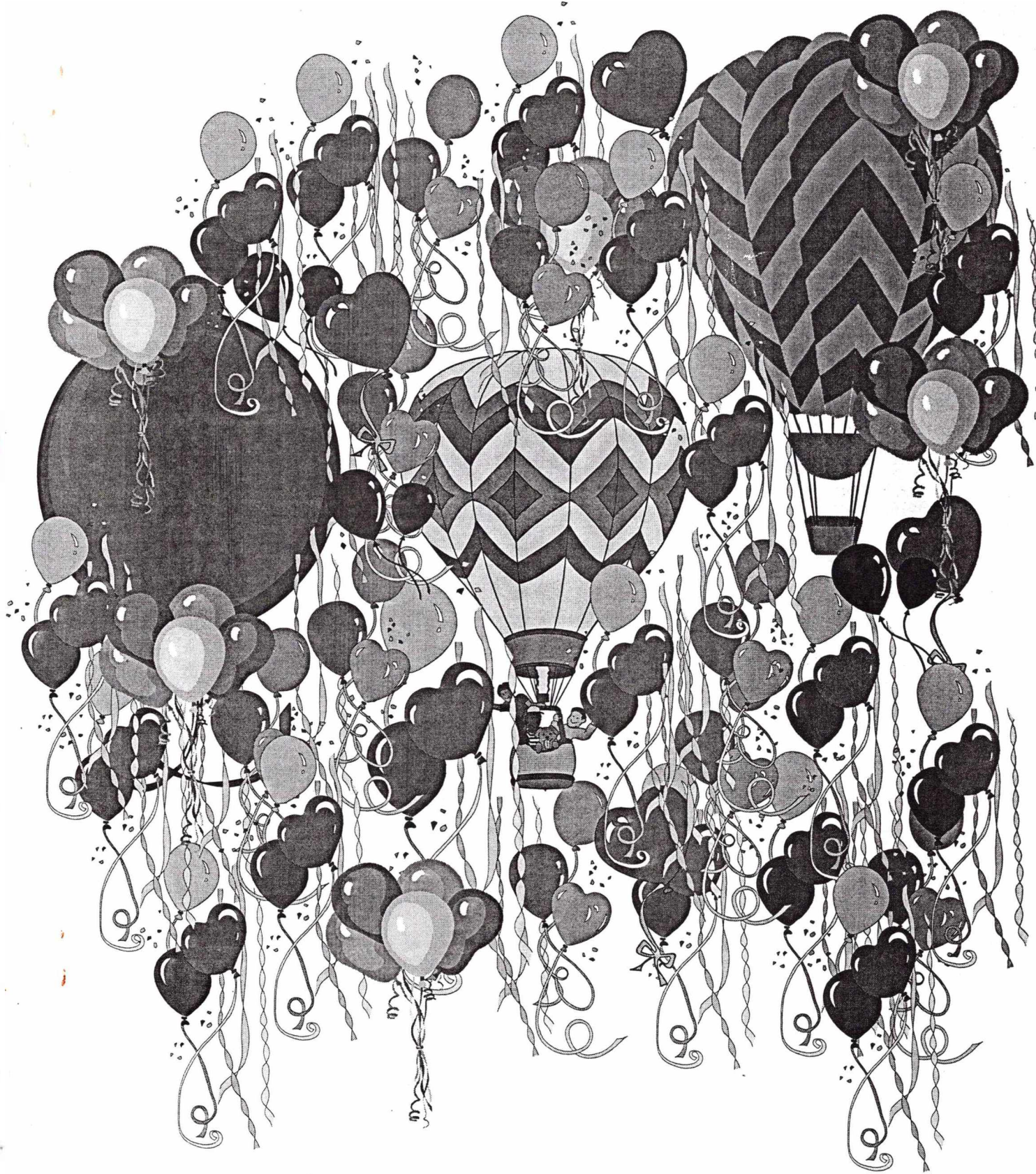


99 LAST BALLOONS



99 LAST BALLOONS (OVER BRISTOL)

is as ever the product of a deranged mind belonging collectively to the Bristol SF Group. As such, expect the usual mixture of music, movies, masturbation and other inconsequential entertainments. Be happy - this is the last issue, so you don't even have to write back!

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26TH OCTOBER 1999

END OF AN ERA?

SPECULATES CHRISTINA LAKE

The Bristol SF group first started meeting in the Brewery Tap pub in early 1994. I remember it well because I'd just moved into my new house, and was looking forward to being within 10 minutes walking distance of the SF pub. But it was not to be. Brian, our ever vigilant beer festival organiser, reported that The Brewery Tap had added a non-smoking room to its award-winning, but far from spacious facilities. People tried it out in my absence and the consensus was unanimous. We would swap the strange old men, variable beer and weekly smoke damage of The Cat and Wheel for the wooden seats, clean atmosphere and brewed on the premises Smiles beers of The Tap. And so it was that the enclosed area at the back of the pub became "home" for the Bristol SF Group for many years.

But for many in the group, a change of venue is long overdue. Almost two years ago, Sue famously wrote her list of "Things the Tap ran out of in 1997", which included cider, orange juice, red wine, southern comfort and the hot nut containers. In March 1999 the list was updated with Erdinger, Erdinger glasses, salt & pepper crisps, lemon slices, quinces, lard and "round black disgusting things... er... olives". Of course, some of these things had never been served in the pub in the first place. But just when it looked like a move was inevitable, the Tap made a comeback. It started to serve real cider and Hoegaarden, Brian's shares in the Brewery were rocketing and Sue even began on a list of "Things they have back again" (marred slightly by the necessity of crossing them out again when they ran out within a week or two.)

Then came the change of barman. The new guy didn't automatically know Brian's order any more, or laugh at Doug for calling B.A. "Baah". He seemed to have an odd, rather sarcy manner with us. His unpopularity was sealed the night that Nick broke the Erdinger glass. Though it's by no means certain that Nick *did* break the glass. Nick was just squeezing past people to get a seat and the glass got knocked over. The barman who was collecting glasses at the time, and was the main obstruction that Nick was squeezing past, immediately demanded that Nick pay for the glass. Nick just brushed it off as a joke. Glasses get broken in pubs. It's part of the budget. Erdinger glasses might be more expensive than average, but being tall and top-heavy the pub would expect them to get broken occasionally. But at the end of the night, the barman returned still asking money from Nick. Nick just told him to piss off.

After that, opinion was divided. Should we boycott the pub? Should we write to the brewery and complain? But boycotting the pub meant finding another one we could all agree on, which was by no means easy. So in the end we did nothing. The incident was dropped by the barman. He never hassled Nick again. Indeed for a while he seemed to be bending over backwards to be nice to us. He would ask us if the lighting was all right, remember drink orders and even tried to convince us that he was into cyberpunk. One night he actually let Richard have one of his precious Erdinger glasses again. We settled back into the groove, almost convinced that we were valued customers, and that his earlier outburst had been an aberration.

Then one week we came in, drenched from the rain, and our room was barred off. Private function, it said. The remaining small area round the bar, needless to say, was packed out. "Oh, someone should have warned you about that last week," said the barman, casually. "Why don't you go up the road to The Ship. I'll tell the others." We decided to wait, which was just as well, since the barman immediately disappeared, leaving his assistant who didn't know any of us to serve. By the time there were six of us milling round the bar, blocking the door, getting in the way of traffic between the bar and the toilet, and dripping messily over the floor, we decided to move on. Brian took us up the road to The Scotchman and His Pack which seemed surprisingly uncrowded. There were a couple of large seating areas, comfy chairs instead of the wooden benches of the Tap, no music, a wide selection of nibbles and it still served Smiles (though not such good cider.) Could this be our new home? Only time will tell.

MORE STORIES ABOUT BRISTOL

BY CHRISTINA

Do you ever feel that you are out of touch with the major events of your life? I've been reading a couple of books about the Bristol music and dance scene, and begin to get the impression that a lot of it happened about a block away from me and I didn't even notice. For example, when I first moved to Bristol in 1986 I remember people talking about going down the Dug-Out after SF. Now I learn that it was the major hang-out of Bristol's early punk/reggae fusion scene, and the place where members of Massive Attack and other Bristol bands first discovered their musical direction. The Bristol SF Group had only been in existence for a few months at that point, and used to meet in an unremarkable pub (since revamped as The Scream) just up the road from the club, but somehow I never managed to join fellow members Justin, Sean and Lou in their fortnightly migration to The Dug-Out. I'm not sure why. Maybe the club closed before I knew them well enough to join in. Or maybe I didn't have the money, stamina, or interest. I did make it down to The Granary, another famous mid-80s Bristol landmark but all I remember from that is its spaciousness and looking down from the balcony onto the dance floor at all the dancers in their black Goth/Metal gear. The club is long gone, and the building is now home to Belgos, one of the many cafe/bars chains populating Bristol's renovated, trendy waterfront areas.

The late 80s and 90s have been a boom time for Bristol culture, particularly in terms of the club scene, but I've missed out on most of it - through inertia or lack of knowledge. The Lakota club, St Paul's Carnival, many years of the Ashton Court free festivals (though I'm making up for that now!), Bristol's copious drug culture. A colleague, about my age, regularly goes off on all night raves with her pals - and she's a grandmother. But I've never hooked up into that scene. My friends are mostly incomers, people like me who went to University elsewhere, who moved to Bristol to work. Denizens of the affluent but largely anonymous North side of town. For most of us, to go South of the river is to enter into unknown territory.

What I think it comes down to is culture. I might be interested in music and dancing but I don't hang out with people for whom this is intensively a way of life. I suspect that getting in on the Bristol scene requires being part of the right sub-culture or local community. A crowd that goes clubbing. An involvement in the local free festival. A pub with a hotline to the rave action. The nearest I ever had to owning a subculture was when I worked at Bath Environment Centre and knew all the environmentalists in the city. But that had the drawback of not being the city where I lived.

I do have my own places in Bristol. The various art cinemas, a handful of pubs, restaurants I've been to so often I know the menu, Ashton Court scene of mass balloon ascents and weird local bands. Maybe I've done more Bristol things than I think : seen Portishead live (and for free), gone to gigs at The Fleece, The Fiddlers and the once active Bierkeller, gone clubbing at The PowerHouse (but never the more interesting sounding reggae/ambient/dub clubs of St Pauls). And soon Doug and I will be going to football, to support Rovers, hence plugging into a different kind of local subculture. And lets face it, if I had spent the last 10-15 years keeping up with the Bristol scene, I wouldn't have had time for fandom, travel, movies, books etc. But there's still part of me that thinks I've missed out, and regrets that I never made the contacts or the effort to get involved, that believes I should have been there when the wild and crazy things went down.

-- "You can do a lot with head." --

DOWN NEAR NEMPNETT THRUBWELL

BY DOUG BELL

The same weekend we got cable TV we decided to visit Cheddar Gorge. Our Saturday afternoon plan of watching Bristol Rovers play Blackpool failed to occur due to the cable guy's late arrival. By Sunday lunchtime I was getting stir crazy and needed to get out into the countryside.

Cheddar is easy to get to from Bristol. Unfortunately getting from one side of the city to another isn't. There's an unwritten rule for Rover's supporters, never go south of the river. Not only are we talking Bristol City territory, but the land that transport planners forgot. Getting onto the right route requires the correct combination of skill, blind luck and guesswork while all the time you're fighting against common sense and non-Euclidean route management. The hordes of Kiwi rugby fans gathering at Ashton Gate didn't help matters either.

Somehow we managed to find our way through the tangle of roads, roundabouts and diversions and were soon flying through North Somerset's rolling green countryside. The Mendips are packed with olde worlde villages, thatched pubs, and hedgerow lined roads. This is heritage England. We raced past a road sign for Nempnett Thrubwell, a name long known to me a Wurzels album once borrowed from Penicuik library in a fit of teenage madness. Someday I'll have to make a pilgrimage there.

PLUMBING THE DEPTHS

Although I love rocky countryside apart from my walk through the Samaria Gorge in Crete and a brief trip to the mountains in Majorca, I have never really gotten to grips with limestone geology. Here was my chance to get up close and personal with the landscape furniture of a lime rich area, as well as visit the tourist trap shops that cling to the cliff face of the lower gorge.

The south west had been experiencing heavy thundery downpours in the week prior to our visit. This wasn't good news for cavers or retailers that survive on summer tourists. Gough's Cave (the famous one) was closed off due to flooding, but Cox's cave (the original one) was still open for public viewing. With rain lashing down on us we quickly purchased our tickets for the cavern plus one for the mysteriously tacky sounding Crystal Quest.

Entering Cox's Cave we were bombarded with a hard-to-not-notice loudspeaker commentary. The endlessly repeating loop detailed in intense booming idiot-speak how caves, stalagmites and stalactites were formed. Lights were used to good effect to bring out the copper-green and red mineral streams contained within the rock. The cave was further 'enhanced' with concrete floors and concrete filled water pools to see reflections in normally inaccessible places. Mother Nature certainly knows how to colour her world. The dull concrete grey stood out in the dim subterranean half light. I'd always imagined stalagmites and stalagmites to be more pointy - the thrusting rounded 'mites resembled giant rock hard, ridged vibrators.

The more interesting nooks and crannies were blocked from the more intrepid visitor by brick and mortar. Pity, I thought, if this is what the tourist sees what wonders do spelunkers get to feast their mole-like eyes on. For a brief moment I ached to enter further into this cthulhoid world, but sense was soon restored to me. In mountaineering you only have to worry about getting lost, injuring yourself, hypothermia, dehydration and falling to your death. Caving has an element of risk far in excess of these dangers and I'm not sure that the rewards gained are worth taking those chances. I'd rather not have to deal with flash floods, being crushed by rock, drowning or running out of oxygen as well as the usual danger associated with outdoor sports.

The cave ended quickly, before the horror of the Crystal Quest began. Constant signs reminded us that small children may be frightened by the strobe lights and fantastical images. In the end it turned out to be a couple of remaindered shop-window dummies in fantasy costumes

lit dramatically by multicoloured flashing lights. I think a silenced dark un-doctored cave would have been a more fitting and beneficial feature for that underworld tourist than some bad Tolkien derived experience. To each there own.

HITTING THE HEIGHTS

By the time we exited Cox's Cave, the rain had eased off long enough for Christina and I to take a walk. Poor Mr Cox would be turning in his grave if he'd realised just what would happen to his lovely cave a hundred years on.

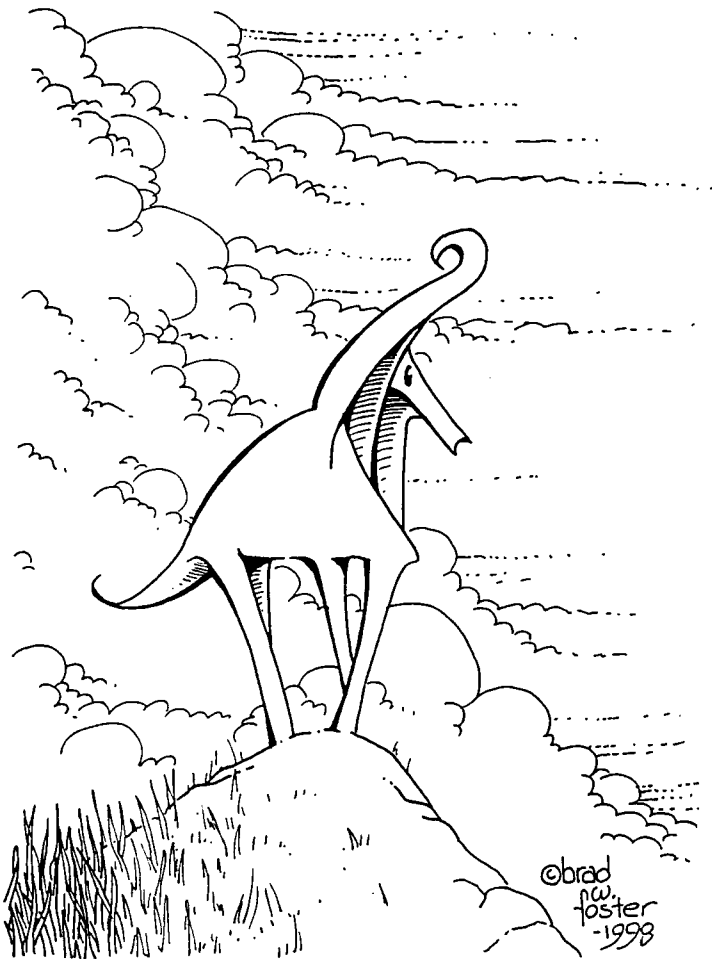
We climbed our way up the Jacob's Ladder stair to reach the watchtower where spectacular views of Wales were guaranteed on clear days. Not being gifted with the best weather we could only make out nearer features like the raised perfectly circular Cheddar Reservoir and Glastonbury Tor. We could not unfortunately see Edinburgh although the tower did show us which direction it lay distantly in.

Climbing steadily north from there, we gained some excellent views out over the gorge, as well as attacking a small but steady supply of brambles. We passed a few other walkers but for the most part had the place to ourselves. Descending back onto the main road a couple of miles up we were constantly trying to dodge speeding cars while walking back down through the overwhelming chasm of Cheddar Gorge itself. Given the number of visitors in the village we

were surprised and delighted by the relative peace we had, sharing this with only a couple of small groups of drenched rock-climbers.

I still don't understand the tourist mind. Why pay to go on a coach trip that barely takes you into the most spectacular scenery in the South West in favour of sitting in an over-priced tea-room or visiting yet another Edinburgh Woollen Mill? Maybe when I'm sixty then I'll understand. I like visiting souvenir shops but I like to make sure I've got the most out of the main attraction first.

Entering into the sea of purple-rinsed heads once again we sought out a place to eat, where we stuffed ourselves on award winning pasties, pickled onions and milkshakes. Satisfied there was only one last thing to do - shop. One bottle of Scrumpy and a real cheddar cheese later we were leaving Cheddar, winding our way through it's narrow coach filled streets. The last image of The Cheddar Gorge Experience™ I saw - the mighty cliffs? No, a cheese and handbag shop.



Nick Walters is the author of the IKEA-fixated Sisters of Mercy inspired Doctor Who novel *Dominion* and the co-author of the Virgin New Adventure *Dry Pilgrimage* with Paul Leonard. In July he started his second Doctor Who book, a time-paradox love-story space-opera entitled *The Fall of Yquatine* and was given three months to write it, from soup to nuts. He took two weeks off from his daytime job in August to concentrate on the task. By the second week, however, he had succumbed to cabin fever and total panic, so he decided to escape from everything and go to Weymouth, a town to which he felt strangely drawn. What follows are a series of excerpts from his notebook which are either a fascinating insight into the mind of a writer, or a load of bollocks, depending on which planet you hail from.

FROM WEYMOUTH TO YQUATINE

BY NICK WALTERS

THURSDAY 12 AUGUST 1999

ON THE TRAIN

This train's a creaking old thing. Seven carriages and as far as I can tell only three other passengers. The seats look like they've been torn from a dead bus. Huge dusty head-rests which look like they've never been cleaned. I heard a scuttling in here before we set off – a rat?

Anyway, Weymouth, here I come. Three days of – well, what, exactly? Reading. Writing. Editing. Thinking. Relaxing. Doing nothing. Getting away for a few days.

The train keeps stopping, seemingly for no reason, as trains sometimes do, and when it starts up again it creaks and groans like a haunted house on Hallowe'en. To while away the journey I listened to the Robyn Hitchcock session album and read, sad though it is, *Storm Harvest* (a Seventh Doctor story by Robert Perry and Mike Tucker – entertaining, but as shallow as a puddle of skimmed milk and just as bland). Weymouth is less than 70 miles from Bristol but the train takes two and a half hours, passing through wonderful Dorset countryside. A slow but lovely train journey which I recommend.

FOSTERS GUEST HOUSE

Well, I'm here now. This room is hysterically tiny, but thankfully clean, recently decorated in pale greens and blues, very close to the sea front and the town. What I thought was the wardrobe was the toilet. Lucky I found that out whilst I was sober.

GREENHILL GARDENS

I'm sitting on a park bench at the top of Greenhill Gardens, overlooking the bay. The sea is blue-green as a postcard, the sky is completely cloudless, there's a fresh wind – it's a beautiful afternoon. I already feel rejuvenated.

I don't know how much work on *The Fall of Yquatine* I'm going to get done. How much actual writing and editing. This break should help in other ways – the poor brain that has to do all that writing and editing needs to be cleansed and the body relaxed. Which is why I'm here.

From what I've seen so far, Weymouth is a very typical seaside town, and at this time of the year it is bloody crowded. This park bench is the first fortress of solitude I've found. Everywhere I go, I see glimpses – even banal things like buildings, parks – which remind me of Other Places. I get sudden vivid flashes of Other Lives. Of me in houses with a totally different life and outlook and set of memories. A fleeting connection with the collective unconscious? Flashes of my other-dimensional self? Material for stories? Signs of incipient mental collapse?

THE GEORGE INN

The town is thronging, even now [about 8 PM]. None of the pubs look at all inviting. Must find a hostelry where I can read *Storm Harvest* – or, indeed, any book – without fear of getting my head kicked in. This pub, the George Inn on the harbour, is OK: Abba on the jukebox, cheap ale and two chapters with head intact.

RENDEZVOUS

An awful place, a café-bar-club hybrid straight out of the 1980s. At least it's full of totty. Have to hide my book under the table in shame. 8.40 and still the crowds surge around the harbour.

THE DORSET BREWERS' ALE HOUSE

At last, a decent pub, opposite Brewers Quay [sic]. And I'll say one thing, the beer is remarkably cheap down here – £1.50, £1.60 a pint! This pub has a huge courtyard, and I'm sitting outside drinking Badger Ale in the moonlight, a chance to sample Dorset beer where it's brewed.

THE CORK AND BOTTLE

Blimey, this town is tawdry – I like it, and know I'll like the gardens and beaches and certain pubs, the vast expanse of ocean and so on, but there's a huge pavilion on the harbour with garish great signs proudly advertising shows by PAUL DANIELS. And, if that wasn't bad enough, JETHRO. The horror. Should I go for irony value? That thought lasted for three tenths of a second before being dismissed as utter folly.

Now I'm in the Cork and Bottle – it's in Weymouth, but there's no way of telling. I could be anywhere. It's like the Rat and Parrot in Bristol, only underneath a hotel, below pavement level, there's a horrid concrete patio and it's full of people I'd fly to Mars sans spacesuit to avoid. A girl with a cacchinating laugh which must make her great company and a charming lady to take out to dinner. Some wankers who have caught sight of the cover of *Storm Harvest* – luckily I'm sitting near the stairs. Screeching little kids – way past their bedtimes, surely? That's one thing I've noticed, everywhere you go, kids in pubs, even at closing time. Trainee alcoholics for sure.

THE DOROTHY INN

Is on the seafront, and it's rowdy, cheap and cheerful, with those sort of chairs you see in church halls. What's more it's spacious and kid-free. But I have a busy day tomorrow and I'm destined for a hangover.

FRIDAY 13 AUGUST

WEYMOUTH SEA-LIFE CENTRE

The usual tourist bollocks, straining vainly to be something to everyone. 'This way for your next exciting adventure!' proclaim the signs, leading you to a – shallow pool full of motionless crabs. It's for kids, I keep telling myself, and when I was a kid I loved places like this. When you're an adult, they fill you with memories of childhood, embarrassment, a sense of furtive excitement and fascination, as there is no denying the beauty of these creatures. The rays especially. I could watch them for ages, and I did. The 'weedy seahorses' [real name!] are the weirdest looking living things I have ever seen. From Australia, they look like a bizarre cross between a seahorse, a dragonfly and a begonia. Confronted with such amazing creatures, you realise the dearth of imagination in so many SF books and especially films. The beauty of rays is something no CGI creation could ever hope to capture.

NOTHE GARDENS

What brought me here? What made that name leap out at me from the map? Maybe because it sounds and looks a bit like 'Goth.' And I like Goths. Especially female ones (Gothettes). If any Goths are out there reading this – keep it up! Ignore what other people say, they're the tossers, not you.

Very peaceful here, amazing views. I am struck by the notion that I don't need to go abroad, there are just so many places in the UK to visit, and places like this I could happily re-visit again and again. Or maybe I don't feel the need to travel because I know I'll never get away from myself. Which is probably why I write – to create new worlds and characters to correct my own deficiencies. Which is probably why writing a Doctor Who book is so fulfilling – a dream come true, and the chance to drag the worlds of Doctor Who into my own worldview. Well, it worked for *Dominion*, to my utter surprise.

I'm now sitting on a bench with a plaque dedicated to someone called Reith Jane Heathville Somerton or something, 'who loved this view'. Some bastard is mowing or decimating something behind some vibrating bushes, totally destroying the tranquillity.

STONE PIER

Just walked around the bottom of Nothe Fort, which looked like an extremely dangerous thing to do - I kept expecting the sea to come crashing in to dash me against the rocks. Escaping unscathed, I walked to the end of the Stone Pier [erroneously labelled South Pier on my A-Z], which is apparently the oldest pier structure in England and a magnet for fishermen. There was a weird tower thing at the end which I climbed, and the views were amazing - the vast blue bowl of the ocean, the Georgian houses on the seafront, the rolling hills leading up to St Aldhelm's Head. Right there and then I decided to base Yendip, capital city of Yquatine, on Weymouth – excluding Paul Daniels and Jethro, of course.

ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF 'NOTHE'

1. 'Noth' as in 'Goth.'

This is what I first thought – but it can't be, because of the 'e' at the end.

2. 'Noath' as in 'Growth'

And then I thought it was this.

3. 'Noathe' as in 'Loath'

Long O, soft TH. The guy at Nothe Fort said this was the correct pronunciation.

The word is derived from 'Nose' due to the appearance of the headland, so I suppose that 3. is correct, as it is the nearest to 'Nose'.

NOTHE GARDENS AT NIGHT

The gardens are lit at night and it's a magical place, with the sound of the sea surging all around. It's after closing time. I dare say there have been a few midnight liaisons here! I wish – no I don't. As I walked round Nothe Gardens, I subjected myself to endless, endless, alcohol-fuelled self analysis. I suppose that being single, and a writer, I'm entitled to be introspective but blimey, I am my own harshest critic, I rarely allow myself to have a good time. And so as I sat on the bench in Nothe Gardens, I thanked whatever powers exist that I am alive, independent, and doing my own thing, and for places like this.

SATURDAY 14 AUGUST

NOTHE TAVERN

I'm in the Nothe Tavern, for food before my last night out. Spent an enjoyable afternoon on the beach in which I managed to do a lot of editing, improve the Arielle/Zendaak scene and even write some new stuff. I was stopped in my labours by rain, which soon went away and I walked

through the RSPB reserve at Lodmoor. I even managed to do some sun-bathing – or in my case, being of fair skin, some lying in the sun plastered in Factor 50 and listening to 'Milk & Kisses' [final, heavenly, Cocteau Twins album]. Total summer. Wish, wish, wish I was staying for longer.

DORSET BREWERS' ALE HOUSE

I should club it later – there's a place called Verdis which is an indie-club, it seems, but I feel just too knackered – spending all day in the sun takes it out of you.

THE BOOT

Well, here it is – the best pub in Weymouth, and I found it completely by accident 30 minutes before closing time on my last night. The Boot, 'Weymouth's Oldest Pub'. Good ales too – Ringwood Brewery. Quiet and interesting clean and totally individual, I wish I had found this on Thursday night. And 'Blue Bell Knoll' [1988 Cocteau Twins album] on the jukebox! This is the other pub the hypothetical Weymouth SF Group would adopt. Perhaps there is one – no time to find out! Maybe next year...

I have been thinking about holidaying on your own. It's OK, you have complete freedom, but miss having someone to talk to. I have this notebook but it's not the same. That isn't to say I haven't enjoyed myself. I think I'll do this every year, from now on. Twice every year, actually. Go away to somewhere I haven't been before, and re-visit somewhere. On my own or with someone, either way suits me.

SUNDAY 15 AUGUST

NOTHE

Back on the Nothe, at the edge of the sea, sitting on the crumbling sea wall. Didn't think I'd be here again, but there's a few hours left before the train.

So what have I got from this holiday? Do I need to have 'got something' from it, can't it just be for its own sake? A break from things? OK yes, that's all it was. But I was drawn to the Nothe, for some reason. I thought I might find something there – I don't know what. Perhaps it was the graffiti I saw the other day on the doors of a bunker-type thing in Nothe Gardens:

Here's a quick test to see if your mission in life is over.

If you're alive – IT ISN'T

Maybe that's the message I should take away with me. Maybe that's why I came here, felt drawn here, because I needed a message to galvanise my lazy mind. I am alive – my mission on Earth isn't over. I have much to give and more to say.

And a novel to write, so GET ON WITH IT!

He did get on with it, and finish it in the time allotted, and *The Fall of Yquatine* should hit the shops in March 2000. He hopes it's better than *Storm Harvest* but that's not for him to say.

ONE WAY WINCON

BY CHRISTINA LAKE

You never quite get over the fear of arriving at a convention by yourself. At least I don't. I'm not sure which is worse: arriving by car and inevitably failing to find anywhere to park, or staggering in from the railway station, out of breath and dishevelled from having taken your luggage on a long detour round the wrong side of the hotel. I suppose the ideal would be to roll up in a taxi, but I'm allergic to taxis except when work's paying. Besides, that doesn't help with the self-consciousness that inevitably assails me as I wait to be processed by the hotel. The sense of being insufficiently acclimatised yet to want to be seen by anyone I know. The sinking feeling as I wait in line behind that fan who always talks to me in the lift even though - name badge notwithstanding - I've no idea who he is. The sudden conviction that this is all going to be a horrible mistake.

No, you never lose that. Not even if you go to ever so many conventions. In fact, it only gets worse.

But sometimes the gods are benign. As I drove into Winchester for Wincon the sun was shining, the sight of fan-types meandering down the hill actually reassured me (the directions in the PR weren't too good), and the car park had spaces left. I tucked my peugot in next to the Cain/Scott baby-mobile, comfortingly familiar to me from the week I'd just spent with them in Normandy on a group Eclipse holiday.

The campus looked pretty deserted. Gone six of a Saturday evening, you couldn't hope for a less conspicuous arrival time. In fact I was lucky to find Anne-Marie Wright with my room key amongst the handful of people in the bar. One benefit of campus cons is that it's very easy to get a single room. This particularly comes in handy when your would-be room mate (one Ms L. Edwards) decides at the last minute that after a week away in France she'd prefer to go straight home to Edinburgh to catch up on her sleep, rather than catch the last day and a half of Wincon as planned. The downside of the campus experience is that you can't just load your bags into the lift and follow the signs. When people talked about the Wincon campus being hilly, I had imagined pleasant grassy undulations. In reality the effect is more like a series of terraces, with the car parks at the bottom, the bar in the middle, and the accommodation, inevitably at the top. In keeping with the modern spirit of equality of access, the library appeared to be sliding down the hill to join the car parks.

Having trudged up the steps with a random sample of my luggage, played with the cupboard that housed my washbasin and examined the courtesy pack of soaps and shampoos provided by the college, I just about felt ready to face the convention. But where *was* the convention? The bar seemed just as empty as earlier. The only person I recognised was Steve Green. Now, that's another fear you never quite get over when travelling solo. What if the Steve Green is the only person at the convention you know? (Though it could be worse. The only person I knew at my first convention was Joy Hibbert.)

"Everyone's watching Michael Sheard," Steve reassured me. "Micheal Sheard!" I squeaked, heading for the stairs at top speed. Sheard, better known to me as Mr Bronson, had starred in several seasons of *Grange Hill*. He was also in *Dr Who* and *Star Wars*, but who cares about that? I slipped into the lecture theatre and found a seat, half-expecting to be bawled out for lateness. But Bronson was in urbane mood, standing at the podium, red wine in hand, holding forth on his acting career. I must have missed all the *Grange Hill* questions, because the audience kept asking him about science fiction. It seemed that Sheard had quite a track record of cult sf bit parts, and was now well and truly integrated into the convention circuit. He even had his own Claudia Christian story. And, of course, a book. One woman who appeared to have learnt it by heart soon became teacher's pet, while Sheard did his best to drop enough names to chivvy the rest of us into buying it. On the whole it was an amusing session. Sheard was

opinionated in a slightly lovey kind of way and good at working his audience. But by the end I was in danger of falling asleep. It had, after all, been an early start from Normandy.

The composition of the audience at the Sheard session had not been reassuring. Some of the faces looked familiar, but there was no-one there I really knew, reminding me that I didn't have much experience of Unicons. The prospect of the Steve Green scenario was just beginning to loom large in my mind again, when I ran into a cluster of more familiar fans including Michael Abbot (another survivor of the Normandy trip) and Julian Headlong. As I explained to them the reasons for Lilian's absence, Julian began to laugh. Apparently Lilian had agreed to let a number of people sleep over at her flat for the Edinburgh festival, and none of them were expecting her back till Monday. So when she turned up for her peaceful night of catching up on sleep she - or they - might be in for a shock. Since the delinquents in the flat were none other than Ian Sorensen and number of women, it didn't take long to embroider on the scenario. However, the panel, a film quiz, was about to begin, so I decided to head on back to the bar. As I left the programme level, the last of my fears were allayed when I saw Caroline Mullan standing near the doorway, pint in hand, in earnest conversation. Wincon must be much as other cons after all.

The population of the bar had grown considerably since I was last there, though it was still by no means crowded. I grabbed a beer and sandwich, and found a place at a table with Dave Hicks, Cat Coast, Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer. The sandwich was awful - it had a level of sogginess I thought had been consigned to history with the dismemberment of the British Rail system. The beer was one of those real ales that promises instant hangover after 2 pints. None of this mattered. I had reached convention entry velocity, confirmed by Mark Plummer diffidently offering me an issue of *Banana Wings*. Was he trying to ration copies, I wondered, or was he merely anticipating the long-awaited *Banana Wings* backlash? But modest editors make for eager recipients, and I was soon thumbing through the pages, whilst Claire reassured me that there was no need to worry about the likely impact of the Paul Kincaid fanzine reviews because he hadn't written any. Mark meanwhile had extracted a notebook with identical coloured cover, and cute piece of elastic as the one I'd bought in W H Smiths at Heathrow just before I went on holiday. I mentioned this fact, leading to at least one other fanzine editor round the table producing her own version of the book. Both of their notebooks seemed to have far more written in them than mine.

At the bar for some more drinks, I ran into Alison Scott who told me her traumas at discovering that the bar staff wouldn't allow children into the room. After a tiring overnight ferry trip to get to the con, this had not been the most welcoming of news. Back at my table, I discovered I had been co-opted onto the team for Steve Green's pub quiz, mainly so that Dave Hicks could use the word "Bristols" in our joint team name. A barcardi-breezer swilling Sandra Bond had also joined us, which was just as well, since she seemed to know more answers than the rest of us. Steve took a plain no-nonsense approach to running the quiz, bawling out the questions, unconcerned if people couldn't hear above the noise of the bar, and offering short shrift to hecklers. There were also no spot prizes, free crisps or any of the other paraphernalia that Lilian had insisted were necessary when we ran a pub quiz at Corflu. But to make up for this, we had Michael Sheard, who was wandering around, tie loose, demanding to know which team was winning so that he could join it.

Released finally from the captivity of the quiz, I went off to explore the other room, and ended up chatting with Cambridge fans Kari and Phil about all the panels I'd missed and trying to discover what might happen when the bar closed. The only advice seemed to be to stock up on bottled drinks and head for the halls of residence. At midnight, the bar duly closed and people spilled out into the night air. It wasn't even cold. We stood around chatting, then I decided to head off in search of parties. No-one seemed to know any room numbers, but in the event this was unnecessary. The party was plain to see, spilling out the groundfloor door of the block opposite mine. It seemed to be a stair cum kitchen cum courtyard party. Eventually the stair portion was closed down to preserve some quiet for people in the floors above, so I pushed

on through to the kitchen where the Norwegians were dispensing strange liquors and Caroline Mullan was leaning against a wall, happily drinking whisky. An hour or so later I made it outside to the courtyard. The party there was livelier still, benefiting from the confined space dynamics of a room party without any of the claustrophobia. But even though *Banana Wing*'s very own toolman Noel was on fine form, I was beginning to fade. Luckily it was just a short walk back to my room - no further than it would have been in a hotel - and there I was lulled asleep by the faint buzz of conversation from the courtyard party.

Going down to breakfast alone is a not such an uncommon occurrence for me. Ever since Lilian Edwards, my convention room mate for many years, figured out that she needed sleep far more than she needed greasy calories, I've been wandering along to breakfast alone, hoping to find congenial but undemanding company. Usually it works out; the only thing the average fan is demanding about at that time of day is coffee. On this occasion though there was the added hazard of finding not just the right room, but the right building. The world outside my Wincon window looked brighter than I felt ready to deal with. My head was aching slightly, but I felt a definite need for food, and not just another soggy sandwich from the bar. Out on the path the sunshine didn't seem so daunting though the solar-powered committee member who spotted me, identified me as a person who had arrived too late to register and handed me a breakfast voucher was a bit scary. Such efficiency is distinctly unnatural. He directed me to the Refectory where the big communal student tables seemed much better suited to convention breakfast than the average hotel set-up, and the staff provided a basic cooked breakfast without any fuss.

The next task for the day was to register, and find out what was on the programme. Since discussion of the programme on the Internet had been one of the things that had attracted me to Wincon in the first place I felt I should attend some of it before I went home. On the other hand, I was still tired, had been away on holiday for a week, and really all I felt like doing was giving out some fanzines and going home to Doug. A quick study of the programme only confirmed me in this view. Not only had I missed most of the panels I would have liked to see, but the two events that interested me most for Sunday were on at the same time. One of these - the one I went to in the end - was the Unicon bidding session. Before I went on holiday Jim Trash had sent me e-mail, asking if Doug and I would present a bid on behalf of Heriot Watt University, but Doug couldn't get to the convention because he was working, and I didn't know enough about Edinburgh to be much use. It was a relief to see that no-one was expecting me to bid Heriot Watt, and that there were two perfectly healthy bids on offer, one for Oxford and one for York (or possibly some strange college in Ripon). The only confusing element being that they were both for different years, yet, under the terms of the Unicon charter, they had to compete against each other. I think the audience would happily have endorsed them both - even though the Scots guy supporting the York bid wanted to call it Nemcon and had a dodgy reputation in Edinburgh - but they could only select one of them. It took a surprisingly long time to convince the audience that they didn't really need to choose: if we voted in Oxford we could have a Unicon next year, and an option on getting York in 2001. If we voted for York, there would be no Unicon next year. On this basis, the vote went unanimously in favour of Oxford.

Back up at bar level, people were sitting in the family-friendly space outside the Union bar. Alison Scott was doing a critique of Caroline Mullan's latest set of photos to prove to her why she needed a new camera to take to Australia. Marianne asked me: "Where's Lilian?" Apparently after sharing a room for a week, Lilian and I are a couple in her 2½ year old brain. I didn't know whether to be alarmed or amused.

People kept joining or leaving the group, mainly by way of the steep grassy slope up to the cafeteria level, and I didn't have to far go to find most of the people I wanted to distribute my fanzine to. I reckoned that once I had handed out all the copies, I would go home.

Leaving a convention on your own is easy. You don't even have to say goodbye if you don't want to, especially if the car is already loaded. You can just slip away casually, unnoticed. I had almost made it too, when I ran into Steve Glover, just as I turned down the last road to the car park. Rumbled, I stopped for a chat, and eventually made my escape at the price of one last fanzine.

Driving alone is fine too. It means I can play what music I like, as loudly as I like. And I don't need any navigator to get me back to Bristol.

AN EVENING WITH MARK E. SMITH

CHRISTINA LAKE

The Fall's annual visit to be Bristol seems to be the highlight of Nick and Simon's year. In 1997 they played the Bierkeller and I missed it thanks to a clash with a work Xmas party. Predictably Simon and Nick raved about it for weeks. So when the dates were announced for December '98, I was determined to be there. This time they were playing The Fleece, Bristol's original Firkin pub, now one of the city's better small venues. I met up with Simon, Nick and some of Nick's friends in the pub next door to the Fleece. Nick was excited for two reasons. One, he'd found a £20 note on the floor, and two, Mark E. Smith, lead singer and evil genius behind the Fall, was down the pub. After the £20 had been turned into consumables, Nick and co set up a persistent toilet-going rota in the hope of bumping into Mark E. Smith. Finally Nick hit payload. He'd spoken to his idol, and told him he was writing a Dr Who book for the BBC. He said this so calmly that for a moment I thought he was making it up. No, no, it was all true, Nick insisted. M.E.S. had been interested and told him the BBC sucked.

With the band's lead singer in the pub, there seemed no hurry to get on to The Fleece, but eventually we decided to go check out the support. The Fleece was comfortably full. The support were comfortably mediocre. The famously boring Firkin brand name beers came served in plastic glasses. Anticipation mounted in our group. We were stationed about 3 rows back from the stage when the band came on. At this proximity, Mark E. Smith was totally magnetic. I watched in fascination as he performed, hunched intimately over the mike stand, mumbling into the microphone in his famously surly tones. At one point, he started to scrawl up bits of paper, and throw them out into the crowd. In the half-light it looked like he might be tearing up a personal notebook or something. One of the bits of paper landed near us, and one of Nick's friends dived to the floor to retrieve it. Unfolded, it was just one of the Firkin gig flyers.

Suddenly, mid-song, Mark E. Smith went over and had a word with his female keyboard player. The next minute she left the stage. The band played on for a number or two, then Mark E. Smith signalled for them all to leave the stage. We waited, speculating if they'd be back, and what the keyboard player's crime had been. Apparently Mark E. Smith was renowned for mistreating his musicians, and there was allegedly even a touring band of ex-Fall members on the circuit. After about five minutes, the impromptu intermission came to an end, and the band returned to the stage. But you could tell that all was not well. They had the air of fulfilling an engagement, rather than the initial punchiness. M.E.S was in a worse mood than ever. But Nick was in the toilet when it happened - Mark E. Smith made a couple of disparaging comments about the BBC. It was as good as a dedicating the song to Nick, we agreed.

Outside on the streets after the gig, Simon insisted that it had been crap compared to previous years. He was probably right, but I have to say that I thoroughly enjoyed myself, and despite not being a big fan of The Fall, I can't wait to see if they come to Bristol again this Christmas. I would certainly go again, just to see what happens.

KNOWN PLEASURES

(SOME WORDS ON THE JOYS OF POP MUSIC)

BY SIMON LAKE

Pop music.

Best friend. Sister. Lover.

Just like Homer Simpson hugging his beloved TV set, pop music is the warm place I go to on dark days. It's a chorus that can kick-start your day. A chord change that takes your breathe away. Or those simple harmonies that will always make you cry. With pop music it's all there on the surface. What you see (*hear*) is what you get. There's no room for snobbery. Great pop music crosses the divide. It's as much Bowie and the Buzzcocks as it is Steps or Madonna. It's Blondie *then*, but not Blondie *now*. It's All Saints on a good day. It's never B*Witched.

Pop music works at gut level. It's not intellectual music. You don't have to think about it. If you do then it's not pop music.

Of course pop music had its heyday back in the '60's and '70's when the 7" single ruled supreme. It was the perfect medium for the three-minute pop song. From Phil Spector and Joe Meek to Mickie Most and Berry Gordy there were a steady stream of oddballs, mavericks and misfits who seemed to create endless clean cut stars to promote their material. From Motown to The Wall Of Sound, we'd never had it so good.

Eventually, of course, artists decided they wanted to write their own material. In many cases this was a big mistake — but still, the balance of power had shifted. In the 70's prog rock groups like Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd and Genesis didn't even bother releasing singles. (*The medium for pop music*). They had songs that could fill a whole side of an LP (*pop songs invariably last less than 4 minutes*). Thankfully this left the charts free for acts as diverse as Sparks, Abba and Roy Wood to clean up.

At the end of the '70's Punk came along to give pop music a whole new lease of life. The rock dinosaurs were put out to pasture. The 7" single was restored rightfully to centre stage. Punk understood the basic rules of pop: **Simplicity, Brevity and a Good Tune**. The chance meeting of John Lydon and Bjorn and Benny from Abba in a London pub back in '76 may only be a much travelled urban myth, but the fact remains that the Pistols took some of their best chords wholesale from Abba. Punk meant anyone could make a record. Not a triple concept LP full of diminished minor 7^{ths} maybe, but a xeroxed-covered 7" with the obligatory three chords. This was no guarantee of greatness in itself, but the legacy left by bands like the Buzzcocks, New York Dolls, Blondie, Undertones etc. show that something good was happening.

By the '80's punk gave way to New Wave. The alternative scene became more experimental. Songs started getting longer. The spirit of pop moved elsewhere. But had pop music lost its cool?

On the surface it may have seemed so. The letter pages of the NME were regularly swamped with diatribes against *Stock, Aitken and Waterman*. They were evil. They were capitalists. They dared to sell records by the millions. They invented Rick Astley. (Okay, fair cop on the last one). But then there were the things people neglected to mention. They had great tunes. They had choruses that could melt your heart. They had Kylie Minogue. Of course all this was wasted on the writers at the NME. They were too busy writing features on The Wonderstuff or Neds Atomic Dustbin.

So where does that leave the pop fan in the '90's? Confused, maybe. Abba seem to have been re-branded as some high temple of kitsch. People still want to like them — but in an ironic, post-modern sense. The fact that they wrote some of the greatest pop songs ever is almost a side issue. Elsewhere the charts vacillate wildly as pre-teens, cartoon novelties and piss-poor dance tunes clog the airwaves. But wasn't it ever thus? The '70's had the Wombles, Little Jimmy Osmond and The Rubettes. The '80's Joe Dolce and The Smurfs. Maybe it's best not to dream up theories. Easier just to dig out those old 7"s and fall in love all over again.

And remember: Once the Beatles abandoned pop they were finished. One of our greatest pop bands were lost forever in a fog of drug addled lyrics and backwards guitars. 'Sergeant Pepper' remains as a warning to us all.

DIARY OF A FILM PUNK

DOUG BELL

MAY

May ushered in the warm South-West weather. My first bank-holiday as a resident of this flat country and though the roads may be clogged, at least it's not raining. While we sat out on the weed-filled patio, drinking wine and listening to the sounds of the neighbours playing guitar, I wondered, how do you know when summer has really arrived?

Surely it must be the light as it sears your skin as you leave the pictures on a bright afternoon. Just as a Lance Henrickson vampire might burst spontaneously into flames, I felt all too crispy upon exiting *Plunkett and MacLean*. The celluloid blood has certainly run thin in the Scott family now, as does the sense of pacing. Here we have a grande-historical-comedy-action-thingy; sort of Blackadder but without the jokes, script and the good bits. While you can't fault the acting, Miller and Carlyle look lost most of the time - 18th century Prague does not suit them. Stick to Leith boys! A sure-fire recipient of the "Stargate Great Trailer/Lousy Movie Nomination."

From a sweltering afternoon's viewing to a balmy evening in Sweden. *Festen*. What can you say about the Dogme 95 School that hasn't been regurgitated in all the reviews. Easily the most compelling film so far this year, Lars Van Tiers, delivers a stunning portrayal of a family gone so far into dysfunction they should appear on Jerry Springer. Except they all have too much sense for that. Dogme 95's adherence to swirling handheld camerawork, washed-out grainy film-stock and fly-on-the-wall style break that invisible shot-countershot style beloved of Hollywood. However at times it made the observer all too aware that you were indeed watching a film. As a nation of viewers we're untrained for this...despite the BBC's best efforts recently. Whether this will be the nearest we'll get to ground-breaking cinema before the millennium remains to be seen, but with its sharp dialogue, masterful controlled direction and documentary feel this will rank in the top five filmpunk Films of the Year.

JUNE

Matrix needs no introduction. Going to see films in big groups always pains me. I know from the outset that my views on that particular evening's viewing will always be in the minority. *Matrix* confirmed these expectations. Let's get all the quibbles out of the way: YES it has huge plot holes, YES the SF content is derivative, YES the science doesn't work, YES it's special effects laden and finally YES the ending is unoriginal and relies completely on gunfights. DO I CARE - NO!!! When you spend your time watching foreign films dedicated to searching for the higher truths in life you need celluloid downtime and that's what *Matrix* is. Come on who really went into it looking for an intelligent work dedicated to unravelling the mystery of virtual reality? Get serious. For plot holes try *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*. For derivative SF try *Star Wars*. The science doesn't work, try *Independence Day*. Relies on special effects, try any big budget Hollywood film of the last 20 years from *Forest Gump* to *Star Trek: The Slow Motion Picture*. As for the ending...take your pick of Hollywood cop outs. The truth is I need pretty no-brainer action movies. What we're talking here is John Woo meets The Crow. *Matrix* is a sumptuous feast of an action movie. If *Matrix* was a meal it'd be genetically-engineered steak tartare straight from an automat.

The Idiots continues from where last month's *Festen* left off. The trade papers have gotten a lot of mileage out of its "Let's make fun of retards" content. This belittles the film's status, and hides it's real true M.O. - a study into why close-knit self-reliant groups will inevitably fall apart.

It could easily have been a study of SF fans. In this respect *The Idiots* is a carefully observed piece, relying on unobtrusive Dogma direction, fine character acting and excellent dialogue. Trust me...if you suppress your political correctness gag-reflex you'll be taken on a roller-coaster ride of shocks, laughs, despair and wonder. Both *The Idiots* and *Festen* deserve the audience and the praise heaped on less worthy films like *Titanic*.

JULY/AUGUST

I've spent the last three weeks telling future students where Bristol's good residential areas are, sorting out problems caused by other members of staff, processing UCAS forms and generally working myself into the ground...and to be truthful loving it. During Clearing my only source of film has been whatever TV and Video could offer. Recent notables include *The Crow* (Goth-wank-fantasy-fun) and *The Hitcher*¹. The Hitcher falls into my favourite class of film - the low-budget but effective terror movie. Apart from its grim suspense I love the lack of reasoning behind Rutger Hauer's repeated assaults on the hero driver. Why does he do it? Because he can. Some would fault this as poor script-writing but it really is the film's strength. There is no poorly explained pseudo-mystical origin like Freddie, Michael Myers² or Jason. A random attack is more realistic, easier to suspend disbelief for and ultimately scarier. After all no-one knows who the serial killers are in real life until you feel the cold steel of their knife pressed rigid against your windpipe, or until the police start digging up your neighbour's patio. He was such a nice young man after all.

CLINT EASTWOOD V DARTH VADER: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER ROUND 1

I did take time out from organising next year's students to watch perhaps the greatest, breathtaking cult movie celluloid's ever been exposed too - *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. Oh I did see *The Phantom Menace* twice as well. Here's some random thoughts on the two of them.

Star Wars has been much praised for its outstanding Special Effects. I can't help thinking that this is a bit lop-sided. True once again the sets, locations and spacecraft all looked stunning but somehow, I think, CGI technology was overused. Contrast the Naboo battle with the battle scene from Leone's epic. The ships, droids and alien race all look "not quite right", a bit too artificial, too like animation left over from *A Bug's Life*. I got no feeling of emotional contact with the loss of life in the battle scenes, a claim that cannot be levelled at Leone. While we hadn't yet reached the high evolution of *The Sam Peckinpah Exit Wound*TM, TGTB&TU battle scene does contain huge emotional content with all the horrors of war laid out in front of us. It's a hot, dusty cruel job being forced day in day out to kill over a bridge that would forever be lost and retaken again and again. This is trench warfare Dixie-style. The washed out film-stock, dust, smoke, blood and the death of the young army Captain all convey suffering and cruelty. Somehow seeing the death of a few computer generated pixels wasn't quite the same.

Cruelty underpins the beauty of *The Good, the Bad and The Ugly*. When Eli Wallach is been beaten to a bloody pulp in the concentration camp, the POW band plays one of the most haunting songs penned by Morricone to disguise the screams. Lee Van Cleef is the ultimate figure of cruelty in cinema; even Darth Vader has a conscience in the end. When Cleef lets Clint Eastwood live it's only because he's still of use to him. To contrast this the relationship between Wallach and Eastwood is complex and understated. Eastwood appears as a rather ambivalent figure neither good or bad, while Wallach starts the film as the dirty untrustworthy rogue.

¹ I've always had a soft spot for Rutger Hauer. He reminds me of Kirk Douglas in *The Vikings*.

² I do prefer Mike Myers earlier funnier slasher movies than his supposed recent comedies.

Through their adventures both men realise they share the same loner's mentality and through time come to rely, if not totally trust completely the other one.

From beginning to the climactic three-way gunfight this is a truly monstrous story told in extreme close-ups, marvellous panoramic landscape, few words and careful matching of vision to soundtrack. The tension in the climactic multi-character gunfight is still unmatched anywhere in cinema.

Extracted from Spoo, an occasional e-mail zine from Doug Bell. If you would like to be put on the mailing list, contact Doug on rangerdoug28@hotmail.com.

Meanwhile, still at the cinema, Christina encounters some:

STOREFRONT PARADOXES

I know very little about Robin Hitchcock or his works. I only went along because Michael Abbott and Anne Wilson were visiting Bristol, and Michael particularly wanted to see this film cum performance. It was quite strange to sit in The Watershed arts cinema where normally a middle-aged, middle class crowd converge for the latest adaptation of Henry James, and be addressed by a real person. The audience seemed to be made up of ex-student types or ageing hippies, characters with long greying hair, looking not unlike the man who finally stepped down from the back of the room : Robyn Hitchcock in person to preface the film *Storefront Hitchcock* with a few words and a couple of songs.

"Two songs? Does that constitute a set?" asked Anne, after he had finished.

"A small set," said Michael pragmatically. "That's what I expected."

To me it was enough of an event that someone had brought out a guitar and played live at all in this film theatre. My movie space had for one short moment been enlarged beyond the parameters of the screen to encompass a 3-dimensional character who instead of stepping out of the screen like in a Woody Allen movie, had taken us in with him back to New York, where he was playing a gig in the window of a downtown store.

The film was structured so that the cinema audience has the same point of view as the audience at this New York gig, and could watch the reactions of passers-by outside in the street. Some just strolled by oblivious, some paused to gaze in at the shop window, peering intently to see what was going on. It was just possible, I hypothesised, that they could see beyond Robyn to us, this non-standard Bristol Watershed crowd that shuffled and moved around to let people out to the toilets, or sat entranced by the wonder of this melding of two spaces and times.

For me there was a particular fascination, knowing that I had been in America in 1996 when the film was shot. I thought that maybe if I looked hard enough, I might just catch myself strolling past.

Not surprisingly, I didn't. But like the audience in New York, I found myself drawn to these songs and stories, full of Robyn Hitchcock's personality and concerns, which seemed all the more strikingly British for being filtered through the eyes and perceptions of his American audience.

-- "Anklefucka - what's that all about?" --

BEER DRINKING THE DOCTOR WHO WAY

One can measure one's beer intake by referring to each incarnation of the Doctor:

1 PINT: THE HARTNELL

"I was in town the other day Christmas shopping, it was bloody busy, so I nipped in the Bay Horse for a quick Hartnell."

A rare occurrence, the Hartnell only usually occurs when pressed for time.

(1½ PINTS: THE CHASE)

2 PINTS: THE TROUGHTON

"I was out with my bird/bloke/hamster last night, and she/he/it was gagging for it, so I thought I'd better play safe and only have a Troughton."

The Troughton is a basic, safe amount of beer to drink. You know you've had a drink, but you're still capable of doing things – work, riding a bike, having sex etc.

(2½ PINTS: THE ENEMY OF THE WORLD)

3 PINTS: THE PERTWEE

"It was a shit night Saturday – everywhere was crowded, we only had time for a Pertwee."

An unsatisfactory amount, not enough to be pissed on, so what's the point, the Pertwee rarely occurs unless pressed for time, and usually "regenerates" into the Tom (see below).

(3½ PINTS: THE SEA DEVILS)

4 PINTS: THE TOM (not the Baker to avoid confusion with Colin Baker)

"Had the Tom at lunchtime and by Christ, in the afternoon I couldn't work."

Satisfactory for an evening, lethal at lunchtime, the Tom is the standard amount. You're a bit pissed, but won't have too bad a hangover in the morning.

(4½ PINTS: THE INVASION OF TIME)

5 PINTS: THE DAVISON

"Bloody hell mate, we had the Davison last time we were out – can you remember whose round it is cos I bloody can't?"

A difficult amount, nights which end in a Davison have usually been cut short. Can lead to confusion about whose round it is next time, or going Dutch on the Tom-Davison round.

(5½ PINTS: MAWDRYN UNDEAD)

6 PINTS: THE COLIN

"Great night last night – the Colin, a grope, and a curry."

The Colin is, at 6 pints of beer, the limit, unless you are an alcoholic or have a belly equivalent to that of Colin now.

(6½ PINTS: THE TWO DOCTORS)

7 PINTS: THE MCCOY

"What a hangover – a real bastard. Must have had the McCoy last night, I had 30 quid when I went out and look at this! Shrapnel!"

Things start to get a little hazy round here. The McCoy is a rare beast, for those who reach it can rarely accurately remember how many pints they have actually had.

(7½ PINTS: THE HAPPINESS PATROL)

8 PINTS: THE MCGANN

"Oh God, I feel like shit."

The McGann is arguably the upper limit of remembrance. I challenge anyone who has had more than 8 pints of beer to remember how many they've had. But there is one more level...

(8½ PINTS does not technically exist)

??? UMPTEN PINTS: THE COMPLETE TIME LOAD REGENERATIVE CYCLE

" " (Unable to speak)

By this stage, you'll dearly wish you had the power to regenerate, because you'll be knocking on death's door, very weakly, with a shaking hand.

BALLOON POST

MONITORED BY CHRISTINA LAKE

Gary Deindorfer, Trent Center West, 465 Greenwood Ave., #1104, Trenton, NJ 08609-2131, USA

I was thinking last night about the arbitrary, artificial ritual of writing letters to fanzines. I mean, I don't know you and you don't know me, but here I am making all these friendly, intimacy inducing verbal gestures. Furthermore, there is the fact that this letter will be entirely different by right of being written Friday night, Feb. 12, 1999, rather than Tuesday night, Feb 9, 1999 as I had originally planned. So the words that get deposited by my typewriter here are conditioned by the moment. I am improvising like a not-so-great jazz musician here.

I think it's time to stop farting around, and address myself directly to the contents of your thankfully sexy fanzine, namely to offer some commentary on Nick Walters Dr Who convention report. First off, he offers us short "takes" on the con, in a rather kaleidoscopic manner. That is one good way to capture some of the hurly burly and chaotic joie de vivre of such an event. It works. Nick is also dreadfully witty, like D. West on testosterone tablets, perhaps. It all matters very much to him, this Dr. Who stuff, in a way it never could to me, since I have always been indifferent to anything having to do with Dr. Who. So I must make something of a mental effort to understand this convention from Nick's angle of vision. Fortunately his observations are so funny that much of my work is done for me.

Vastly amusing, that little school children have been corralled into doing gruesome "takes" on monsters that might mess with Dr. Who. It is obvious that the tads were much more creative in their monsters than the prop department's efforts on the shows were capable of being. But the highpoint of the con report for me is when the 14 year old girls slither out to do an erotic dance. Damn, that's just the kind of nutty thing that can happen at a con, but no one would believe you if you didn't document it. Thankfully, Nick documented it.

Now we come to the Amsterdam trip reports. I feel bereft in that I don't travel much: I have lived on both coasts of this country, cities I have been in in between the coasts, and for foreign country, pitiable as it is: Toronto and Montreal in Canada. I feel like a real hick compared with you and your contributors.

Amsterdam would seem to be the world center of hedonism and drugs in public, unless Bangkok is. I don't know if I could handle it. I haven't had sex in five years and I don't do drugs any more, except for the occasional joint of grass, which somehow I don't think of as serious "drugs". But it's nice to read about it here in the "Special Sex Issue". By the way, you may wonder why I HAVEN'T HAD SEX IN FIVE YEARS. That's when my girlfriend Judi dumped me after I lost my job with the State of New Jersey, where she also worked. It was one of those office romances. I haven't had a girlfriend since then, and I don't believe in going to hookers because of AIDS; so I have become in compensation a rather accomplished wanker in the past five years.

But let's return to Ranger Doug, whom I suspect is getting more than I am. Doug makes the sex in Amsterdam sound rather clinical and boring. About the way I would expect it would be. Well, terse, well-done article on Ranger Doug's part. Peter and Sue Binfield's Amsterdam report is thankfully explicit to this sexually frustrated middle-age wanker. I really have got to go over there sometime to see a girl swallow a banana with her vaginal muscles.

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

When I look at the front cover of *Balloons Over Bristol* No. 13, I think not just about what an intriguing piece of artwork it is but what a helluva a lot of toner it sucked up - and well, having dealt with artwork for *Trap Door* that has large black areas, I know what a challenge this can be for a copier. When I turn the masters over for printing to whatever copy shop has come up with the best price, I always instruct the person on the other side of the counter to lay the toner on

thick, but not so much that it blurs the letters. I also tell them, when there's a front and rear combination on one side of which there's dark artwork to run that side first. This avoids those annoying "drop-outs" I've experienced on some copies of some pages when I've forgotten this instruction in the past.

I find that my instructions to photocopy shops often fall on deaf ears, so in the case of Sue's cover for the last issue, I photocopied it myself at work because I didn't want to risk the effect being spoiled for lack of toner.

No. 13 was an enjoyable read, by and large. The "millenium rant" leading off your editorial column represented familiar ground to us Americans. If I have to read one more canned explanation in the newspapers and magazines and hear one more on TV about what the "Y2K problem" is, I am going to scream. Like you, I find the weirdest part of it all to be the religious community's seizing on it as having some sort of Great Godly Significance. This shite has even infiltrated my workplace where the management staff recently was circularized for a seminar thrown by the local church on the "problem". The flier was to throw up over.

I'm beginning to feel more relaxed about Y2K now it's becoming less of a build-up thing and closer to reality. I haven't encountered much of a religious angle to it over here - but there's still time.

Regarding which British fanzine to vote for in the Novas, I agree it's a hard decision, but let me disagree with you and Paul Kincaid that current American fanzines "seem more connected to some sense of fannish community" than the ones emanating from your side of the Pond. It actually seems to me that, since the folding of *Apparatchik*, the last zine I considered anything like a focal point, neither side has been particularly coherent. A lot of zines are appearing, but there seems to be somewhat less interconnection these days. In terms of *favorite* UK fanzines of '98, I guess I'd pick yours, Michael Ashley's, Andrew Butler's, Debbi Kerr's and Yvonne Rowse's. But as to whether they're the best, I don't know. I guess it depends what you're looking for in a fanzine.

Too right. I think '99 hasn't produced much consistency from either the North America or the UK - though there have been some enjoyable one-off fanzines, notably from Tony Berry, Dave Hicks and Mike Siddall.

As someone who rarely watched *Doctor Who* during its lifetime (or after), I can't say that Nick Walter's Who-Con report particularly excited me in terms of casting a clarifying eye on that particular subculture. (His mention of Nicola Bryant being "as lovely as ever" did send me on a fruitless search through Clute's *SF: The Illustrated Encyclopedia* for a look-see, though). But other than the Dr Who aspects of the event, it sounded pretty much like your normal/usual convention, even to the archetypical bad meal, this one being veggieburger and chips. Nick and I have one thing in common, though: we're both fans of "King of the Hill", which I consider the best American animated comedy currently airing.

Your, Ranger Doug's and the Binfields' articles about Amsterdam made an interesting trio. Doug's was illuminating not so much for any insight into Amsterdam, but for the revelation that you lot "are becoming a nation of uptight whingers" due to the combination of Fast Beer and American Fast Food. Yours was fascinating for the various insights into what you found good about cities all over the planet. I was particularly taken with your observation that after so much sightseeing you just wanted "someone literate to swap books with" and by your pointing out the duality of thought of those former colonies (Singapore, Indonesia, *et al*) towards their former colonial overlords. Pete and Sue quoting someone saying "That's the first time I've had

a blowjob with a condom on," made me think about how that would feel. Practically not at all, I would think, but perhaps whoever said that would write in and illuminate the experience.

Yes, Pete C., we're still waiting on that article!

Regarding Paul Hinder's observation, "Fanzines begin to get devoted to justifying their own existence," I haven't really observed that. To me, fanzines just *are* and if they're not your thing then don't read them. I would be the first to admit that some fanzines, like for instance *Crifanac*, are as he describes ("like walking into a pub to meet a group of people you don't know") but they're meaningful to the people to whom they're, er, meaningful. The very nature of fanzines is that they don't have to have widespread appeal to be successful. Er, am I being defensive here?

No more than me.

I'm going to stay out of this word fight between Bill Bains and your brother Simon because I agree with both of them. But I am going to disagree, strongly, with Ken Lake's assessment that *Balloons* has been "somewhat dumbed down". Not from my point of view.

Bill Bains 37 The Moor, Melbourn, Herts SG8 6ED

Thanks for BoB 13. Usual diverse content. 2/3 of your rants were in line with my rants on the same subject - Millennium (huge hype - I am Millennium Compliance Officer at our primary school, and have had this until I am sick of it), and That Lewinski Person, and Clinton's feeble attempts to redefine sex. Nova awards are less fascinating to me nowadays. What was equally feeble about l'affaire Lewinski was that Clinton was nearly impeached over it. This was the sign of US politics finally vanishing down the U-bend. We watched Oliver Stone's *Nixon* over Christmas. That showed what a really corrupt president could do, and what impeachment was for. Compared to Tricky Dicky, Bonkin' Bill is a bit player. An aside: Ed Harris plays the head of 'The Plumbers', Nixon's in-house and completely illegal security team, in the film. He also plays flight director Gene Kranz in *Apollo Thirteen*. Both crises were going on at the same time in 1970. But nowhere in *Nixon* is there any mention of the space programme, one of the defining icons of the time, and rarely in *Apollo 13* is there any mention of Nixon, the Vietnam War, Kent State etc. Thus are our worlds divided. I was 15 at the time, and I definitely go for the Ron Howard rather than the Oliver Stone view of the late 1960s.

Amsterdam - all your correspondents seem to have visited a different city from the Amsterdam I remember. I recall lots of trams and polite people and art galleries. I realised why Amsterdam does not have the traffic problems of even Cambridge, let alone London. The traffic lights give priority to trams, then bicycles and pedestrians, and last to cars. And there are so many bikes that they have to obey the rules of the road, lest they all crash into each other. Law-breaking bikes (and suicidal ones - shooting red lights, undertaking trucks signalling to turn left etc) make Cambridge a menace to walk, cycle or drive in.

But this Amsterdam of women in shop windows and drugs on the menu - must have been a parallel universe. Or somewhere in Eastern Europe. Mind you, Simon Lake thinks the UK is Third World, so maybe Amsterdam was a vision of paradise compared to Bristol.

The bikes in Amsterdam definitely rule the road (and parts of the pavement). They show no mercy to pedestrians. If you're in their way, you'd better get out of it sharpish or you'll be run down. This is not what I would call pedestrian friendly.

Nick Walters review of a Dr. Who convention was almost enough to make me want to go to one - well done Nick. Interesting that the female leads were meant to be so ineffective - in

our (pre-fan) household we realised that the 'Eek Doctor I have twisted my ankle!' brigade was the height of feebleness, and simply there to give the Doctor someone to be masterful and protective at. Curious that this was intentional. Did you see the Dr. Who parody on Red Nose Day? Richard (aged 11) thought having the Master fall down the sewer a lot and then grow breasts ('They are not breasts! They are Dalek Bumps!') riotously funny. I thought that more could have been done with the idea, the actors etc... Having the Doctor turn into a woman (Joanna Lumley) at the end was quite neat, though, and one in the eye for the 'is the Dr. Gay?' school of fanzine debate.

I thought that having to wade through long segments of the rest of Comic Relief made the comedy we did get out of the Dr Who sketch a bit thin. But I did enjoy the "what-if" element of watching several actors try out the role of the Doctor (personally I liked the look of Richard E. Grant, Paul McGann's mate from Withnail and I.)

Amsterdam again.... I would add to Ranger Doug's list not to go to Delft if you are allergic to yeast. There is (or was when I was there in the earlier 90s) a huge Gist-brocades fermentation plant on one side of the town, and when they vent the tanks in the early morning the smell is...well...pretty amazing. You know that fresh baked bread smell? You know the smell of overnight beer from the pub floor? Imagine them combined, multiplied ten thousand times, and then blown into your bedroom window at 6.15 am. Is it any wonder that Delft produces unique pottery and insane bell-ringers?

Me - good grief, what an intemperate rant. And so long! When ever did I find time to write it? Oh yes, on holiday. Next time I take BoB on holiday I must recite the mantra 'BoB is not Sercon. BoB is not sercon' to myself. I am sure you will get response (that is why you printed it, after all), and I am happy to add that as well as being an exploitative banker, I eat red meat, don't like cats (much, anyway), have never smoked dope in Amsterdam and have four children (or are you too young to have read *The Population Bomb*?) Hah! And you know the worst part? *I still read SF*. Now you will feel polluted every time you pass the atom-and-spaceship symbol in the library.

Colin Greenland, 98 Sturton Street, Cambridge CB1 2QA

Thanks for B/B 13. I went to Amsterdam once, in 1972, for a week or so, rather in the spirit of Maureen Speller wandering around San Francisco, I suppose: looking for something that was never really there in the first place. The Alternative Society. Gentle people with flowers in their hair. I met up with John & Paddy, friends from school, who were there already, in a campsite north of the city. We lived on bananas & goeey wholemeal bread, chips & mayonnaise, Red Leb & Heineken. I remember chestnut trees, canals & red brick bridges, a rusty houseboat, a smoky youth club, & racing round art galleries at top speed because we hadn't managed to get it together to go until half an hour before closing time. I honestly don't remember women standing in windows wearing strange underwear, tho we must have walked thru the red light district, surely. Seems strange we didn't explore deeper, as it were, being 3 18-yr-old boys on the loose. Perhaps we hadn't got enough money. Perhaps we were just intimidated.

I remember everybody speaking English, & being extraordinarily hospitable, considering their city was already starting to be overrun with everybody else's shaggy layabouts & dropouts. & I remember people just standing on the street, talking, or just looking, not rushing on their way somewhere else. I remember identifying these people as citizens, not tourists; but I don't remember why. I know we left earlier than we'd planned, because Paddy did run out of money. We hitched home, a miserable, tedious experience, as always. It seemed to be some sort of duty, then, to hitch, even in preference to taking the Magic Bus. The ethos was, you did as much as you could for free, even liberating things (=shoplifting), then blew all your money on dope & records. I never had the stamina or the courage to be more alternative than that. I'm sure I'd

have regretted it if I hadn't done at least that much, but I don't know that I'd do it again. I always used to want to go back to Amsterdam one day. Rather gone off that now too!

Alan Sullivan, 30 Ash Road, Stratford, London E15 1 HL

Amsterdam : my own, more limited experience of those parts of Holland I've visited, is that it is indeed an extraordinary place. Utterly familiar one minute, totally alien the next. It is, as has been observed before, the little things that do it. Looking back on it, the whole thing seems curiously dream-like. Even the bits that *don't* involve dancing with tractors on moonlit beaches, Octarines attempting to bury Simo alive, and wedding guests throwing six-foot rabbits into the sea...

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

Thanks for Balloons over Bristol 13, with its most striking Sue Binfield b/w cover.

Hmm, I've been to Amsterdam precisely once, and was mostly stuck in a hotel on the outskirts of town for the three days of a training course back in the mid-80s. Not much of a chance to see the city, and I can't actually remember very much of it except for a vague idea of canals and architecture. I think we were cautioned about Silver Street after dark unless with a sizeable group. My mother used to go to Amsterdam a lot, working at that time as a costumier for various clubs and revue bars in the late 60s/70s, so my memories of that period were of a lot of sequins all over the living room floor, and gifts of chocolate clogs that she would bring back for us.

I wouldn't worry too much about the soon-not-to-be-so-poor people who will have to be working on the eve of the new millennium. I've already heard of programmers ramping their charges up to £1,000/hour to be on call as the clocks (hopefully) tick over, and utility and service workers asking anything from £350/hours or a £3,500 day rate. I have to say I'm finding it difficult to get excited about the whole prospect, either of wild parties, or imminent doom (or both, like a Liz Hand novel). Neither am I yet struck by any survivalist streaks to start taking my money out of the bank (far too much being tied up in long term pensions and saving to make a lot of difference if it all goes haywire) or hoarding tins of mushy peas (Vikki does, but that's another matter) and baked beans. Come the millennium, food hoarders are presumably going to have to eat all this stuff filling their cupboards, so I'd be as worried by a sudden onset of methane global warming.

The Bristol Group has delegated its hoarding to Sue Mowbray's parents. So if all goes wrong at the millennial hour, we'll be heading up to Chester.

What did I want to comment on? Oh yes. I was, I think, a bit disappointed by brother Simon's dismissive reply to Bill Bains. Yeah, right man, we're all fascists 'cause we have jobs. He's in danger of sounding like Neil from The Young Ones. Pretty good from an ex VAT inspector. "Where else could I invest in projects that destroy the earth's resources?" You could have a pension, shop at Sainsburys, run a car, use a photocopier or underarm deodorant, drink coffee, use electricity, publish fanzines - in fact, almost anything. Rather than actually argue what Simon considers 'rights' (and without a constitutional Bill of Rights in the UK, we don't have any that aren't provisionally granted by government) I'm a bit disappointed that his response to Bains is of the "so you think we should stuff children back up chimneys?" level. Frankly, I expected better. Or maybe I'm being grouchy and defensive because Simon is doing what I've been thinking about for a while now on and off, since I got made redundant about a year and a half ago. Having had my career derailed at 40, I've ended up working in what is essentially a contracting job without any real long-term prospects, and which I have to admit I'm only doing because of the money. So there's probably an element of mid-life crisis in this as well, that the most enjoyable creative work is probably over by now, and I don't have much to show for it -

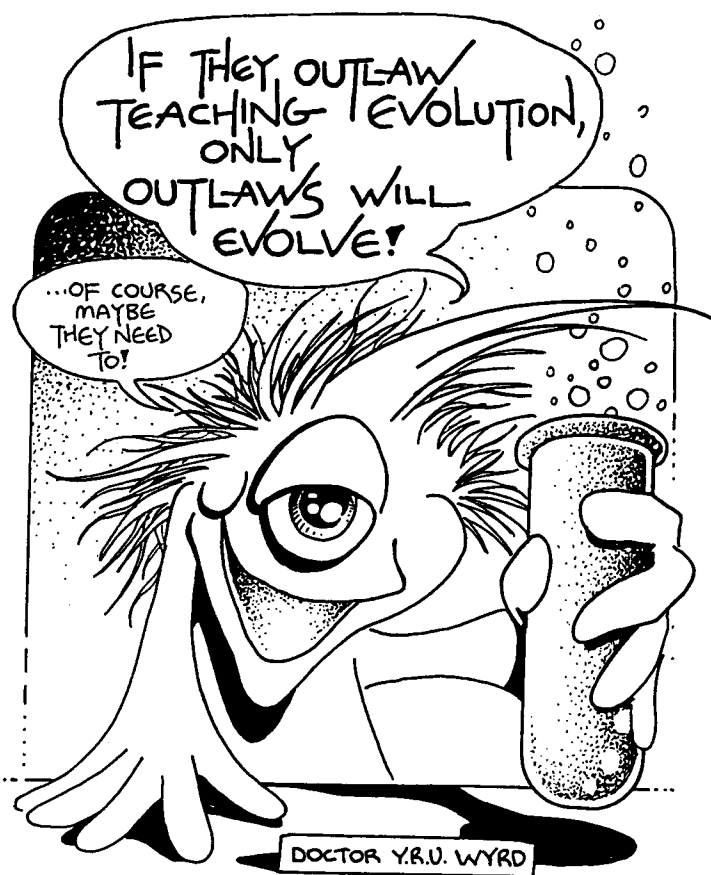
my name on a couple of minor patents and a rapidly dating CV. And maybe I want to do something that I feel might make a difference, but on the other hand I've never really had to worry about whether we can pay the bills at the end of the month, and I don't want to start now. Maybe if it was just me I had to think about I'd be less concerned, more willing to take a chance.

At least you get to be creative outside working hours. And the way the job market keeps changing these days, who's to say what opportunities lie ahead of you?

Brad W. Foster PO Box 165246, Irving, TX, USA

Well, yes, I think I'd have to agree with the caption on the cover to *Balloons Over Bristol* #13... a drawing of someone frenching a skull is pretty much "special" sex. Yuck! However, after that somewhat frightening opening, I did rather enjoy the interior of the zine. I have to wonder if the discussion you saw on the coming Millennium that ended in prayer might not have been on one of the Christian-rant cable networks or specialty channels. They seem to be the most eager to discuss the horrors of the Millennium, since they figure all us naughty folk will be the ones in trouble, while they *finally* get to prance around saying "I told you so!" It really is disquieting to happen on one of these shows where they are almost *drooling* over the prospect of worldwide havoc.

Sometimes on a particularly dull day at work, I drool over that prospect too. But at least my reasons are purely irreligious.



BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL - THE COMPLETE STORY

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL. OCTOBER 1987

Contents: Conspiracy con report - Christina Lake; One night in Paris - Peter-Fred Thompson; One Month in Paris - Christina Lake. *Cover* Peter-Fred Thompson. 20 pages

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 2. OCTOBER 1988

Contents: Perfect Day - Christina Lake; Night of the Gastric Acrobat - Richard McClaren; Balloon Crazy - Tim Goodrick; Easy Driver - Peter-Fred Thompson; Games We Play - Nathan Sidwell, Re-entry - Christina Lake. *Cover* Peter-Fred Thompson. 22 pages

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 3. NOVEMBER 1992

Contents: A Small Convention - Christina Lake; A Dream of Flying - Peter Fred Thompson; The Away Team Goes Shopping - Tim Goodrick; Writers Circles - Paul Hinder; Reinventing the fanzine? - Christina Lake; A Management Lexicon - Brian Hooper; Hiff - Nathan Sidwell; MF and Me - Tony Walsh; More than I bargained for - Christina Lake. *Cover* Christina Lake. 28 pages

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 4. NOVEMBER 1994

Contents: Miss Lee Letters, part 1 - Tim Goodrick; Peter-Fred in China - Christina Lake & Peter-Fred Thompson; Wincon III - Steve Brewster; Cider Tasting III - Brian Hooper. *Art:* Lesley Ward. *Cover:* Tim Goodrick. 16 pages

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 5. JANUARY 1995

Contents: Liquorice Allsorts - fanzine reviews by Tim Goodrick, Richard Hewison, Tony Walsh, Christina Lake, Peter-Fred Thompson & Steve Brewster; Novacon Dreaming - Christina Lake; Depth Charge - Simon Lake; Miss Lee Letters 2 - Tim Goodrick. *Art:* Tony Walsh *Cover* Tim Goodrick. 18 pages

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 6. APRIL 1995

Contents: Everybody Wants to Win the Lottery - Christina Lake; Miss Lee Letters 3 - Tim Goodrick; From the Pop Group to Portishead - Simon Lake; Party City - Christina Lake; Balloon Post - Steve Brewster. *Art:* Steve Jeffries, Tony Walsh. *Cover* Christina Lake. 22 pages

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 7. JUNE 1995

Contents: Wake Up Bristol - Simon Lake; Orbital Sightings - Simon Lake; Three Girls like Anne Wilson - Peter-Fred Thompson; Message from a Planet Jack Named - Tim Goodrick; Better than Fiction - Christina Lake; Dancing in the Park - Tim Goodrick. *Cover* Louise. 14 pages

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 8. AUGUST 1995

Contents: Making the most of the Worldcon - Steve Brewster; Miss Lee Letters 4 - Tim Goodrick; Fairwell from the Glass Arcade - Simon Lake; Why are American Fanzines so Large? - Christina Lake; How to Make : Dr Who novels - Paul Hinder. *Art:* Sue Mason, Steve Jeffery. *Cover* Louise. 24 pages

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 9. OCTOBER 1995

Contents: Who needs a Nova - Christina Lake; Contraflow: an Intersection report - participants Christina Lake, Steve Brewster, Lilian Edwards, Richard Hewison, Pete Binfield, Amanda Kear, Peter-Fred Thompson & Keith Martin; The New, the Cool and the Sartorially Challenged - Simon Lake; Miss Lee Letters 5 - Tim Goodrick. *Art:* Steve Jeffery. *Cover:* Christina Lake. 28 pages

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 10. APRIL 1996

Contents: Fanzines Found in a Heap by my Duvet - Christina Lake; Miss Lee Letters 6 - Tim Goodrick; Postcards from Burnham-on-Sea - Christina Lake; Is Dr Who Homosexual? - Dr Skagra; Popsicle Madness - Christina Lake; Flying Saucers over Bristol - Simon Lake. *Art:* Sue Mason, Dave Mooring. *Covers:* Steve Jeffrey, Dave Harwood. 34 pages

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 11. MARCH 1997

Contents: Editorial - Pete Binfield; Happy Birthday America - Christina Lake; Readercon - Christina Lake; Journeys into sound - Simon Lake; La Vache c'est Morte - D Hunter Bell; Mis Lee Letters 7 - Tim Goodrick; The Back Page - Steve Brewster. *Cover:* Pete Binfield. 42 pages

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 12. APRIL 1998

Contents: Here We Go Again - Christina Lake; In the Dark - Tim Goodrick; Trash, Cult or Ikea - Christina Lake; All in a Good Cause? - Simon Lake; Peadariloes Review - Nick Walters; Interview Madness and other Peadariloes - Christina Lake; Peadariloes/ Lo-Fidelity Allstars - Simon Lake; Time for Bye Byes - Ken Shinn; Letters Page - Pete Binfield. *Art:* Brad Foster.

Cover: Ken Shinn. 34 pages

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 13. NOVEMBER 1998

Contents: Millennium Rants - Christina Lake; Event One - Nick Walters; Fast Sex, Slow Food - Ranger Doug; The Myth of Amsterdam - Christina Lake; A Savage Journey to the Heart of Amsterdam - Pete and Sue Binfield; Pumpkin (Over Bristol) Pie - Tina Horswill; Bigger on the Inside Record Reviews - Nick Walters. *Art:* Brad Foster. *Cover:* Sue Binfield. 30 pages

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 14. OCTOBER 1999

Contents: End of an era - Christina Lake; Down Near Nempnett Thrubwell - Doug Bell; From Weymouth to Yquatine - Nick Walters; One Way Wincon - Christina Lake; Known Pleasures - Simon Lake; Diary of a Film Punk - Doug Bell; Beer Drinking the Dr Who Way - Nick Walters. *Art:* Brad Foster. *Cover:* Christina Lake. 28 pages.

All issues edited by Christina Lake, apart from no.s 1 & 2 Christina Lake and Peter-Fred Thompson, and no.11 Pete and Sue Binfield

WHERE ARE THEY NOW:

Peter-Fred Thompson	Alive & well and living with his Dutch girlfriend in Clifton
Richard McClaren	Does anybody know?
Tony Walsh	Missing, believed dead
Paul Hinder	Better known as the Dr Who writer Paul Leonard
Steve Brewster	Lost in Leeds
Louise	Dunno - but we could do with some more of her covers
Dr Skagra	Believed by some to be the infamous Nick Walters
D Hunter Bell	Better known as Ranger Doug
Sue Binfield	Has reverted to her former identity as Sue Mowbray
Ken Shinn	Still standing at the bus stop by the Arches reading a book

BRISTOL SF GROUP : FINAL PREDICTIONS FOR THE MILLENNIUM

Sue: Tina's cat will discover the secret of alchemy and finally manage to turn camomile tea into milk.

Nick: Doctor Who will be back on TV in 2000 and it will be great, and I'll write one of the scripts and become rich...Rich...RICH!!! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! And famous.

Brian: At midnight on 31st December 1999, the Earth will bounce, and start going round the other way, so that the Millenium bug will never be invoked: we'll have 1999 all over again, but backwards; we'll have to get used to driving in reverse, and reading from right to left, and there'll be a huge market for should mounting rear-view mirrors.

Simon: Cliff Richards will never have another Christmas Number 1

Doug: In the future Pete Crump and Steve Brewster will come back to Bristol (even though S.B. doesn't exist!)

The Mighty Criswell: For those interested in the future - be warned it is a dangerous place. I forsee momentous events: Croydon fandom will crumble and fall into the sea. "And Stuff" will win the Hugo five times whilst Plokta will win the Nova lots. Paul Kincaid, well we won't mention him...

Nathan: A huge fleet of tugboats will forcibly remove Belgium from the EC.

Sex : Sorry, SFX: Blake's Seven WILL Return! In 2000. It's true, it is TRUE! What do you mean, you don't read SFX?!

Christina: There will be no more issues of **Balloons Over Bristol**. Not ever. Finito!



... GO PHUJ!!!