has some theories about Dr Who novels :

Paul Hinder reminds me of one of the great mysteries of secondhand book hunting in Hagerstown. I know that Dr. Who novels are sold in the United States because one fan collects them and writes about them frequently. But in all the years since Dr. Who was originally shown in England up to the present, I have never found a novel about The Doctor nor a non-fiction book about the series at any yard sale, thrift store, secondhand book shop, or other source of cheap literature. I can't imagine which of my two theories might be right: either nobody in this part of the United States ever buys them new and thus none are ever turned over to secondhand sources, or there is such a stupendous fondness for Dr. Who writings that everything gets snapped up the instant it's put out for sale and I'm never in time to see them.

Brian Earl Brown

Bob#8 caught my eye because I'm not used to seeing Dr. Who photos on the covers of British fanzines. I love the character, though more in concept than execution -- that being usually somewhere between poor and god-awful. Paul Hinder's "How to Write a Dr. Who novel" was nice though I had hoped more for a scandal laden, blowing away the clouds of misinformation and deceit sort of thing.

So had I. But Paul felt that since he still wanted to get work from Virgin, it might not be totally advisable to dish the dirt.

The note that Paul writes Dr. Who novel as Paul Leonard was a pleasant surprise, as I've read his two and thought they didn't suck as badly as most of the others. (That's rude of me.) As much as I want to like the Dr. Who novels the only ones I thought was really satisfying were Andy Lane's *All-Consuming Fire*, and more for the Sherlock Holmes pastiche than for the latter Lovecraftian riffs (although incorporating the Great Old Ones into Who mythology does account for the mass of Ancient Evils the Doctor runs into) and Ben Aaronovitch's *Transit*. I think the books are hurt by an excess of British Gloom and Doom. Rather than ending with a certain amount of exhilaration that the universe has once again been saved, there's always a sense of Worse Things Waiting and that the Doctor is a right bastard...

*That's just the way we like it. Though workshopping Paul's third Dr Who book, *Toy Soldiers*, did arouse some vociferous objections as to the sorry fate of most of his main characters. Never mind, the British reputation for "gloom and doom" could be on the way out, now we have all that jolly BritPop music to cheer us up.*

Kev McVeigh, 37 Firs Road, Milnthorpe, Cumbria LA7 7QF

If BoB is going to focus on music at least lets have some proper discussion. Sandra Bond's letter is symptomatic of the 'Britpop' malaise. For a start I don't consider a band four albums into their career to be a 'new' band, as Sandra labels Blur, but that is typical of the hype which surrounds such 'scenes' in its ultimate shallowness. I don't expect a trainspotter approach that insists on full knowledge of every obscure b-side, but Blur's earlier albums are hardly rare are they? But because Blur made a couple of good singles which caught something of the prevalent zeitgeist (and ditto, Oasis) they were instantly lauded and placed at the forefront of a non-existent movement. After all, if Brit pop is pop made by Brits, then it covers acts as disparate as Tricky, P J Harvey, Radiohead and East 17 (hmm) but instead it seems to cover only the new wave of C86 types. I actually don't mind Echobelly, Sleeper and Elastica, and the early Oasis singles were great but they've it all down since.

I'm not quite sure what you mean by C86 types (I'll have to ask Simon!), but I do agree that BritPop only refers to a certain segment of the British pop scene. But what do you expect, Kev, it's a marketing label, for chrissake? And a very successful one, even if the BritPop backlash is well underway among the musically hip, the life-style conscious, and anyone who hates bands once they get famous.

For the record (pun intentional, I bought many of these on vinyl 7") the best new British bands are The Delgados, Longpigs, Joyrider, and maybe Baby Bird. Elsewhere, the Inbreds seem worth checking out and slightly more established acts like Garbage + Scarce + Whale deserve far more fuss than most of the Britpop scene. I'm reminded of a review in Melody Maker a couple of years back which said "It's an okay record -- maybe I'm just sick of the merely okay being eulogised." In other words "Quite good isn't good enough - demand excellence and fuck the rest!"

I think it takes a lot of energy to demand excellence. I'm reminded of an article in the Observer criticising middle-brow England for wanting to come home and watch Inspector Morse. It all depends what you're using your recreation for, and if it's to unwind from too many mind-numbing hours at work, then perhaps you have a right to settle for enjoying the familiar (good, maybe, mediocre often, but by the nature of familiarity almost certainly not ground-breaking) and not have people shouting at you for failing to seek out and appreciate something more obscure but better. Still, it makes a good slogan.

Jerry Kaufman

I enjoyed Simon Lake's tribute to a record label I've never heard of, because I like to know that such dedication and creativity still goes on. Here, of course, in Seattle, we have Sub Pop, Pop Llama (I think they still produce) and C/Z, none of whose products I listen to. I just like knowing they're around, as it reassures me that Stuff Keeps Happening. I do NOT believe that all musical fun ended with the Beatles...or Talking Heads...or Nirvana (not exactly fun, but often brilliant anyway).

Harry Warner Jr

All the material about pop bands and their records was lost on me. Ivor Novello was the last pop musician I really liked, on your side of the ocean. Over here, I think George M. Cohan was great in his early years but became too modern towards the end.

Maybe some of our readers will have views on that. Hmm, who was George M. Cohan?

Steve Jeffrey

I think I'll back out of the comments on music and bands at this point. After a while, it just becomes lists and personal preferences or why we all agree that Blur and Oasis are really naff after all. But Ken [Lake] is right about the osmosis theory, and it's so irritating to go round humming Enya after hearing it a couple of times on the radio. And not really liking it that much either.

Maybe you should retune your radio, Steve. And talking of people who should retune their radios, Steve also asks "Does anybody actually own up to a Wurzels record (apart presumably from the Wurzels themselves)." Yes, I believe that Steve Brewster, resident Radio Two listener, also owns a Wurzels record. Well, he certainly talks about them a lot. Obviously a formative experience. Though as an Internet mainliner, Steve Brewster's musical knowledge is improving by leaps and bounds now bands have taken to putting their home pages on the net. But he still couldn't quite cope with the concept that my brother Simon's band Ghostword (who were played on John Peel) could not even ironically be called a "popular beat combo" since they are in reality just Simon and a room full of electronic equipment.

Robert Lichtman

Enjoyed the group Intersection reportage. Laughed at your nervousness over how Ted White would take your review of *Blat!* in the last *BoB*. Truly, Ted's bark is much worse than his bite, and the way he responded to you is indicative of that. As for the *Blat!* archives, I would say that all of them so far have contained the sort of exceptional material that made their (belated) appearance worthwhile. Now if they began running unpublished issues of Taurasi's *Fantasy Times* or perhaps one of Norman G. Wansborough's *Rune*, then one would have to draw the line. In one of Keith [Martin]'s comments, I as an American wonder how beer can be naff. I gather from the surrounding remarks that it simply wasn't very good, but that's another matter. But naff?

Funny, I as an English person, would think that you, as an American, would know EXACTLY how beer can be naff. What does "naff" mean in American English then?

And as for Mike Siddall drunkenly pointing at fat Americans, I'm happy that I still buck this particular tide. But they might not all have been Americans, Mike. In the latest issue of the Australian newszine *Thyme*, I saw a photo of Karen Pender-Gunn, half of the GUFF winners, and she could have been an American for her size.

William Bains

Convention reports - usually these are terribly smug, like 'what the papers say' programmes on TV, an excuse for someone to use an outrageously biased view of something fundamentally dull as a vehicle for verbal fireworks. Any similarity between the event depicted here and ... Your format was great, because you somehow forced the interviewees to say something about the convention. Yes, yes, it will never catch on, but as a one-off it was fun. I was never a convention person, really. (The argument that this is because I am not a person at all, but an automaton, does not compute.) I mean, lots of great moments, but spread over rather a lot of person-days, and for most of it "well, you just gotta be there". Like that terribly amusing way children throw up over dinner guests or bosses make gross passes at secretaries, you really have to be there, in the right mood, and on the right end of the vomit to appreciate it. And I wasn't. I forget where I was, I will have to reload the tape back-up of August into my head and check.

Oh, OK, so I'm an old misery guts, and it did sound like fun. OK, satisfied? Peter-Fred's description of programme items was fascinating, and made me *want* to be there. Accounts of programme items that I can visualise make contact. Witty accounts of how Fred and Joe were totally pissed in bed with Julie, and one of them fell out and the other two had sex and in the morning *no-one could remember who had fallen out* would be slightly funnier if I had the slightest idea who Fred, Joe or Julie were, but only slightly.

I think Julie's in the Leed's group. Fred's now known as Peter-Fred and Joe's this drunk who turns up a conventions now and then, no-one's quite sure why. But, as you say, why should you care? Fandom has many communities, and sometimes it's fun to write for the fifteen people who will care, and fuck the rest.

And then there is the 'no-frontiers-conversations' myth. I have never found conventions to be places where you can talk to anyone about anything. If you are *lucky* you can find someone who is willing to talk to you at all, and not solely to their tiny sub-clique of fandom, and is not incoherent from blood alcohol or testosterone. If you are *really lucky* they will be willing to talk about something that does not instantly turn out to be sex, Star Trek or the intricacies of fandom, and if you are *incredibly lucky* the person is not a complete dickhead with absolutely no idea what he is talking about.

Which I guess is why people stick to their own tiny sub-clique. Suddenly I'm going off the idea of the forthcoming Eastercon.

I confess that one of the most interesting conversations I have had about medical genetics was not at any of the half dozen genetics conferences I have been to, but at a Con, and I heard all about nanotechnology some decade before K. Eric Drexler made it trendy and Horizon-worthy at another one. But this is rare.

Sidebars? Sidebars? This is what I mean. You are talking Martian here.

Not at all. They were using the term all the time in Chapter 11 of Murder One. Though I was disappointed that no-one seemed to be taking any drugs. Still, Neil Avedon did pass out on a bottle Scotch later in the programme. So, you see, I was speaking Martian at all, just American. Very naff.

Steve [Brewster] is right. Massive conventions do not fit well with what I understand fandom to be about. UK Eastercons seem to be the largest that fandom can support and remain a society founded on mutual help. I don't think there is an issue that UK fandom can handle a worldcon. Iceland fandom can probably handle a worldcon. The question is - is it worth it?

Judging by the following comment - no!

Teddy Harvia, 701 Regency Drive, Hurst, TX 76054-2307, USA

British fans seemed too busy running a convention at Intersection to do much socializing. Diana Thayer and I spent most of our time with Australians, Canadians and continental Europeans. Only after the convention did we schmooze with the locals.

Ken Lake

"Contraflow" is assuredly one of the best conreps I've ever read because it reflects such a

range of perceptions that some of 'em HAVE to be right. I'm glad I didn't go; from what I've read I'd summarise it as a lot of hard work expended on the wrong site and fat Americans. A stroll along the New Orleans Moonwalk (ie the levee) revealed that two Yanks side by side equal one eight-foot walkway. As for their fanzines... Pity Andy Hopper can neither recognise nor spell humour.

My memories of New Orleans people it with cool, slim people having a great time. I think we'll have to give up this cultural stereotyping as we in Britain begin to breed generations of children who no longer walk anywhere and blow out on junk food (though not burgers from this week as mad people disease takes hold of the population). As for recognising humour (or humor), it goes both ways. I'm not sure we always recognise Andy Hooper's humour either.

Irwin Hirsh, 26 Jessamine Ave, East Prahan, VIC 3181, Australia

I really enjoyed the Intersection report in the ninth issue. Had the eighth of you each written short separate reports I doubt the effect would've been as strong. By being able to reflect and contrast off each others comments I was able to build up a good feeling for what Intersection was like. I assume you set up and did the editing involved in this piece, and I think the result justified the work involved.

Jilly Reed

The highlight of BoB 9 was the mosaic of opinions on Intersection. I didn't enjoy the worldcon much but I've relished the reports from those who did. I particularly liked the impression of conversation I got from this and thought you mediated it very well. It covered a remarkable variety of experience and opinion and what was especially interesting was to compare Steve's [Brewster] comments with his previous article in BoB 8. Lovely stuff. Were you transcribing an actual conversation or editing responses to specific questions? I'm intrigued to know how you dealt with the constraints of such an imaginative format.

This con report was composed - as many of you may have guessed - with the help of the dreaded Internet. I sent questions to all those in the group on the net to get their opinion on a certain aspect of Intersection. I also did a session down the pub at the Bristol group to get a few more interactive views and cover those not on the Net. I then edited and pieced together and sent out the report to the participants in the hope of getting them to react to each other's statements, so it would sound more like a conversation than an interview. This was only partially successful as by then it had mostly been moulded into a narrative flow which didn't allow for much intervention. But at least it gave participants a chance to edit out any misrepresentations (and me to edit in some - viz my typo of Lilian's "American cool crowd" as "fool crowd", which caused great amusement to Dan Steffan and Frank Lunney when I sat down with a pile of fanzines frantically changing 'f's to 'c's so as not to insult my American hosts.)

I really enjoyed producing the report and think (modestly) that it worked much better than the various disconnected views produced elsewhere. And was certainly a damn sight easier than writing a report on the whole thing myself.

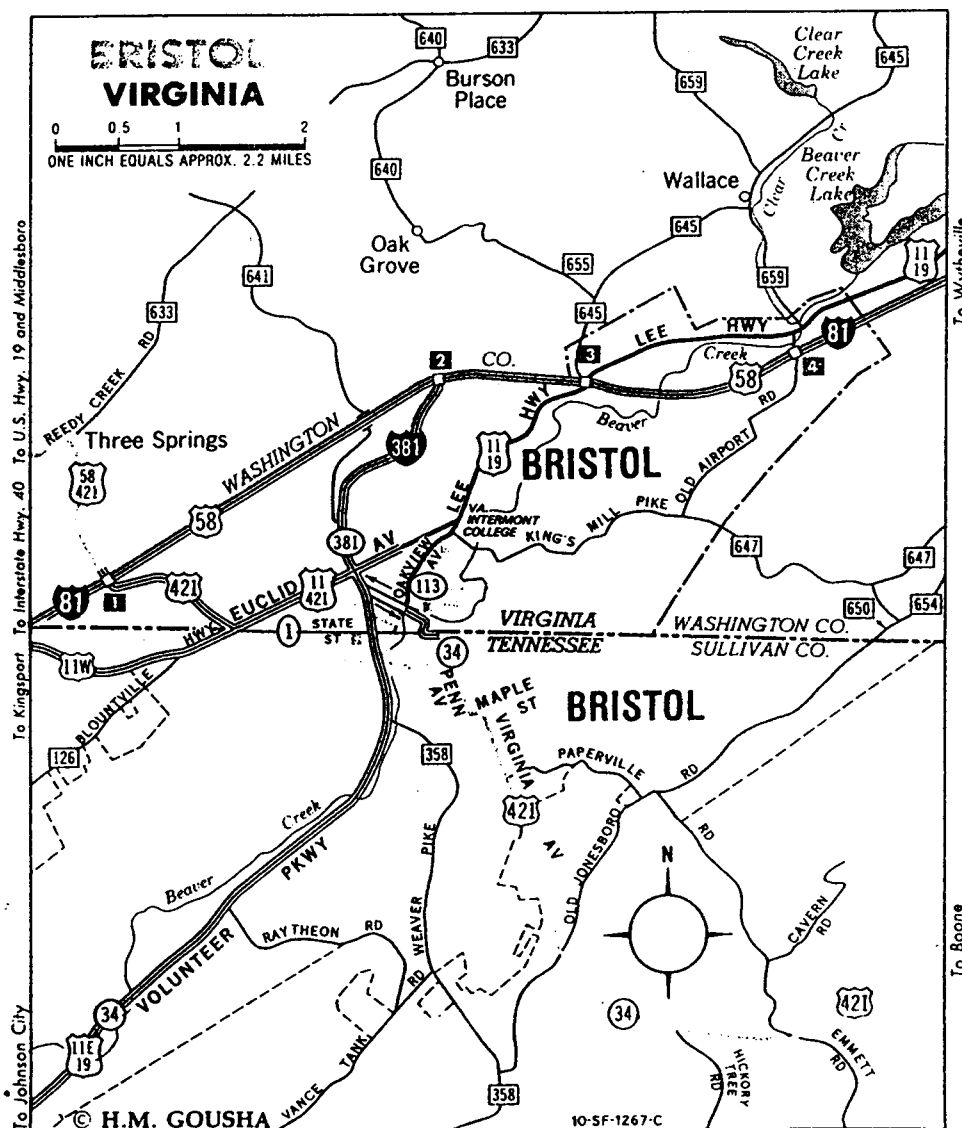
Irwin Hirsh

I wasn't aware that *Balloons Over Bristol* had become a fanzine of the Bristol SF Group (though there isn't anything to indicate such in the ninth issue - have you grabbed the title back?) Was it the Bristol SF Group that Wendy and I encountered back in 1987? If so it has certainly come on in leaps and bounds. Amazing what a difference 8 years can make, eh?

*It sure is! I think I'm probably the only person left from the group you met in 1987 (now that Peter-Fred no longer comes along). **Balloons Over Bristol** (for the fan history buffs out there) was always intended as a group fanzine, even if I have ended up editing all the issues so far. It was the successor to the single issue zine "Yuppie Terrorist Reprisals Hit Bristol", published in 1986, at the time of the fuss over hippy conveys (the yuppie convey being the solid stream of traffic heading down the M4 to Wales and the West Country every summer Friday/ Saturday) The first **Balloons** came out in 1987 and was jointly edited by me and Peter-Fred Thompson (who made up the title), no. 2 came out in 1988, no. 3 in 1992, 4 in 1994, and 5-9 in 1995. But while I take a year out to travel, Pete and Sue Binfield have bravely volunteered (i.e. had their arms twisted) to take over the editorship. So, send all contributions, comments, forms of encouragement to them at :*

Top Flat, 160 Wells Road, Totterdown, Bristol BS4 2AG.

*Finally : We Also Heard From Janet Stevenson, but I can't find her letter anywhere. Maybe if it turns up some time I'll pass it on for the next issue. I also have some comments on the **Time Bytes** fanthology, edited by Lilian Edwards and myself for **Intersection** (a fabulous collection of fan writing from 1987-1995, still available for sale from me at £6.00 for two volumes), but I'll hold those over to **Never Quite Arriving 4**, due out May 1996.*



Question : *What happens if you move the 's' in
Balloons to the end of Bristol?*

Answer :

