



# Balloons Over Bristol

Editorials are a state of mind

And fanzines are delivered by the stork. Or rather, are left behind a gooseberry bush in the middle of town by the GPO. (Don't tempt them. Just don't.) What a pity we haven't quite mastered the system yet and still have to do some intermediate work involving a word-processor (which shall be nameless to protect the innocent), a Roneo 750 and a great deal of mental anguish. Never mind, on with the introductions:

The story so far -

Peter-Fred, having agreed to do the letter column and the cover, retreats to a Buddhist monastery leaving hapless co-editor Christina to make up a token fannish piece about something funny that happened at a hotel in Brighton this summer. Meanwhile the Bristol SF group on being appealed to for material can only produce 101 uses for a dead Bonny Langford, ninety nine of which affirm that she is as useless dead as alive. Up North in Scotland, Lilian Edwards politely declines the offer to become a third editor. In desperation, Christina takes a job with the Wessex Water Authority and finds herself incarcerated in a library indexing documents about paralytic shellfish poisoning.

Now read on -

"That girl's been in the library for thirty six days," says menopausal office sex-pot Mandy. "Do you think she's using the right deoderant?"

"She's trying to produce a fanzine," replies overweight typist Marigold Day. "Out of sticky labels, index cards and one of the more sophisticated microcomputer cataloguing packages on the market."

"Shouldn't some-one tell her that now we're being privatised staff aren't allowed to produce their own fanzines?"

"No, I thought we might use it for the next board meeting."

"Yes. Pity the new chairman can read. I say, Marigold, do you think if we ever make it out of this editorial they'll give us a part in Howard's Way?"

And now for something completely relevant -

(Or as relevant as you're likely to get in this editorial.) *Balloons Over Bristol* is the successor to *Yuppie Terrorist Reprisals Hit Bristol* (title discontinued due to dinkification), and which in turn was the successor to fanzines too numerous to mention (at least by Rob Hansen in his fan history). The current title owes its genesis entirely to Peter-Fred who rushed in from the garden one Sunday afternoon to say there were balloons out there again and wouldn't it make a jolly spiffing fanzine title (his very words, I swear. All Buddhists speak like that.) Bristol seems to be some sort of centre for hot air ballooning - the first day we arrived, we saw a colourful assortment of them floating past our kitchen window; and we've been seeing them up in the sky over the city on and off ever since. They actually come close enough to the garden for us to hear them adjusting the jets of gas that heat the air in the balloon and to discover that the balloonist don't just tie a knot in the end and hope for the best - as one of the more scientifically naive of this editorial team used to think.

Anyhow, to launch the fanzine, the Wessex Water Authority have agreed to take their balloon out of the stationery cupboard and mail drop 5,000 copies all over the city. Any remaining copies will be brought to Novacon and auctioned for charity by a celebrity DJ from BRMB in a live televised link up with the very first Radio 1 convention, taking place over the same weekend. Any fans still wanting the fanzine after so much hype will be sent off to see a psychologist, and then made to attend the next fifteen Worldcons.

# And Were You Even There ?

- a convention report

I could still hear the voices for days after. Every time I closed my eyes, I was back there in the fan room, chatting and laughing. A voice raised forcefully in the distance and I thought it was Greg Pickersgill. A giggle and I looked round for Lilian or Pam. At work, one of the guys in the legal department even began sounding like Colin Fine, of all people. My head was buzzing and my sleep-deprived body couldn't tell truth from illusion.

But now the voices have faded and there's only memories. Conversations that may or may not have happened. Reconstructions of how it might have been if only I had carried a notebook. But I'm not Owen Whiteoak, nova award winning chronicler to the gentry of fandom, and I can't promise to tell it how it was, at least not for you, babe. Only for me. And no, the earth didn't move.

"That's Michael Ashley," says Simon Ounsley, pointing to an inoffensive youth tagging along behind John Jarrold. The youth looks slightly grouchy, but otherwise nothing like one might imagine fandom's most famous miserable sod.

I wonder, briefly, if this is another figment of Simon's imagination. Perhaps he's psyching himself up to write a convention report again, and is already seeing ghostly versions of Ashley lurking in wait to give him sage if unwanted advice.

Indeed this manifestation of the Ashley figment does seem to have something he wishes to say to Simon. He sidles up, with a practiced D West-style sneer on his face, and suggests "How about getting in a round?"

Struck thus by his own personal Nemesis, Simon can only comply, even though the hotel beer prices are so high he will probably need to get a second mortgage on his home, or at least sell an Interzone subscription, in order to do so.

Left alone with me, Ashley resorts to abuse.

"What an incredibly stupid shirt," he sneers, pointing at poor inoffensive Owen Whiteoak who is busy with his daily activity of scanning all the national press for any headlines featuring the names of fans.

"What's wrong with it?"

"Nyeer. Lumberjack shirts. So duff."

I don't look convinced.

"Nigel really hates them," he explains, as if this confirms the matter.

"Oh well, if Nigel hates them..."

Could this be a sneer of my own that I'm developing? A mental image of Nigel Richardson, card-carrying chicken brother, flashes into my head. Surely he isn't, yes he is - he's wearing a blue lumberjack shirt.

Michael Ashley proceeds to tear apart, metaphorically at least, the other shirts in the room. But just when I'm beginning to get some idea of the Ashley standard of 'cool', he introduces a refinement.

"That red shirt would be really stupid," he says, pointing to Greg Pickersgill, "except that that guy's so aggressive, you know it's cool, really."

"Ah," I say, seizing on the point, "so it's not the shirt at all, but who's wearing it that counts."

"Nyeer," admits Ashley, with the look of one who rather wishes he's never begun the conversation in the first place.

"And so, if it was Greg wearing the lumberjack shirt instead of Owen," I proceed mercilessly, "it'd be okay?"

"Umm, yes."

This is too much for me. Shirts. Hogwash. "What's so cool about looking aggressive then? What's so cool about violence?"

Fortunately, before violence is committed, Simon Ounsley returns with the drinks and Ashley lapses into informing Simon that his shirt looks like a deckchair.

"And what's so great about your shirt anyway?" I ask, my sneer now definitely out of nappies and already running around looking for old ladies to vandalise.

"That's not my real shirt," Ashley explains hastily. "I haven't had time to change yet. I've been in the pub since I got here, trying to drink enough to face this crowd. My real shirt," he adds proudly, "is all black."

We take Ashley over to the table where Anne Wilson and Ashley Watkins are sitting.

"Ashley meet Ashley," I say, just because I want to get the line in.

"So you're the guy who's getting me a bad name!" accuses Ashley Watkins. The other Ashley mumbles something incoherent, but he can't even get his own back by criticising Ashley Watkins shirt, which is impeccably black.

People round the table have fanzines from Maureen Porter and we all begin to compare notes on the boxes ticked on the back page.

"She ticked three on ours," boasts Anne Wilson. "'You are receiving this because 'I like you', 'I haven't heard from you lately' and 'You fed my cats last Sunday'."

"We only got 'I thought you might be interested' and 'You've put up with me long enough in apas you might as well have this too'" I lament. "Obviously Maureen doesn't like us."

"She doesn't like me either," said Simon, "She only ticked ONE box on mine."

"Huh," said Michael Ashley, past-master in this kind of one-upmanship. "She didn't even give me a fanzine."

"It's like the paper-clips on Martin Tudor's fanzines," I theorise, remembering the debate over which colour meant Martin really fancied someone.

At this point, Maureen herself turns up to give out some more fanzines, unaware of the furor she's causing.

"Oh, you're all right, she likes you," I say leaning over to look at what they have ticked on the copy for Mike and Sherry who have just returned, glowing, from a New Era workshop, all set to sell trilogies to Interzone.

"Okay," says Maureen resignedly. "Give it here." She takes my copy and ticks another couple of boxes. "All right?"

"I've got four now," I announce proudly.

But Anne and Ashley are not to be beaten. They beckon Maureen over, and soon she's ticked every single box, including the one for special requirements such as vegetarianism, creche facilities and a room in the non-smoking part of the hotel.

"We've got seven," boasts Ashley Watkins.

Maureen walks away, muttering "How childish."

Sitting on the floor in the debris of the fan room, Martin Tudor produces a bottle of Lambrusco. (He's advanced from paper clips these days).

"From his tucker bag," I say to impress the Australians, or at least to make Pam Wells laugh. Pam and I were making so many Australian jokes before the convention that I didn't think I'd be able to keep a straight face in front of them. But since the first Australian I met was Justin Ackroyd who had me in a bearhug before I even saw him, it wasn't so difficult after all.

"What about the billabong?" I demand. "You gonna chunder in your billabong?"

Perry Middlemiss patiently explains what a billabong is, but it's too geographical for me to remember. I still think it means one of those letter boxes standing on a post in the middle of nowhere.

"So, are you and Lilian going to stand for GUFF?" Pam asks.

"I don't know. Not if it means turning into an auctioneer."

In the next room, an international team of fan fund winners are cavorting around selling curios like Rob Hansen's very first baked bean can and Jeanne Gomoll designer underwear.

"But Lilian can do all that," I say, safe in the knowledge that Lilian is upstairs asleep.

"Tomorrow there'll be a whole fresh new Lilian," says Simon Ounsley, who hasn't the heart to wake her.

Who's going to be the new Lilian, we wonder. Wendy Hirsh perhaps. Or Debbi Kerr. Simon, surprisingly enough, doesn't seem to want to commit himself on this matter.

"I know who I want as the new Christina Lake," I say, looking across the room. "Laura Wheatly or Angela Ingsole. Then I'd be sure of having a good time."

"Laura could be the new Lucy Huntzinger," suggests Pam.

"Or vice versa," I decide, seeing as it's Lucy who now looks like Laura. "We ought to send Laura to Australia to confuse people. Pity no-one in Australia's ever heard

of her."

"We hadn't heard of Justin and he still won GUFF."

Justin is on the floor, recovering from the exertions of the fan fund auction, having his back massaged by Catherine Crockett. Back rubs seem to have broken out all round the room under the instigation of Jon Singer.

"Bloody Justin," says Perry, just for the sake of form.

"Michael Ashley's thinking of standing for TAFF," says Simon. "On an anti-Pam Wells platform."

Pam rocks with gleeful laughter. "Really?"

"Only if he can get the right nominators." Simon reels off a list of names full of Langfords, Whites and Nielsen Haydens.

"Shee-it," says Pam. But a scheming glow appears in her eyes. "Maybe I can fix it, you know. Just so long as there's a race."

"Supposing he won? Can you imagine Michael Ashley at an American worldcon?"

"He'd probably stay in New York and spend the money on independent records."

"He'd probably stay at HOME and spend the money on independent records."

"Then auction them all for TAFF when they've all made it into the Top Forty and aren't cool any more."

"And who will be the new Michael Ashley?" I wonder.

In the day time Peter-Fred and I are in charge of running a merchandising desk to sell extra large sweatshirts to extra large Americans. Today it's sunny and I'm itching to go to the beach. I can't help it - childhood has conditioned in me the desire to go swimming every time the sun is out, and when the sea is only just across the road, then the reflex is too strong. Swim I must, or make everyone else suffer.

So we talk someone else into looking after the desk, and head out for the beach. But we soon discover that the seas of Brighton are almost as mean as its hotel managers and twice as dangerous. It's so windy that the breakers form an effective defensive wall against the slightly calmer waters beyond, and we have to fight them every inch of the way - one step forward, two backwards and waves right over your head if you don't move fast. I may like rough seas, but this one's playing it a bit too rough. After nearly being knocked under once or twice, I get the message and let myself be washed ashore. Peter and I sit exhausted on the very edge of the spray zone, like two battered survivors of a shipwreck, comparing our adventures, not sure if we'll ever be able to limp back to our towels.

Later while we're sunbathing we see the incongruous sight of a line of chicken brothers, including newest recruit Michael Ashley, weaving their way through the holiday-makers. They are dressed in their normal flamboyant holiday shades of black and grey, and of course have cans of beer in their hands. Nonetheless, I can't help thinking it's all terribly implausible, especially when they sit down a bit further along the beach from us, and throw stones in the water. Good God, they'll be taking their socks off next and paddling in the sea.

"Things must be bad in the fan room," I conclude.

"Yes," says Peter, "They've closed the bar for the afternoon again."

"Let's have a party," says Lilian as we look round our wonderful flat upstairs on the sixth floor of the Metropole.

Lilian writes out a list of who we're going to invite. Forty one people, we make it - but of course they won't all turn up. Will they? There's plenty of space but we've been told that the people in the flat adjoining our lounge aren't fans and so might not appreciate the niceties of the room party tradition. Still, they're not airline pilots - at least not as far as we know.

"Oh well," says Lilian, reluctantly abandoning her list, "maybe we'll just have a little party in the bedroom."

But to make sure the lounge is not entirely wasted, we invite people up for a fish and chip supper. D West, with his infallible nose for ENGLISH food is commissioned to lead the exhibition - though seeing the chip shop is in the same road as all the other restaurants, he is called upon to do little more than sneer at the extraneous Arnold Aiken we have acquired en route, a task which he shows a curious reluctance to perform, preferring to leave Lilian and I to garner the full benefit of the erudite Aiken conversation.

"Did YOU ask him?" Lilian accuses Steve Higgins after we finally lose Arnold somewhere in the hotel corridors on the way up to the flat.

"Of course not," shrugs Steve. What kind of person do you take me for, his expression says.

"He just attached himself," explains Hazel Ashworth. "One moment it was us leaving the fan room together, and the next he was there, acting as if we'd asked him along. As if we'd said, Arnold, please come down the chip shop with us."

"It will probably count as our good turn for the convention," decides Simon, who can afford to be magnanimous since he hadn't had to talk to Arnold.

Peter-Fred and Steve try to make the cassette player work, but it seems to have a loose connection and nothing happens.

"It's just like my one at home," says Lilian and kicks it a few times. After that it works perfectly. We examine the records provided with the flat, just in case the cassette player should try to fight back, but none of its very inspiring.

"How about the Best of Engleburt Humperdinck?" I offer. "Or Chitty Chitty Bang." But there are no takers.

We're tempted to start the party there and then, but bad counsels prevail and we decide to wait till the fan room bar closes. Simon runs around moving chairs and suitcases in a vain attempt to make the bedroom look more enticing.

"If we keep the lounge door closed and put all the drinks in the bedroom, no-one will go in the lounge," he says hopefully.

"Maybe," I agree. But we both secretly know it's futile. What's the use of having a whole flat to party in if you're only going to use the bedroom?

By one o'clock in the morning, word seems to have got round. Even so, when Peter, Simon and I go upstairs to get things organised, there's a moment or two when we believe no-one will find their way up to such an obscure corner of floor six. Then Lilian returns with Mike and Sherry, Steve and Laura stagger tiredly down the corridor from their nearby flat and four Americans turn up, one of whom seems to know Simon - slightly. After that there's no stopping them. People we know, people we invited, people we've never seen before in our life all pour in thick and fast.

"Shall we open the other room?" says Lilian the success of the party going to her head.

"If you like," I say, figuring that with the number of people we have in the flat, the neighbours will hear us no matter what. So we might as well enjoy ourselves.

The party really is a success. It's full of people I'd like to talk to, except that I'm too comfortable on the bed talking to whoever's nearest. But it's nice to know they're there. And just to prove it's a good party, Dave Langford with his unerring instinct for a good time (or does he have a cyberpunk style bulletin service wired into his brain via the hearing aid?) ambles in to sample the proceedings.

But within almost seconds, literally, of Langford's arrival, a distressed-looking Lilian comes into the bedroom. "We've got to stop," she says. "The hotel manager's been on the phone. The neighbours are complaining." But after all, it's the final proof of success. "We've been closed down," she announces.

Obediently, the party files away, evaporating into the corridor, till suddenly I find myself alone in an empty bedroom, holding half a glass of Lambrusco that I no longer want.

It's real party shock. One moment everyone was there, next there's only me and Peter. Even Simon and Lilian have gone to follow the party.

We wander around picking up empty ash trays and half-finished drinks. It's like some fannish Marie-Celeste. Everything's been abandoned just as it was before the mysterious tragedy occurred. There is even a record still on the turntable. 'Greatest Hits From the Seventies' featuring the likes of Abba and Smokey. Surely not put there by those doyens of musical taste the Chicken Brothers? Perhaps we will never know.

The Hugo ceremony is less boring than I expect. It's quite amusing to see the sf and fannish community playacting at putting on a real award ceremony - just like the ones they have on the TV. Not that all award ceremonies aren't playacting - it's just less convincing when you know the people concerned. Only Pate Lyon fails to join in, jumping on the stage in jeans and trainers instead of suit and bow-tie - but then perhaps he's playacting too - at being the non-conformist artist.

A Japanese duo is engaged as a comedy turn, and bowing and smiling, pretend they

are there to present awards. The audience only begin to catch on when they reveal that in fact they have no awards to give. The translators have insisted on keeping them. To make up for this though, one of the Japanese is given a Big Heart award and everyone beams. All happy again. Why not give all the audience Big Hearts too, and isn't the world a wonderful place.

We all clap loudly when someone says the ceremony is over.

After the awards, it's time to crash the New Era party. Lillian really is looking like the new Lillian in a black mini-skirt. Peter and I look exactly like what we are - hangers-on, trying to get into the party. But Simon flashes his invitation card, and says, they're with me, and amazingly, they let us all in.

Once inside, we realise that most of the rest of the party don't have invites either.

"What are you doing here?" I say to Bruce Saville, disbelievingly.

"Press," he smirks. "You can get in anywhere with these badges."

We help ourselves to champagne and little nibbly things on toast. Mike Christie and Sherry Coldsmith appear shepherded along by Algys Budrys, being treated like celebrities because they were on the New Era workshop. We mutter among ourselves about Scientology and brainwashing, but this doesn't stop me taking one of their starter packs for writers and asking about the workshops.

Time passes in this glittering throng. Celebrities crowd past and I'm nearly sat upon by Chris Claremont.

"There isn't any more champagne left," Simon reports disconsolately, wandering back from the bar.

"A waitress just topped ours up."

"Meep," says Simon plaintively and goes off to buy himself a pint.

Outside on the seafront, the first of the fireworks goes off. We all crowd up to the picture window, and press our noses against it to watch the pretty colours. Cocktail party muzak, champagne and the entertainment on the seashore temporarily go to my head. I feel like a character in a film, the member of an incredibly rich, effete class of people, poised on the edge of extinction.

Then people start arguing about which colour of sparks cost the most to make, and I remember we're only a bunch of smart-assed fans freeloading a dubious publicity party.

In fact, the real party breaks out at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day (and if it wasn't the eleventh, it certainly felt like it). The rumbling niggles and dissatisfactions of the convention have coalesced against the hotel manager. At the Gophers party, they are auctioning off the slogans. Down in the fan room, the Mexican punch is a-brewing at last, and Talking Heads are pounding off the p.a. The spark has been struck and something is going to burn - probably the Metropole.

We dance. We drink. Someone blows up a durex. Kate Solomon photographs Dave Langford committing indiscretions with Abi Frost. William McCabe dances with an animated but oblivious Teresa Nielsen-Hayden. Martin Smith makes love to the speaker stand.

The party has turned into a series of images fabricated for a John Byrne video.

But in the end, Pam has the scoop of the night.

"Guess what, the chicken brothers aren't the chicken brothers any more."

"What are they then?"

"Wait for it... you're not going to believe this. You really aren't. They're - the fun people!"

And so, the process that began on a beach in Brighton - or was it a basement at Novacon? - has come to fruition. The chicken brothers are no more. The convention is no more.

And now even the voices have faded. All there is is a picture. A picture which won't move as time rushes away from it. A picture which gradually loses its detail and significance until you wonder if it ever concerned you at all. Whether it was the fanroom at Yorcon III or the programme at Mexican, and were you even there?

But already it's time to get out the gear for the next convention, and if there is a fannish continuous present perhaps I'll find it again. And if not, then maybe it was never worth having in the first place.

# One Night in Paris...

...is much like a night in any other place. But the days, ah, they were fun.

I'm not in the habit of nipping over to Paris for the weekend. However, Christina is doing an M.A. in Librarianship, and has a degree in French, so it seemed a good idea to one of her tutors to send her to a French library for a while. And so it came to pass that she went off to the library of the Pompidou Centre in Paris for the month of May, with the shared use of a flat just across the square thrown in. So I had to visit her, didn't I? It was too good a chance to miss.

I had plenty of holiday spare (relatively speaking), but every day of it is precious, so I decided to \*fly\* in order to save time. Quel extravagance! Quel probleme, too, since I've never booked a plane ticket before. In fact the only time I've flown in recent years was on a package holiday to Spain, and Kate Solomon bought the tickets that time. So I went to see Sheila, the secretary at work who deals with all the travel and accomodation for our busy jet-setting executives, to ask for a bit of advice. A bit of advice became a query, which became an offer to do the booking, and it turned out that she was perfectly happy to arrange the whole thing; I just made out a cheque to INMOS and she would do the rest.

Actually it wasn't quite that simple, since I had to decide which flights to take. I'd originally hoped to go from Bristol Airport, going out on thursday evening and back on monday evening, getting four days in Paris at the cost of two days holiday (since I wasn't going at either of the bank holidays). I couldn't come back any later because I'd arranged to go to a conference on the tuesday, but it turned out that, although I could go out from Bristol, all the seats back were booked on sunday and monday evenings (there being only one flight a day!). Tricky... so I decided to go from Heathrow instead. Sheila even wrote out a railway ticket for me to get there!

Unfortunately the earliest plane I could catch and still pay the 'cheap' fare was at 8.30 p.m., which meant I would arrive in Paris very late, since the French are an hour ahead of us (obviously a more advanced country). I didn't really appreciate this until Christina rang me to check the details, and by then it was too late. Ah well.

Since I was going on British Airways, I finished up at Terminal 4 of Heathrow; you know, the new one. It's great! Concord parked outside, a brand-new Volvo parked inside (how did that get there??), moving pavements, and lots of chairs for me to sit and read 'The Glamour' while I waited for my plane to go.

Eventually, it went. Unfortunately I didn't get a window seat, but I still enjoyed the flight. The sensation of power on take-off was terrific. I love to see the earth drop away, and to look down on clouds, but the window was too far away for much of that, so I read my book, and marvelled at how the cabin crew could give everyone something to eat and drink in the space of a 60-minute flight, or even why they bothered. Then came the landing, the ground rushing up, the wheels hitting the runway, a powerful deceleration, another country; I don't know how anybody worries about flying, I'm far too excited to have the time!

After that, all the tedious bits of picking up luggage, immigration control, and finding the bus to Paris. It's raining, and the ticket is 350F, but never mind, I'm there! The bus drives on the wrong side of the road, and drops me off out of sight of a metro station. I put on my kagoule, and consult the local map kindly provided on the bus-stop. Guessing, I head up the road, sorry, rue, and find signs for the metro. Close inspection reveals the metro itself; I descend. Fortunately I remember that metro lines are labelled on a different principle from the Underground; you go in the direction of the terminus, rather than 'east' or 'west' on a particular line. I change at *Chatalet*, which turns out to be a mistake; I have to walk miles with my suitcase to get onto the



new line. Finally I emerge from *Rambuteau*, and am confronted with a jumble of vast, multi-coloured pipes; the Pompidou Centre, where else?

Now the hard part: finding the flat. With a sigh, I pick up my case and set off around the square, going into all the corners in case I miss the 'really small street, just off the square'. It could be anywhere. Fortunately it isn't, in fact it really is 'opposite the Centre' as described. I find the door, and have to fumble for my note of the entry code. Once through the outer door I can press the bell; the lock on the next door buzzes, but I am too slow with my case to push it before the buzzing stops. No matter, Christina has come down to meet me; we embrace; I have arrived.

The next day was Friday, and Christina had to work. Well, not *work* exactly; it turned out that, rather than being given something specific to do, she was being passed from one department to the next, where they would explain what they did, and how, and why, and then run out of things to say to her slightly before she was due to move on to the next area. However, she was expected to turn up, and so I was left to my own devices for a while. I explored some of the streets around the Centre and found, amongst other things, a giant clock in the form of a battle scene between a man and a sea monster. Later on Christina took me there on the hour, when, with a great hissing and wheezing of bellows the fight actually took place! There were a couple of guys selling dodgy-looking cassettes from a table in the street, but since even buying things from a normal shop taxes my twelve-year-old 'O'-level French, I decided to leave them alone, and went off to meet Christina and her flatmate Carolyn for lunch in the Pompidou Centre. They had been given meal tickets for the staff canteen, but taking me in there in the middle of the day seemed a bit too blatant, so I bought a few things from the public side and met them at a table, where Christina shared her free lunch with me.

After lunch they had another department to go to, so I wandered round the centre. It is an amazing place. Three floors are taken up by the BPI, an open access reference library, designed for ordinary people to use to educate themselves in any subject they choose; and they do, they do. It's very popular, judging by the number of people in it. It has all the latest gadgets too; not only microfiche and videos, but laser disks and CD ROMS (although the interactive encyclopedia on such a disk was all in English, so presumably wasn't home grown!). There was an impressive exhibition about the development of spoken French; admittedly Joan of Arc's accent didn't sound all that different from Napoleon's to me, but then it's all French as far as I'm concerned. I asked an IBM PC for all the occurrences of 'et' in the works of Victor Hugo (or somebody like that), and walked off while it was still trying to list the first 500. All good stuff. Above the library is the modern art museum, but there was a charge for going in and since I didn't have much time I left it out. There were various other exhibitions etc. around the building, and hordes of people milling about. Is the Barbican as popular, I wonder? Or the Tate? Somehow I doubt it.

When Christina got off 'work' we went to see the new science museum/expo at La Villette. We found an impressively huge building, less architecturally radical than the Pompidou Centre but interesting nonetheless. Inside there were model space shuttles hanging from the ceiling, and many delights promised upstairs. Carrying on through, however, brought us out into a large park, dominated by a vast silver sphere, which we discovered is a film theatre. Performances of 'The Origin of the Universe' and 'The Evolution of Man' (or somesuch) were sold out until the next day, so we went back into the main building and played with a zippy but rather superficial interactive video display offering information on 'Biotechnology', 'New Materials' and so forth. Eventually we realised that to see the bulk of the exhibitions we had to buy an entry-card, but as the place was just closing it didn't seem worth it. A pity, as I'm sure it would have been fascinating, even if it is all in French.

After dinner - brazenly taken in the staff canteen, where I followed Christina and disguised my inadequate French by ordering 'le même chose' - we admired the view from the top, which takes in practically all of the major landmarks of Paris. Paris differs from most big cities in that the tall office blocks are some distance from the centre, and nearly all the older buildings (apart from those that are famous) are built to the

same height of four or five stories. So the Pompidou Centre commands an excellent view despite being only slightly taller than the buildings around it.

On Saturday we rose fairly late. I went out to do a bit of shopping and attempt to contact our friends Dave and Jenny, who by an amazing coincidence happened to be in Paris while Christina was there. That I was there on the same weekend was less of a coincidence. In fact I'd arranged that we would contact them and do something together, but this turned out to be more difficult than I expected, because the telephones wouldn't co-operate. Only by fetching Christina did I discover that those in the Pompidou Centre simply wouldn't phone that far! Those in the street were no use, because they all (without exception, it seemed) required a phone-card, which we didn't have, and didn't want to pay for since even Christina's stay was too short to justify it. So we set off across town to the central post office, where a few coin operated phones remained.

Of course, by this time there was no-one in. The post office is in the Parisian equivalent of The City; dead boring, and dead altogether on a Saturday; so we tried to think of somewhere else to go. Eventually we decided to get some lunch in the big new shopping centre at Les Halles. Using our map we wound our way out of the dead zone and back to civilisation. Or so it seemed...

We turn a corner into Rue Les Halles; not far to go now. I notice a neon sign saying 'Sex Shop', and think little of it. I see another saying 'Peep Show', and begin to wonder. I see another - 'Strip', and another - 'Nude...'. They are all around us. By now even I have realised we are in the red light district; so that woman standing around looking bored must be...and there's another....in fact, there's one leaning against nearly every pillar between one shop and the next! I am astonished. It is broad daylight. I try to imagine what it must be like at night; and fail. We hurry on down the road, passing a middle-aged woman who is obviously just waiting for someone, and I wonder how long she can stand there before being accosted. We turn another corner, and there is a concrete outcrop of the shopping centre, comforting in its ordinaryness.

Lunch was a sandwich, shared (not so frugal when you remember what French bread is like!), and pain au chocolat, followed by some delicious Belgian chocolates. Refreshed, we set off to find a comic shop.

French 'comics' are not like English or American comics, but I'm not going to go into all that. Ask Steve Green. Suffice it to say that there are a lot of them, they're very good, and it's probably just as well that my French isn't good enough or I'd have been sorely tempted. Christina was very restrained, and only bought the latest in the series she collects ('Le Vagabond des Limbes'). There were imported American comics there too, and even odd things like translated Andy Capp strips. What can the French possibly make of Andy Capp? Is that where they get their picture of the English?

Groggy from comic-book overdose, we stagger into a café and sit in the window, watching the world go by. Visiting the toilets reveals something interesting: a coin-operated pay-phone. So *that's* where the coin phones are - in the cafés! I phone the place where Dave and Jenny are staying, and this time there is someone in, and I arrange on the spot to go over and have dinner there that evening.

They were visiting Sue and Ian, an English couple living in Juvisy, a southern suburb of Paris. To reach it we had to take one of the urban trains, the R.E.R.. We'd seen some odd-looking trains on one or two occasions, and now we found ourselves on one. A double-decker train no less! We braved a smokey atmosphere just for the fun of sitting. We were met at the station by Sue and Jenny, and led through a cloudburst to Sue and Ian's flat, which was quite nice but rather lacking in furniture (they hadn't been there all that long). Jenny told me such horror stories about the flight she and Dave had taken from Bristol I was very glad to have gone from Heathrow.

The early part of the evening was dominated by Thomas, Dave and Jenny's toddler, but eventually he went to sleep and we had to amuse ourselves by having dinner, talking, and playing with the Minitel. Minitel is like the British Prestel only better; much,

much better. The terminals are *free*, and so everybody uses it. When I say everybody, I don't just mean the people; public corporations and businesses subscribe to the other end in large numbers. Sue showed us how we could look up train times and even book seats on the train, and similarly for planes, but that was only scratching the surface. It has thousands of uses, including arranging sexual liaisons, which is the subject of a big scandal in France at the moment; but you can't make an omelette with breaking a few oeufs, as they say.

Sunday dawned fairly bright. The customary breakfast of rolls saved from the previous night's free dinner was missing, since we'd eaten out all Saturday, so we fasted and went to Mass in Notre Dame instead. Christina had taken me to Mass once before, but this time was even less comprehensible, being in French (unfortunately we failed to pick up one of the English service sheets). However the setting and the singing were very beautiful, and the occasion very peaceful despite the constant stream of tourists round the edges. The point near the end where everyone turns round and shakes hands with the people around them I found quite moving. Afterwards we went around as tourists ourselves for a while.

After lunch we went to the Louvre, following a rumour that entrance was free on Sundays. It was, but we paid our way in shoe leather alone. The museum is vast, and we walked round most of it. Yes, we did see the Mona Lisa, which wasn't as difficult as I'd expected, though we didn't bother to get to the front of the crowd around it. I was more impressed by the Rembrandts, and some of the antiquities, such as the stone engraved with the Code of Hammaburi, the earliest known set of laws.

Culture-shocked and exhausted, we staggered back along the banks of the Seine and spent the evening writing letters and postcards.

Monday; my last day. Just to be a little different, we went to Samaritaine, a large department store, and had a look around. There was lots of stuff I couldn't afford, some I could, but couldn't carry, and quite a bit I didn't want anyway. However I bought some food for my journey, and Christina bought an Asterix notebook. We looked at some more comic books, then set off to find a restaurant for lunch. ("What? A whole restaurant? You must have been *really* hungry!" Well, not quite.) Despite the pride the French take in their cooking, in the end it was a Chinese restaurant that tempted us inside. It's not that we were *bored* with French food, you understand, but a change seemed like a good idea; and it was fairly cheap. We had the 39F set menu, and the food was excellent, especially the banana fritters!

Little time left now; what to do? On impulse we decide to go to the Eiffel tower, even though Christina has to be back at the BPI for 4pm. Back on the metro, we pass the now-familiar stations; Chatalet, where hundreds of people change; the Louvre, with selected antiquities displayed on the platforms; and President Roosevelt, incongruously American. Walking hand-in-hand along the road we catch glimpses of the famous tower above the trees. Then: there it is, grasping the ground, reaching for the heavens. Standing beneath it, looking up, we watch droplets of water falling in slow motion. I catch one shimmering globule; but captured it is just moisture. We have no time to ascend, and so must leave this monument to one man's genius, and ascend past the Museum of Man to the metro at Trocadero.

Back in the flat I pack, slowly, having plenty of time, and read more of *The Glamour*. For a while I am drawn from one unfamiliar world into another, then Christina returns and one spell is broken. I leave the flat for the last time, and say farewell to the Pompidou Centre. We pass the fresh-juice seller, standing all day in a giant plastic orange, watching the passers-by who don't want juice in this cold, wet weather. Holding hands on the metro, the sations go by unnoticed this time. All too soon comes the Air France office, and the airport bus, which carries me away. I am sad. Goodbye Chris. Farewell Paris. A bientot.

# One Month in Paris

is not quite the same as a night.

Not the same at all, especially if you have to share a flat, and to a very real extent your life, with someone you've never met before. Sharing a flat, and to a very real extent your life, for a month with someone you've never met before is an interesting experience. It makes you realise what a delicate thing friendship is. And how little it depends on actually liking people. I liked Carolyn, my flatmate. Liked her from the start. But this didn't really make us friends. To be friends, you have to become used to each other, read the other person's reactions, accept their right to coexist in your world. This takes time - or at least it does for me.

When I started at Loughborough University last October it took at least a term to become really comfortable with people. But there at least you had your own space in which to do it - your own room and the choice of whom you associated with and when. In Paris, Carolyn and I had a two room flat where we might have been sharing a bedroom (and even a bed) if there hadn't been a single bed in the living room too. (Since I value my privacy, I opted to sleep separately - even though it meant leaving all my clothes in the bedroom (which henceforth became Carolyn's room by right of prior occupancy) and having to use the en-suite bathroom - though thankfully not the toilet - by prior arrangement only) Aside from living so closely together, we were also in each other's company for a large part of the time, during the day in the library and at meals twice a day in the BPI restaurant. The only time I escaped, and I'm sorry to say that most of the time it did feel like escape, was in the evening when I was free to research my dissertation.

At the same time, I felt guilty. Carolyn spent her evenings phoning her husband. It was her first visit to Paris - she'd expected better than this, I was sure. The trouble was, I didn't know what Carolyn liked doing. Did she secretly hanker to spend her evenings in Parisian cafés, spending a fortune on overpriced drinks (the wine may be cheap in the supermarkets, but not out on the streets)? Or would she think it too dangerous for two women alone, or not 'nice' in some other way? We couldn't go to the cinema as she didn't understand French well enough. When I put the television on out of curiosity, Carolyn just got bored. Even the sight-seeing we did at the weekends was a bit difficult. Carolyn didn't like art, which cut out half the places to go in Paris, wasn't particularly interested in history and got tired from walking round too long in the high heeled shoes she liked wearing. The first weekend seemed to pass more slowly than the week.

Having conversations with Carolyn was an interesting experience too. She had the ability to launch into enormous monologues where the openings for one to add to the conversation were few and far between. One evening I heard the history of all her cats, another the full details of her wedding. Perhaps I was meant to supply monologues of my own; perhaps I just needed to be more aggressive about seizing my share of the conversation. I didn't mind - it made the time pass - and if the thought occasionally crossed my mind, am I really interested? I ignored it. At least when we talked we had the illusion of being friends. It was the silences that worried me more. Was Carolyn unhappy? Had I failed her? Why was I such poor company? And my interest in what I might have been doing faded.

But we made it through to the end. There were times when I feared I would do something unforgiveable. Let loose my growing resentment that she had the bedroom - when I was the one who woke up first every morning and had to wait about to use the bathroom and get my clothes. Or tell her how stupid she was to come to Paris with more luggage than she could carry - was it my problem that she couldn't work out how to get back to the airport? Or even get annoyed over the fact that she *had* to call her husband every evening, without fail - not to mention the sheer unfairness of it that she'd received three letters from him before I'd even had one from Peter (his got lost). But, as I said, we made it. We enjoyed Versailles together, drank wine together and almost came to some kind of understanding. Reached the stage where we knew enough about our differences to see beyond them to where the common ground lay. It could have been friendship if we'd known each other over a longer time, with more people.

It could have been friendship - but it wasn't, quite.

# Balloon Post

*The end is the beginning, and the last shall be first; so let's start with Mike Abbott, who thought his letter would be too late, little knowing just how long we could take to get this issue underway:*

Well, as they sometimes say for films, this is a LoC nearly a year in the making, on and off. ((But what was the budget?)) It is now late, and probably too late, but I thought I ought to send it off now I've written most of it, since I did think Teen Yuppie Terrorists on Dope was fun.

*Evidently Mike is referring to our last fanzine, since he goes on to say:*

What I know about Alvin Toffler is this: I began to watch a video (perhaps I'm a Yuppie too..) of a television programme he presented about the Third Wave, but I got called away while he was still introducing the basic concepts, and giving the impression that he was about to back them up with hard facts. It seemed like a very good introduction, but I never got around to watching the rest. Possibly because the introductory bit had already taken two of the three hours of the programme, and I couldn't see any great reason why the programme was actually going to get on to any of the hard stuff.

Maybe the third wave will be like this itself: an awful lot of light introductory pieces of technology without it ever getting on to the serious business of changing people's lives at all.

*I vaguely remember seeing the start of that programme too - though perhaps I actually saw the whole thing! Rather non-third wave William McCabe addressed us thus:*

The questionable use of subtitles.

There are a lot of questions. Why are some of your titles spelt differently on the back cover and why is Christina always credited? Why is there a difference of three months between the issue date and the postmark? Has Shep really done something disgusting to have his name crossed out and mine written instead? What is a Yuppie and who cares anyway? And if they do - why?

The use of questionable subtitles.

*Well, it might all be an infinitely devious plot by Martian Communists disguised as Filofaxes; or then again it might just be editorial incompetence. We may come to Shep later, if he doesn't come up with the readies pretty damn quick. As for Yuppies, Judith Hanna tells us that characteristic identifying marks include:*

- The Filofax
- The Amstad PCW ((Shurly shome mishtake?))
- Shopping at Habitat and Libery's
- The Garlic Press

*She also sent us some issues of 'Yuppiewatchnews', proving that not all CND staff are as ideologically sound as one might assume:*

"For our 10th issue we decided to do an in depth EXPOSE of a short period in the life of a well known Yuppie.

## A Weekend in the Life of ELAINE JAY

Friday: Spent a pleasant SOIRÉE CHEZ ELLE with an AMI and two bottles of

BEAUJOLAIS NOUVEAU.

Saturday: Has a small DINNER PARTY at one of HAMPSTEAD'S more fashionable FRENCH RESTAURANTS. Later returned to her abode for an evening watching ARTY FRENCH FILMS.

Sunday: A quite JOURNÉE at MATER and PATER's place out of town.

Monday: Our reporter can reveal that Elaine's movements today will be as follows.

She will call in at the CANADIAN EMBASSY to meet DADDY for LUNCHEON in a small BISTRO in GROSVENOR SQUARE. From there she will move to LIBERTY for a spot of Christmas shopping. Later she will take a CAB to SLOANE SQUARE for an EVENING on the KINGS ROAD.

Elaine Jay has a STRIPPED PINE WINE RACK in her kitchen, full of BEAUJOLAIS NOUVEAU and good VINTAGE MUSCADET.

*They also advertise:*

A conference for all anti-yuppies will be held early in the new year on CONVERSION OF GARLIC PRESSES INTO SOCIALLY USEFUL ITEMS - organiser Martin Jones will be talking about the need for leper lotion applicers, a new development in the conversion field.

*Sharon Hall finds writing Locs difficult, even though she has a word-processor and isn't a Yuppie:*

I've been telling myself for ages that I really ought to write you a loc re TNH ((The fanzine Christina co-edits with Lilian Edwards)) or Yuppie Reprisals or both, but have been putting it off. The trouble is that as soon as I try to write a loc I can't get it out of my head that I'm writing to a 'zine' and not a 'person', the upshot of which is that I end up writing a dreadful stilted article type letter, or I get a severe case of writer's block and end up with a blank sheet of paper.

*I know exactly how she feels. I can't write locs either - even writing the loccol is difficult enough. There doesn't even seem to be any consensus as to what a loc ought to be, so it's always a bit of a stab in the dark. So Sharon isn't doing too badly, even though she's relatively new to fandom:*

If I'm honest my response to TNH runs along the lines of: 'that was a really interesting/amusing/whatever article/cartoon - but I'm not quite sure I understood it'. I continually get the feeling that there's something just out of reach that I'm missing. So, I either show my ignorance and be damned, or laugh along with the crowd because that's what you're supposed to do, or keep quiet. Thus far, I'm keeping quiet, and hoping that I'll acquire the taste and/or background knowledge to properly appreciate a fannish fanzine.

Yuppie Reprisals fared rather better in the comprehensibility - relatability stakes. I particularly appreciated Peter-Fred's armchair reviews, especially in the light of the above. And whereas 'The Cure' aren't my idea of heaven (I'm writing this to the strains of Joni Mitchell), standing in the rain listening to one of your favourite bands must rate as a plus experience. I hate to admit it, but I've never been and listened to anyone live, in the rain or otherwise; something which I intend to rectify in the near future - as soon as Bryan and I can get our musical tastes sufficiently aligned.

*Even long-time fan Owen Whiteoak liked the Armchair Reviews:*

Thanks for giving me a copy of the Bristol groupzine, which I enjoyed reading, even if Peter-Fred did only review one of the three hundred fmz's I've produced in the last six months (well, at least people remember my name now. Pity they all think it's the brand name on a toothbrush). Have you considered offering your body to

Maureen to review fanzines for Matrix? (*The former, perhaps - the latter, never!*) These reviews were good, and Matrix does desperately need to have fanz reviews again, before the great unheard of the BSFA forget the very existence of fandom! Concise, capsule-type reviews are just what are needed, too, rather than exhaustive, in-depth critiques. Oh well, just an idea.

*Any volunteers? I fear I must decline, since Skel has penetrated my disguise:*

I don't have a lot to say about Yuppie Terrorist Reprisals Hitting Bristol, which in itself may be a good thing. I do though want to tell you that I enjoyed the fanzine, even though most of it wasn't speaking directly to my own particular concerns. Oddly, the one bit that ought to have been of most interest to me, Peter-Fred's fanzine reviews, I thought the least successful part of the fanzine.

I think this was because of his attitude of basic disinterest. To do this sort of thing properly you need to want to do it, not because you think you ought to do it. You do it because fanzines are important to you, because you care about fanzines both in theory and practice. Peter-Fred tackled it like some grudging task, almost like some fannish rite-of-passage that he felt obligated to go through, possibly in the futile hope that when he came out of the other side he would be a changed person, a fully fledged adult in the tribe of fandom, able to finally to appreciate all this weird stuff that currently seems like an alien language to him.

Needless to say, it doesn't work like that. Peter-Fred should accept that he simply isn't very interested in fanzines. Then he can ignore them and write about the things that do interest him.

*Skel has hit the nail on the head. Like Sharon, I sometimes feel a bit of an outsider in fandom, and I find myself wondering just why 'real fans' do some of the things they do. So, I try them out myself, hoping to gain understanding by doing; sometimes this works, and sometimes it doesn't. Fanzine reviews remain a mystery, but I think I'm getting the hang of fanzine production (famous last words). Particularly since Owen responded to our appeal for a duplicator manual! He also had some things to say about sf groups:*

I found Chris's story of the Bristol group interesting and strangely familiar, both from the way FORTH developed over the first few years and also from accounts of other local groups. It's odd how people can seem really keen and show up regularly for years, and then just suddenly vanish for no apparent reason. By now FORTH itself is just a few people who turn up on the pub each week, chatting just like any other group of friends in a pub, but with little interest in, or involvement with, fandom. And even though all of us have been going along for years (our solitary poster in the SF bookshop hasn't brought any new faces for years, and none of us can raise the enthusiasm to take any other dynamic steps to introduce fresh New Blood; we've tried that before, and while occasionally interesting and compatible people arrive, it's far more common for those who show up to be dull and/or obnoxious, so we tend to lose heart somewhat - though the group could undoubtedly use a good shake-up) where was I before I started this parenthesis? Oh, yes, even though all of us have been going to pub meetings for years, it's odd to observe that a hierarchy still exists - the remaining founder members, Jim Darroch and myself are distinctly Looked Up To and no-one else would dream of doing anything stfln or group-based or gasp! organising anything without seeking approval from us older and wiser heads. This is awful.

*Currently the Bristol Group doesn't even have a poster in the local SF bookshop, partly because it seems so unfriendly, and partly because we're still trying to find a better venue. However we have had some 'new blood' as a result of our display at Conspiracy, some of whom are keen to see the group do more; fortunately they don't expect to sit back and have it all done for them.*

*Christina's account of the group's history brought back memories to Bill*

*Bains:*

Ah, but your review of the exciting history of the Bristol SF group holds one fatal flaw. It doesn't mention me. Oh, yes it does. But not very much, and the ink at that point is nearly illegible. Is this deliberate? Am I really that transparent? Anyway, you did not mention the dramatic mode of arrival of the Bains/Raggett contingent. I will regale you with it now as if you did not know, so you can pass it on to your readers as if they did care. ((Thanks, Bill)) Not for us the quiet, careful approach of looking at two groups in a pub and trying to decide which was the Bristol SF group. Anyway when we arrived there were four bunches of heads hovering over beer glasses, giving us only a 25% chance of being right. So I stand firmly in the middle of the floor and say 'Excuse me, is anyone here from the Bristol Science Fiction Group?' in my best lecturing voice. Dave just smirks (he is used to me making a lot of noise), Jane and Jenny cringe, three groups look at me as if I am mad and one says 'Yes!'. No trouble at all. We sit down, explain we are from Bath and Bristol. 'Ah,' says one member of the group, 'you must be Dave and Jenny Raggett.' We stare, for it is true. 'And, er, are you William Bains by any chance?'. We stare even more, for it is also true. The speaker apologises for not knowing Jane's name, which considering that she has never seen any of us before, and we have not the foggiest idea of who she is, is probably excusable. And who is this telepathic fan? One Christina Lake. She had read a few bits in Ansible and seen the back of Dave's socks at Novacon or something and had, with Arisian mental powers, put 2 and 2 together and come up with 10<sup>15</sup>. After that, what could we so but go away and have children?

*Well, you could have, er, oh well, it's too late now in any case, since you seem to have done it.*

*The one item which attracted even more criticism than the fanzine reviews was (you guessed it) the other one by me; 'Confessions of a Reluctant Technophobe'. It probably should have been called 'Reluctant Confessions of a Technophobe', since it was included (at the last minute) only because my contribution to the jointly-edited fanzine was so slim. Admittedly, Martin Smith said:*

I agree with Peter-Fred on technophobia...

*and Terry Broome added :*

...gosh, yes. Let me quote a little - these are relevant: "What is the use of running when we're not on the right road?" German Proverb. "The usual trade and commerce is cheating all round by consent" Thomas Fuller.

*However Geogre Bondar was upset by my slur on CD players:*

¿How could you write such a thing, Peter-Fred? A person in your line of work has no right to be a technophobe. And I'll thank you to stop knocking CD players: I waited 5 years for them to appear. ((Since it is well known that the chances of an object as complex as a CD player to appear spontaneously are next to infinitesimal you're lucky not to have waited a lot longer, Geogre!)) Seriously, though, the article is a bit weak. Anyone can make vague remarks about things being wrong, but ¿where are the answers?

*Answers to some of the criticisms I levelled at the ~~rich~~ poor drug companies came in large quantities from Charles Stross, who labour under the misconception that the article was written by Christina, but, as a qualified pharmacist, is otherwise well informed:*

Item: 'Drug companies employ most of their scientists to copy the other drug companies' most profitable products...' wrong. Okay, some do; but what you miss is



that the patent life on a new pharmaceutical is twenty years from the day the compound is first discovered in a test tube. Given that it takes, on average, fifteen years and £70M to get the drug on the market, that leaves a mere five years to recoup all that development money and show a profit. A large number of generic manufacturers with no R&D commitment jump on the products when they come out of patent, and as a result the parent company is unlikely to show much profit after the patent period expires. So there's a desperate fight to stay ahead and develop something new, for which a market exists, among those few firms which specialise in R&D of new products. This means that new, copycat products (such as a new penicillin-based antibiotic) are expensive and unlikely to make a profit unless absolutely superior to the previous products; and the CSM refuses to grant a Product Licence to a drug that is not demonstrably more safe than equivalent ones already available in that field. The result? Drugs are withdrawn, drugs are launched... and the new ones are always less toxic, have less side effects, are cheaper. As for research... do you realise that before 1977 there wasn't any safe cure for stomach ulcers except surgery? That anti-viral drugs are coming on the market or are under development that will prove as effective against viral diseases as antibiotics were against bacteria in the 1940s? That 92% of patients with Hodgkins Lymphoma are completely cured today by drugs developed in the last fifteen years?

*Well, Charles, I concede that my original statement was an exaggeration (and our tame (tame??) biochemist Bill Bains agrees with you there) but you admit yourself that some drug companies copy the products of others, and even some is too many. Sadly your rosy picture of things getting better all the time doesn't seem to quite tally with the history of tranquillisers, for example. Though I would love to believe that new drugs are 'always less toxic, have less side effects, are cheaper', I cannot forget Thalidomide, nor similar, more recent tragedies. Pharmaceutical companies do not develop new drugs to benefit mankind but to sell at a higher price (and profit) than the old drugs for which there is too much competition, or which have been superseded. I suggested they might flog the latter in less discerning markets...*

Oh yeah, the third-world bit. No, they don't sell anything deemed unsafe in the third world...not if they value their public image, which they do. Third world diseases are researched into -- witness the continual fight against Malaria, research into possible cures for sickle-cell anaemia, polio. All too often it's the local infrastructure that lets things down...

*I wasn't actually trying to blame the drug companies for the medical problems of the Third World; on the other hand I get the impression that a lot of research into malaria and so forth is done by Universities. As for drug companies being worried about public image, I shall take the liberty of quoting from New Internationalist of January 1986, on the subject of European pharmaceutical companies:*

"...Exports mean big profits to the drug giants. In Southeast Asia where 30% of the import market belongs to Western Europe, retail prices are marked up by as much as 300%. In Bangladesh in 1981, British manufacturers ICI, Wellcome, and May and Baker charged their subsidiaries five times the world market price for the raw materials to produce specific drugs.

*Did you hear a public outcry over here? I didn't. Sad to say this kind of behaviour by drug companies in the Third World does little to tarnish their public image in the West, and their position in the East is so dominant that 'public image' is of no consequence. The article goes on:*

"Pharmaceutical companies claim high profits are necessary to finance the development of new drugs. But the US Food and Drugs Administration found that only 2.4% of new drugs in 1980 represented 'important therapeutic gain' over products already on the

market. And Britain's DHSS concluded in the 1970s that most drug research was 'directed towards commercial returns rather than therapeutic need'."

*I admit that the journalistic style is a bit suspect here, but there is certainly a case to answer. Charles goes on to point out that there is a code of advertising practice for medicines, and data-sheets must be CSM-approved. My suggestion that medical journals relying on pharmaceutical advertising revenue might be reluctant to publish 'negative' results was perhaps a bit paranoid (or perhaps not); but here is Bill Bains with a slightly different inside view:*

...What the drug companies spend far more money on [than developing new products] however, is pushing their products into doctors surgeries and chemists dispensaries. The pressure on doctors to prescribe fancy new drugs comes direct from the pharmaceutical industry via a mound of glossy free brochures and magazines which tell them that the only satisfactory way to treat XYZ is to pump the patient full of the new wonder-drug, and indirectly from the same source via the patients, who have been brainwashed by the same propaganda to expect a pill for depression or old age. Doctors are trained to learn things, fast, and consequently newly-qualified doctors have minds like rat-traps, able to seize and hold onto any passing fact. Or opinion. The pharmaceutical giants pump their version of the facts at them, and in they go. They are not trained to be critical or explore new ideas (do you want your GP exploring his ideas about treating influenza with Buddhism on you?) ((Well, yes I would, actually; but I'm strange like that)), and so the drug culture goes. And then we all express surprise when disaffected youngsters take to solvents or heroin as a fix for their problems. The precise expression may be unorthodox, but the basic idea was taught them by their GP.

*This is really the point I was trying (so ineptly) to make in the first place; that the whole of our medical system is at fault. We have come to rely too heavily on synthetic drugs, and the fact tha drug companies exploit this is inevitable in a society where profit (or 'economic viability' as the Thatcherites call it) is the very highest virtue. I'm not saying that we shouldn't use drugs, nor that profit is evil; only that we trust the one and prize the other far, far too much.*

*Charles had a parting shot to make:*

Final consideration, for all the haters of multinational companies. Compare the pharmaceutical industry with the arms trade; one profits from curing people and raising the quality of life, the other from selling new and horrible ways of killing... Which can lay claim to moral superiority, and can you define your criteria? Look at the Soviet Union. They have no pharmaceutical companies -- and their pharmacopoeia is almost entirely composed of copies of western-developed medicines. Even if you drag animal rights into the question ((you mentioned it, Charles, not me)) (and no way would I accept that three thousand rats are worth more than a drug that can save thousands of human lives a year), I don't see how the pharmaceutical industry can be targeted the way you have.

*I chose the pharmaceutical industry because it is where our drug-fixated medical system and profit-obsessed capitalist system meet. Criticising the arms trade is like shooting fish in a barrel (with Exocet missiles, of course). However your point about the Soviet Union is interesting and ties in with Alan's article about the RCP, who (you may recall) don't regard the USSR as a good example of a Communist state. Not everyone agrees (sic), however, as William McCabe recalls:*

I actually knew that bit about the RCP not putting Russia in their list of ideal states ((Is there actually anything on that list?)), but I can't for the life of me figure out where from. Both my father and my brother are, in at least some degree,

communist, although in my brother's case it might be out of fashion more than anything else. I remember once doing the publicity for a WDC (World Disarmament) meeting on the arms race and a couple of young Marxists seemed to think that Russia was the ideal communist state and tried to impress the Russian speaker that they should retain nuclear arms to defend Communism. No accounting for taste.

*Indeed not. Nor for political opinion. Here is Benedict S. Cullum, questioning whether Communism itself is a good idea:*

Alan Gilbert's piece was enlightening. Whilst wishing for a fairer set-up than we have now I'd always plump for the capitalist system in favour of a communist one. People will always want to cheat and I do not see the societies that are striving to establish communist systems as being any more humane than those operating capitalist ones. Not so long ago a college friend was arguing that communism was fairer since it abolished wage-slavery and ensured that workers were not having to live in fear of their bosses. When applied to the real world his argument was shown to be inadequate and although he went on to postulate an ideal communist state he would not allow the notion of an ideal and fair capitalist state; one operating with enlightened self-interest. Alan's article shows how he learned that Soviet citizens had little in the way of incentive.

*'Enlightened self-interest' is a nice idea, but if 'people will always want to cheat' I can't see that an ideal capitalist state is any more workable than an ideal communist one. Indeed, a system based on the principle that only those who have wealth can obtain more seems to invite 'cheating' more than any other.*

*However, Benedict admits worse possibilities than Communism:*

The RCP idea of war as being necessary in order to instigate change, in common with the fundamentalist Christians who equate Armageddon with (nuclear) war and so with the Second Coming is a case of putting the cart before the horse - or perhaps a false syllogism in the second case: The Second Coming will occur at a time of great devastation: World war will create devastation: World war is necessary for the Second Coming to occur. Yeeuch!

*Benedict wasn't the only person to find analogies between Communism and Christianity. Here's Andy Sawyer, with a more personal view:*

Alan Gilbert's piece on the RCP was interesting: reminded me of some of my brushes with similar sects. When he says "they were actually very friendly people" I'm reminded of an evangelical Christian group whose members were individually very pleasant and approachable, but who had a very rigid viewpoint when it came to any suggestion that evangelical Christianity may not actually explain everything in the world. Such groups (religious and political) exist because of their separateness: again as Alan says, "If they did happen to agree over a policy it would be for an entirely different reason". What's the most worrying thing, though, is that people tend to chuck out all of a system of thought because of disagreement with a fringe element: I got the impression that Alan has learned something about communism from his brush with the RCP but has reverted to being apolitical without considering that their might be broader churches where dissent does not consign you to the Outer Darkness.

("Such as?" came a voice.

"Why the Labour Party," he replied, and wondered why everyone started giggling...)

*Geogre Bondar thought it sounded like a religion too:*

Well, Alan's article is about politics, which is a bit of a non-starter as far as I'm concerned. Though his essay is quite successful in making it sound like a religion.

As a resolute non-political person, I limit myself to quoting an old Hungarian saying about communism (come to think of it, it cannot be all that old):

He who reaches 25 and has not been a communist has no heart.

He who is still a communist at 35 has no head.

*...and he who is still a communist at 45 has no money, perhaps?*

*Despite simultaneously producing whizzo computer graphics for his own fanzine 30 LFF, Geogre managed to find something to say about hitch-hiking as well:*

So, now comes the tale of Hitch-Hiking by Justin Moss. ¿Is he anything like Justin Ackroyd from Oz? ((There is a certain similarity, especially in their effect on women...))

I only once attempted to hitch, coming back from the first Glastonbury festival. (¿Do they still hold it on some farm that's miles and miles from Glastonbury, so far it's nearer to Wells?) ((Well, they did when we went, but it seems it won't be there any longer.)) No luck at all, so me and my sister ended up walking the 7 miles from Glastonbury. Not good for untrained walkers, and the bright sun did not help my sister's sunburn from the day before. Still, I guess it was an experience.

I learnt that sleep in a hard field encourages me to wake up really early. Like about dawn. I remember lying there wondering which hip was less sore, whether it was worth turning onto the other side and ¿why doesn't the sun rise, dammit? After that I felt I'd done my teenage hippy duty and never went to another rock festival. I felt quite naughty going there because I took a day off working as a clerk in the Milk Marketing Board without giving notice! I just popped a note into the door of the Reed Employment on my way to the railway station that morning. The impromptu nature of the decision to go made me feel really revolutionary, doing something without permission. Such is the wild folly of youth.

*Nowadays, of course, Geogre never does anything without permission. Although he managed to connect hitching and the Glastonbury festival without remembering that there was a whole article on the latter; Christina's 'Pilgrimages', which was certainly the most popular part of the fanzine. For example **Martin Smith** said:*

The piece I liked most was probably the one on the Glastonbury festival. ((The *Uncertainty Principle* probably rules ok)). It sounded like other events I've been to like agricultural shows and airshows. ((They sell acid at airshows??? Well, the sensation might be a bit like flying... Grass I could understand at agricultural shows - it grows, after all)) I suppose there is nothing like the experience of actually being there but it looks so much simpler on tv. You can see all the displays/bands/events etc more clearly and you have a commentator tell you just what is happening. I remember going to the Biggin Hill airshow once. I managed to be right at the front for the big display, a staged rescue of a pilot or something like that. I thought I would be able to see it all, but while the commentator described troops swinging down from helicopters and battles going on, all I could see was coloured smoke. It was not until the display was nearly over that I realised I had been looking in the wrong direction.

*Just like life, really. Obviously what we really lack to make our lives truly real and meaningful is not Walkmans to fill in the soundtrack, but a commentator to explain what is happening! However **Skel** thinks there is a substitute for television:*

I must say I preferred ... Christina's 'Pilgrimages' and Marina's snippet ((This should be a clue to Marina's identity, which unaccountably puzzled some people)). Both these tried to do more than simply convey the facts. And they succeeded. When you try to do more, and you succeed, the result is more complex and rewarding. From

Christina's piece, I didn't only get the facts. I got the mood. I got humour, in fact I got the experience itself. This was definitely the high spot of the issue.

*So perhaps we can make do with Christina's 3-D writing with Sensurround™. And I can finish this overgrown letter column (for the second time, thanks to a seizure of LocoScript 2!) and perhaps even the whole fanzine. This time we won't vacillate over whether there's enough paper to print an extra article (sorry about that, Bernard), probably because there are no extra articles to print; and having had a genuine Roneo 750 manual (and even duplicating lessons) from Irwin Hirsch we may even be able to make the duplicator do its stuff. Next time letters on CF2 discs will be appreciated (especially from Charles). If there is a next time...don't hold your breath.*

Oh yes, and we also heard from:

*Jeremy Ball, Nick Shears, Arthur 'ATom' Thomson, Dave Collins, and Lucy Huntzinger, who wonders whether we might have become Yuppies ourselves? What - just because we have a word-processor, a video, a washing machine....*

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#### **The slightly important bit**

Astute readers may have noticed references to certain fan funds in the convention report early in this issue. Since Worldcon, there's been a few changes of plan. Lilian and I have worked out that if we stood for GUFF we wouldn't be able to do the fan-room for Contrivance in 1989, and are now thinking of standing for TAFF. Pam Wells has discovered that fan funds rot the brain, and is planning to give them up for lent. Michael Ashley has not at this or at any other time considered ripping off the TAFF money. Anders Bellis has sought political asylum in the UK. Irwin Hirsch has made up a joke about SEFF. Greg Pickersgill thinks multiple entries to fan fund races are immoral. Lilian and I are contemplating marriage. Watch this space (but not too hard).

#### **The not very important bit at all**

....unless you dislike Bonny Langford, the latest Doctor Who's latest assistant, as much as I do. This is the Bristol group's favourite suggestion for a use for the dear scream-addicted lady.

You construct an anti-Bonnie Langford (out of what? Anti-matter of course) and send it along to meet the real Bonnie Langford at a meeting of the producers and scriptwriters of Doctor Who in, where else, but the BBC gravel pit (which John Nathan Turner bought shares in years ago). The anti-Bonnie meets the real Bonnie and whoosh, there's a terrific explosion. And so in dying, Bonnie Langford performs a great service to mankind, taking out not just herself but Turner and his cronies and the whole damn pit as well. Out of respect, the BBC then cancels the show, but agrees to do reruns from what's left of its earlier and better times.

And is that not a happy note on which to end a fanzine? (But can media fans stand for TAFF?)

Now read off.

## Balloons Over Bristol

...float none too gracefully in your  
direction from Peter-Fred Thompson and  
Christina Lake at 47 Wessex Avenue,  
Horfield, Bristol, BS7 ODE

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Cover art and headings all come from Peter-Fred in  
collaboration (and, at times, running battle) with  
DR Drawer

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