



Balloons  
Over  
Bristol  
2



## The Beginning of the End

When your alarm clock wakes you up in the middle of a carefully crafted sentence for your trip report, and that's a relief compared with the dreams you usually have, you know it's nature's way of telling you to get yourself a new lifestyle. But what do I know about nature? I can't even grow cauliflowers, at least not so that they won't flower while I'm out of the country. So excuse me while I crawl down to the basement and haul out the old inflatables, dust down that quaint wickerwork basket and sign on the crew for a new issue of **BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL**.

For this flight, your navigator will be **Christina Lake**, designer **Peter Fred Thompson** and supporting cast the **Bristol SF Group** (wherever you may find them). Written to the sound of much cheap emotion from **The Associates**, **Soft Cell**, **Blue Oyster Cult**, **Sparks** and anyone else trashy and outdated enough to keep the sentences short, the grammar sparse and the jokes inaudible (especially to Americans). (No, I didn't mean that - I don't make anti-American jokes any more. I want to go back there. I want you to love me and invite me to your houses. I'm pining for the Cascades. I want my MTV. I'm incoherent. What a way to start a fanzine.)

(And they pay her to do this? Actually they don't - but this could be a first - the only fanzine to be written entirely in embedded brackets, featuring more hyphens than any other form of punctuations. (But the hyphens are only there to sell to **Harry Bond** after we've stopped needing them any more.) (Whoops, a fannish joke incomprehensible to 99% of the **Bristol SF Group**. Sorry guys, but **Harry Bond** jokes are de rigeur. We'll all regret this when **Harry** wins his first **Hugo**, but till then "You just have to laugh!") (Or not, I suppose, if you don't get the joke. Now, I wonder how many brackets I should sign off with, and can **Harry** be persuaded to buy them too?)))))??

"No!" - **Haz** (and I'll beat up the next person who publishes a **Michael Ashley** article about me.)

This, in case you're still reading, is a concept zine. The concept is 'chronological embedding', and we don't know if it will work, 'cos we haven't done it yet. But in any case, the story begins some time last spring, takes place in **Bristol**, **America**, **Canada**, **Exeter** and the living room of **47 Wessex Avenue**, features a cast of **21** and proves that 'lattice-gases' really do exist (though you can't run them on an **Amstrad**).

Which being the case, we begin with something deeply meaningful and rather arty from **Christina**, describing the weird things that overexposure to **Lou Reed** can do to your head - subtly disguised as an account of one of the **Bristol Group's** many and largely unremarkable meals out. It's also the only piece to have seen the light of day before - in **The Women's Periodical** to be precise. But who says we have to start with something new (or even something good)?

+++++

### PERFECT DAY by Christina Lake

*Just a perfect day. Problems all left alone.*

It was a perfect day too. The sort of day that glows round the edge of your curtains in the morning and makes you think of punting in **Oxford**, or tennis, or picnics on freshly cut grass. It reminds you of being a child again, and it makes you remember something that often gets forgotten in the rush to work, and friends and conventions. Happiness. The promise of happiness.

*Just a perfect day. Drink sangria in the park.*

It was the sort of day to head off to **Westward Ho** like **Alan** did instead of going to the **Exploratory** with the rest of the **Bristol SF group**. The sort of day to go and bask in the gardens of a country pub instead of meeting up inside the dark, musty rooms of the **Old White Hart** on **Park Street**.



*Oh it's such a perfect day. I'm glad I spent it with you.*

In fact, the Old White Hart is lighter than I've ever seen it before. The windows glow, and the dust hangs sparkling in the air above the empty brown tables. The juke box plays 'Candle in the wind' - so muted that you can't even tell if it is the original version, which everyone likes, or the rereleased, which they don't.

*Oh such a perfect day. You just keep me hanging on. You just keep me hanging on.*

We walk up the road in the sunshine. Eleven people and me. I bounce ahead because this is the first time all year I've worn plimsolls, and they feel so light after boots. I can hear the voices talking behind me, Jane and Bill, Peter and Adrian, Tim, Philly and Glover who's really called Richard, Richard and Richard, Dave and Steve. All in their little groups. Not quite mixing; not quite separate.

*You made me forget myself. I thought I was someone else. Someone good.*

The exploratory is like the science museum only smaller and more fun. The first room is dark and full of things to do with light and colour culminating in the Van de Graaf generator which if you charge it up long enough will send out a spark of static electricity that looks like a demented dalek trying to exterminate its last opponent. Down the corridor from the dark room begins the assault on consciousness; wheels that turn and pictures that spiral so that when you look away into a mirror your face grows larger and larger or little dots crawl around the wall in front of your eyes. Then there's the room with magnets; and, at the end of the corridor, a wonderful light, airy room which is quite obviously a children's playroom. Here a beach ball hovers above a jet of air, sacks and lifting gear masquerade as swing boats and in the corner there's a snooker table. There are also two roundabouts. I get on the first; lean inwards and it starts going; lean out and it goes slower - whoops no, it goes faster. No wonder it's called 'Dizzy whizzy'. I put my foot down hurriedly to stop it. Meanwhile, the boys are playing on the other roundabout - a swivel chair where you hold a bicycle wheel in your hand. Someone spins the wheel, then you use the momentum to propel yourself round on the chair. "Come and have a go," says Richard. I reel over, and let them put me on the chair and spin the wheel. Not too bad, just about in control - then Richard gives the chair a shove and I spin away, round and round and round. When I get off the floor is still moving and I go and lean out the window till the world settles down again. Later on, I am the only one to discover how to hit myself in the face with the air-jet controlled beach ball.

*We can do this on our own. Its such fun.*

Outside it's still sunny. Still an almost perfect day, but it's half past two and the next item on the agenda is not ice creams in the park, but a chinese meal at Dragon City. We count up the number of cars and the number of people who know the way to the restaurant. The cars have it by five to four, but Jane and Bill seem confident that they can find it without aid, so we split up as appropriate. Typically, although I know where the restaurant is, I'm lousy at explaining how to get there - but due to a head start we still arrive first. I stand on the pavement of the Gloucester Road, where it's still sunny, and wave at the incoming cars (which don't notice me), watching the party reconstitute itself.

*Feed animals in the zoo. Then later a movie too*

"Set meal for twelve?" the waitress asks optimistically once we're all seated. There seems to be a certain discrepancy between what the single males, and the married or soon to be married females are prepared to pay. Jane and I agree that the six pound menu sounds like a good idea; Richard hankers after the £10.50 one. The other Richard just wants a menu that isn't in Chinese. Meanwhile, those who have been to the restaurant before assert that the wine is useless and the thing to drink is lager. I look at the list and see some perfectly good wines on it - but no, it's too late, all the potential sharers have gone for tea or lager. I order a



beer, just to register my protests against the lager drinkers, and find that by some miracle everyone but Adrian has agreed on the seven pound menu. Adrian is hit over the head a few times, and then we order the £7 set menu for twelve. After a while we begin to wonder how food will make it down to the end of the long narrow table. Tim suggests circulation on floating beach balls. We decide to shut him up before he contemplates some arrangement involving twin Van de Graaf Generators. The soup makes it round, but while we're waiting for the next course, Tim starts off again. This time he introduces the concept of the cake frenzy. This as piloted by Philly on a recent holiday in Yorkshire involved going on a long walk scheduled to end at a cake shop in Embsay. During the walk, the participants take it in turns to name cakes, how to make them and what they taste like, thus building themselves up into a state of ultimate cake frenzy. Unfortunately, by the time they got to Embsay the shop was closed. "Pity I wasn't there," I remark, "I could have taken you all to the Ashworths. I'm sure that Hazel would have found us a cake." But since none of them know Hazel, my remark is treated with the indifference it deserves. Richard the First proposes the cake frenzy as the next group activity. "Except," he says, "we'll cut out the walking part, and go straight to the cake shop." We tell him this isn't quite in the spirit of things. "Or better still, we'll do a bakery crawl," he concludes, unabashed.

*And then home*

Outside the restaurant the day is still sunny, but now it's five o'clock. Back at home, in the garden, there is only a tiny patch of sunlight left on the grass. I throw myself down in it, but already the loft extension three houses up is eating it away. Peter mowed the lawn the day before, and when I move to escape the shadows, I see that the front of my jumper is covered in brown, dying grass. The promise has gone. I go inside to mourn - for what could have been a perfect day.

*You're going to reap just what you sow. You're going to reap just what you sow.*

\*\*\*\*\*  
This was performed and conceived to Lou Reed's Perfect Day. So if you have the album Revolver, forget the lines in italics and read along to the record instead.  
\*\*\*\*\*

One of the Richard's, normally known to us as Richard III or Little Richard, spent part of that meal regaling us with stories of the gastric acrobatics of one of his friends, laughingly known as the Iron Man. ("I don't throw up when I drink; the Iron Man that's me." As Richard said, he should have known by this comment how very far gone his friend was; they subsequently watched him rust). The saga soon gained stature of legend among the group (it doesn't take much), so we thought we might as well get Richard to write it up for the fanzine. Not one for the squeamish - you are warned!

THE NIGHT OF THE GASTRIC ACROBAT  
by Richard McClaren

It was one of those events which even as they occur contain the promise of nostalgia, a feeling which fixes them in the mind as an example of the wild and treasured folly of that adolescence, which, later when I have grown, I will pretend was mine.

I knew I was in trouble when he said he thought a bucket might be a good idea. Later, as he lay unconscious in the mire of his own roseate vomit, I thought to myself that it was fortunate my parents were not due home for another two days. I was less lucky in that he had chosen to perform on the spare bed in my room. We pushed him onto the floor so we could strip the bed and pour salt over the mattress; the carpet proved much easier to clean than the blankets. But this was Event, this was something happening which I could talk about with an air of weary humour to those who had not attended, and find myself listened to as I did so. The thought was a consolation to me in the hours that followed.



He was not asleep, he was actually unconscious; he was to spend three hours in a place where we could not reach him, and which he cannot now remember. Another of the drunken cretins behind me asked where the souls of the drunk go; he answered himself by saying 'inwards' and we ignored him in disgust. I reflected that we had thought it a good idea, our little gathering, my brother and I. A dozen people were invited, maybe less. Far too few to get out of hand, and yet one too many nonetheless.

He had told me he was never ill when he drank. He had said he was 'the iron man'. This is the way we are, we adolescents; some of us may have more discretion than others, but that is all. We are united, each of us together with his peers in the pursuit of Event.

I sat on the side of my bed with a friend who had loyally accompanied me into the early morning and watched the unconscious form across the room. We were worried about him choking when he threw up; I was more than a little disturbed by the state of the carpet. He had gone into spasm once or twice, and had lain twitching on the floor, his blank eyes wide and his breath coming in snatches, until we considered dumping him in the phone box over the road and calling the police to tell them there was a drunk vandalising it.

The evaporating party had left behind it the smell of stale beer and puke. On the television, the sound turned down, a girl in a bathing suit was scraping her tits along the rim of a swimming pool; her mouth was moving, so she might have been singing. It's funny how these little things stick in the mind, like vomit to a blanket, I might say.

The quest for excitement, for Event, is all-embracing. It is the ghost which chases us when we drive with the abandon of heroic folly through curving country lanes. It is the imaginary thirst which begs just one more drink, and which leaves us with our arms wrapped around a stranger's toilet bowl. It is the unspoken intention behind every activity undertaken.

In company I while away the conversation with expectant patience, always examining the words and actions of my peers for something to distinguish them from every other word they have spoken and action they have taken. It is the difference from what is usual which is important; originality is the essence of Event: To claim to have hit a golf-ball three hundred yards straight up into the air with a seven iron is Event, to confess to difficulties with the mathematics of circular motion is not. These are the distinctions on which our lives turn about.

The windows had been opened wide in a forlorn attempt to remove the smell, and I can remember feeling suddenly very cold. I think I had realised that I was sober again.

In the corner, my scintillating guest stirred; he woke, muttering apologies for the mess, and retched noisily over the bucket. The same bucket which he had only a few hours ago been too drunk to see, and which he had consequently never used; the carpet was a much bigger target.

We did not tell him about the photographs. We let him fall asleep unaware that a group of us had stood around him laughing; in drunken fright as he twitched uncontrollably and then in true amusement when we discovered he couldn't vomit without farting.

Funny? But you didn't have to pick the peanuts out of the washing machine drum the next morning, did you? It was not your brother who scooped handfuls of salt from the vacuum cleaner because of our guest, who when he woke had in his morning drunkenness thought to clear up after himself.

He was still apologising a week later, he was apologising even as he ripped up the photographs we had taken of him lying on the carpet next to the previous contents of his stomach. Were we to have suffered without the compensating pleasures of Event? Of course not - we got copies, copies which have since provided many of my friends with hours of amusement. (There is one, which I won't go into now, which involves the very imaginative use of a cigarette...)

My parents, returning only hours after the last of the washed blankets dried and was folded away, have yet to discover the stain on the mattress. It lent its stale odour to the room for a couple of weeks; I worked shivering at my desk with the windows opened into the freezing air, protesting that I enjoyed the cold in which I sat, and in time, perhaps after I have left for university, it will be found, and plausible excuses will be made. Perhaps the truth will be told.



And I, I will be waiting, as I always have been, for something new to happen. I will be out in search of Event.

*Richard is currently searching for Event at Lancaster University, despite exposure to several articles by Michael Ashley. And probably won't be showing this fanzine to his parents.*

+++++

One of the features - one of the many thrilling features - of Bristol life is the annual balloon fiesta. We'd never been, though we'd watched the balloons in the sky often enough, and even named a fanzine after them. One day, though, Tim happened to let slip that not only had he been, but that he'd actually gone up in one of the balloons on balloon-fiesta day. "But that'd be perfect!" said Christina, who was supposed to be discussing David Brin at the time, "why don't you write it up for our fanzine?" So Tim did, giving it an obscure title based on some tune from the sixties. "You can find something better than that," he said confidently. "Sure," we said - sufficient unto the hour, we'll think of something. Ha ha! Piece of cake. Just call it Fred. Just call it:

BALLOON CRAZY  
by Tim Goodrick

Thump! "Stay in the basket!" Bonk, bonk. "Aaarrgrhhh!" Crunch! Slap! Slapslapslap! "Hang on!"

Such is the noise of a hot air balloon attempting to land.

It all began one day in April 1987. Rolls-Royce, the company that I work for, had just been privatised. A priority scheme allowed employees to apply for about £5000 worth of part-paid shares with a guarantee that they would get most of them. I took out a loan, bought my shares, sold them on the first day of trading and made about 3 grand. Now I am in no way in favour of the amount of privatisation that the present government is inflicting on the country, but if someone waves a fistful of fifty quid notes under your nose it is difficult not to take it when they press it into your hand (and, of course, the money).

So there I am feeling very rich and take a few friends out for a meal. During the course of the meal the talk somehow gets round to the Bristol balloon fiesta and a few bottles of wine later we have all agreed that we will try to book a flight in a balloon, during the fiesta if possible.

A couple of days later I blow most of the rest of the shares money on a motorbike so by the time August arrives the seventy quid I'll need to pay for my place in the balloon is beginning to seem like a lot of money. Still, I remain convinced that the experience will be worth it.

Places were booked on the Saturday morning of the fiesta - we'd be going up with over a hundred other balloons. There were six of us going up, namely Sue Goodland - the main organiser, her husband Jon, Glover Rogerson and his wife Philippa Davey, Mike Macleod and myself. A couple of weeks before the Fiesta, Sue phoned up the balloon hire firm to check that everything was still set to go ahead. She got the run around.

"We'll be very busy that weekend."

"But we booked this back in April."

"Yes but it's the Balloon Fiesta weekend."

"I know that. That's why we booked so far in advance and checked with you that it would be o.k. for a flight during the Fiesta."

"Ah, well, er, I might be able to fit one of you in."

Sue, would you believe, was annoyed. She told the rest of us what had happened and we resigned ourselves to not having a flight. We decided that we'd still go ahead with the champagne breakfast that we'd planned and content ourselves with just watching the balloons.

Sue, however, isn't the type to sit down and say "oh well". Through her job she is quite well connected with certain firms in Bristol. She made some telephone calls. One to the Junior Chamber of Commerce, who organise the Balloon Fiesta, and some to firms that the balloon company hire company has ties with. A few days



later she received a call. "Er, I hear that you and your friends really do want to go up in our balloon on Saturday." It was on.

Nothing to do then but wait for the confirmation call at five o'clock on the morning of the flight and get over to Ashton Court for about quarter to six in the morning.

We eventually find our balloon amongst all the others. Mike Macleod, who has come up from London for the weekend, finds that he has left his camera at Glover and Philly's house in Bishopston. No chance of getting it now. "Ho, ho, Michael. You're so stupid," chortles Philly, clutching her own camera. These are chortles she may regret later on.

The basket is twice the normal size and divided into two compartments, four people in one side and five in the other (there are two people we don't know and the pilot as well as the six of us). On the ground it creaks a lot and doesn't seem very safe.

The heat when the burner is on is almost unbearable. I've got a hat on, which keeps most of the heat off my head. The pilot lends a hat to Glover. A mistake.

I'm surprised by the total lack of untoward sensations when we take off. There's no movement of the air, of course, because we are moving with the wind. But there is also no sensation of leaving your stomach behind even though we are rising very rapidly.

There is a little haze but we can still see a long way. We were one of the last balloons to take off and the rest of the pack stretches away ahead of us. The pilot decides to veer us off from the pack, so that it will not be too congested when we land. Our route is going to take us out over Totterdown and on towards Bath.

The views are magnificent. The Gorge catching the early morning sunlight, with the suspension bridge straddling it ready for the 'George the Hoffmeister bear' hot air balloon to attempt to limbo underneath it.

Looking towards Clifton we can see St. John's road, where Jon and Sue live and, possibly, Hurler Crescent, where I live. We pass over the Yuppie docks development. I resist the temptation to spit.

We are heading towards Victoria Park and Philly realises that we will pass close to the house of someone else we know. I think it will be nice to get a photograph of it. "Which one is Jeanette's house?" I ask Philly. "That one with the white transit van outside it." I centre on the van and take the photo. When I get the film back a few weeks later, I find that the photo contains several hundred houses and almost as many white transit vans. Fortunately, Jeanette's house is just in the shot.

On we fly, over parts of Bristol that I've never seen, let alone from the air. We approach a wooded valley and dip down into it. There's a stream in the bottom of the valley and as we fly over it we can see our reflection. We are all so captivated by this that we pay no attention to the mutterings of the pilot about cold air, nor to the frantic burning of gas that he's doing.

The trees on the other side of the valley do seem to be approaching very fast. Too fast. We're not going to make it. We are rising, but is it fast enough. The pilot is one of the most experienced balloonists around, we are bound to make it.

We don't make it. Dangling from the tree seemed a bit unreal at the time. I mean, you don't really take in how far the ground is away from you or the fact that there may be no branches lower down the trunk. I'm philosophical, but only until the inch long ants start dropping from the tree down my neck.

Mass panic ensues in the basket and whether it was our thrashing about or pilot skill that freed us from the tree, we may never know. Nevertheless, we were soaring upwards once more. Also soaring up with us was a branch of the tree which had pierced the canopy of the balloon and remained lodged inside it.

The lasts of the ants are sorted out and peace and calm return. Nerves, however, remain somewhat strained. On over the Bitton railway terminus, which makes a nice photo from the air, and we are finally over partly open countryside.

Some of the other balloons are starting to land. One heads down into a field with a herd of cows in it. The balloon almost lands on the cows, which scatter to one side. The balloon touches down, the basket topples over, the people fall out and the cows charge them. We don't see the outcome as we disappear over a ridge.







distinctly heard one of the people in the other boat say: "Look, it's raining avocados!" Admittedly, we couldn't see great lumps of avocado falling out of the sky, but all the same, it seemed to me that I should have won my bet. However, no-one would back me up. Tim said he had heard the person in the boat say something about avocados, but he maintained that what he had actually said was: "It's raining on my avocado!" (How boring!) But then, he would. So we argued about it for a while, and I never got my money. And so it remained until the Malteser balloon went up at the Fiesta and the crew started throwing out little packets of Maltesers. "Look, look, it's raining Maltesers!" I shouted and ran off to try and get one (just in case anyone dared to disbelieve me). This time Tim paid up and I shared out the Maltesers (much nicer than bloody eyeballs, anyway).

*So much for the Balloon Fiesta. A week from then, I was in Seattle, where it hardly rained anything at all, on the first stage of my TAFF trip with Lilian Edwards (soon to be written up in glorious stereo. And if you believe that, you'll believe everything). Peter-Fred had to wait a bit longer for his trip to North America, but eventually, several weeks later, he made it to New York and was hit with the full excitement of his first exposure to Americana and all its concomitant glories.*

*This was going to be a short evocative piece about a few of his impressions, but ended up a mega-epic account of almost everything we did. Still, at least I didn't have to think up the bloody title!*

EASY DRIVER  
by Peter-Fred Thompson

"This is 'Wish', WSSH, on 107.5, bringing you thirty minutes of power rock -"

*Next station.*

" - was Def Leopard. In the next half-hour we have - "

*Next station.*

" - on all '88 and '89 Hondas and Hyundais at -"

*Next station.*

This is New York, where the sky is full of towers and the roads are full of holes -

*Next place.*

- Connecticut, where Christina's friend Heather knows every comic shop -

*Next place.*

- Salem, where hysteria gripped the town in 16-

This is North America, the land of freedom and choice. If we don't like the music, at the touch of a button the radio finds another station. If we don't like where we are we can drive somewhere else. For two weeks the choices are all ours.

It began at John F. Kennedy airport, with the Manhattan skyline silhouetted against the setting sun, after a long flight via Reykjavic. It was my own fault for taking the cheapest deal, but at least I saw Greenland on the way, its glaciers crumbling into icebergs visible even from 30,000 feet.

I had a bit of trouble at Immigration; although I didn't need a visa, no-one had told me that I *did* need a pink form instead, but it was all sorted out eventually. My suitcase, bought specially for the trip, tried to go its own way, but I caught up



with it and finally escaped from the timeless world of intercontinental travel into the night.

After a separation of a month and thousands of miles, Christina is waiting. We embrace, and she leads me away like a native. I am disappointed to find clean trains in the subway, even though Christina assures me that there are still some with the infamous graffiti. However the subway cop convinces me I really am in a foreign country. From her belt hang a truncheon, handcuffs, and a gun, as well as a variety of pouches and unidentifiable objects. They all look well used; and no-one else takes the slightest bit of notice.

*Next place.*

We are phoning car-hire companies from Bill Wagner's apartment. It seems that few of them are prepared to let their cars out of the country (we want to go to Canada), but we find one that seems relatively cheap, with a free milage allowance of 100 miles a day. Can we seriously expect to do more than that? Surely not...

After some agonising we'd decided to abandon the original plan of driving all around the Great Lakes via Madison. We considered flying to Madison and then on to Toronto, but that would have got us to Madison just when Jeanne Gomoll, whom we really wanted to visit, was going to be away. We couldn't do them in the other order because our relatives in Toronto weren't back from their holiday. So we had to give up on Madison altogether, and 'just' drive to Toronto.

*Next place.*

Arrangements all made, we're out on the streets of midtown Manhattan, which are wide, straight, and busy. They also emit steam and have *tremendous* potholes! The buildings are vast, but only greenhorn tourists like me take any notice. The streets are *really* dominated by the crowds of New Yorkers, charged with bustling energy, surging forward every time a sign says 'Walk'. On almost every corner someone is selling hot dogs, hamburgers or pretzels, but we want to sit down for lunch, so we find a cafe (diner? whatever) and order hamburgers and fries. They're good, but not so different from what I'd expect back home - apart from the pickled gherkins, that is.

*Next place.*

It's very windy, and a bit cold, but the view is incredible. The sky is clear and blue; I can see for miles. Spread out *below* me are the skyscrapers of midtown, like a monstrous pile of Leggo. Over there is the Pan Am building, with its disused heliport on top, and there the Chrysler building, with its fluted metal pinnacle. In the distance is the green of Central Park. Moving round I see the Brooklyn Bridge, and a host of others, less famous. This is really a rather small island, for all its content. It looks as if some immense force has compressed an ordinary city, making it very tall and narrow, forcing the buildings to absurd heights. On the south side I see the concrete forest of downtown, and I'm forced to look up, very slightly, at the World Trade Center, the usuper; but this, the Empire State Building, is the real King of Manhattan.

*Next place.*

I meet up with Christina in the modern part of the New York public library, which isn't as grand as the old part where I left her, but is certainly very popular. She can't understand how I spent so long in the Empire State Building, having seen it all already.

We decide to walk down Fifth Avenue. It is a long way, but we see many things, including the 'Flat-Iron' building, which has a corner so sharp it looks as though it must fall over; a block with almost nothing but oriental carpet shops; and Washington Square, at the end, strangely reminiscent of Barcelona.



*Next place.*

Driving up through Manhattan in the newly-hired car; the streets are very busy, but mostly dual-carrigeway or one-way, and the traffic never gets above 25 m.p.h.. Fortunately the gearbox is automatic, so the stop-go driving between the lights is easy. My left foot twitches uneasily whenever we come to a stop, but I don't miss changing gears at all. The main roads are wide, but this just encourages people to double-park, and I'm caught out several times before I have enough confidence to drive in the outside lane.

*Next place.*

Finally on the freeway, we're trying to leave New York in vaguely the right direction. Massive, gleaming trucks thunder past as we attempt to navigate from a rather large scale map. But I can't help noticing that these roads are obviously never cleaned in any way, since the verges are littered with all kinds of trash, upto (and in many cases including) complete abandoned cars. We turn the radio on:

*Next station.*

" - the weather in the next 24 hours shows a low of 16 and - "

*Next station.*

We play with the air-conditioning too - pneumonia, here we come!

Driving in the US is a bit different from driving in the UK. Of course, it's on the other side of the road, but actually that isn't too much of a problem, particularly on the long stretches of Interstate. In any case overtaking is allowed on either side, so it doesn't even matter if you forget for a while (and it seems that people do: why else do the inappropriate turnings of big junctions have signs saying "Wrong Way! Go Back!"?). Obviously some thought is required at junctions, but even there the hardest part is understanding the traffic lights. I twigged fairly early that one is allowed to turn right through a red light if there's nothing coming, and I eventually found out that flashing amber simply means 'caution', but I never did grasp the subtleties of flashing red, which seemed to condone total anarchy.

But what struck me most were the low, low speeds! I was expecting the limit of 55 on the Interstate roads (although it's up to 65 in places nowadays); it was the limits of 25 and even 20 on the urban roads that freaked me. Do they seriously expect people to go so slowly? But they do, they do, and our car certainly didn't seem to mind (power steering helps). The other strangeness was how often the speed limit changed, and by how little. Every few hundred yards it might be altered by 5 m.p.h.! Bizarre...

Not everyone keeps to these limits, of course, and I admit I wasn't the slowest on the roads. After all, for someone who can cope with 70 on British motorways, doing 65 on those splendid American roads (which are generally so straight that they signpost every bend) must be a piece of cake. So I opened up a little - and discovered something; American roads are *dreadful*. Their surfaces are cracked and split to an extent that you rarely (if ever) see on British roads, so that travelling fast feels a bit uncomfortable and not entirely safe. Some of the toll roads were a bit better, but otherwise the only consolation was the relative infrequency of roadworks.

Still, at least I now know why American cars have such ludicrously soft suspensions.

*Next place*

In Salem we discover what a 'Motel' really is (terraced chalets), and then look for something to eat and drink in our room. We buy a flagon of really cheap red wine (most of the cheap Californian wines being denied us by our lack of corkscrew),



and cross the road to an almost-built take-out place. Fortunately, the lack of seats doesn't stop them doing business, and they do sell more than hamburgers. We order some pasta, and chat to the man behind the counter. We confess to being English, and he tells us he's retired from the Navy. His colleagues pop out and ask us what we think of America. It's true, Americans really are a lot friendlier than us Brits. To pass the time while the food is cooked, Christina tries out the Jelly Bean machine. Unfortunately, when it says it delivers 'A Good Handful' it really means it, and in fact it delivers most of them onto the floor before she gets her hand underneath.

Back in the room, our pasta eaten, we drink wine and watch *Star Trek - The Next Generation* on Channel 7. I am astonished to find commercials not only between programmes (sorry, programs) and in the middle of them, but between the credits and the action! They don't leave much time for the episode, and consequently very little happens.

#### *Next place*

Miles of forest; wide, wild forest, not standing to attention in rows, where just a few of the trees have turned bright orange. In a few more weeks Maine will be incredibly spectacular; now it's just very nice indeed.

#### *Next place*

A small border post near Lake Magentic, where the customs men have strong French accents. We're asked several times how long we intend to stay and how much money we have. Are they trying to establish we won't become destitute before we go? They stand back as I open the boot (sorry, trunk). We confess to having half a flagon of wine, but they don't seem to care, and we go on into Quebec, where the roads go absolutely straight for miles and miles.

#### *Next place*

It's dark, and late, we've driven all day, and the last thing we need is the lights and bustle of the city. What we need is somewhere to stay the night, but Montreal is a big place and our random driving never seems to take us to the motel district. Eventually I ask at a gas station, buy a map and get directions to a couple of motels only a few miles distant (sic). We find one and check in, even though it is more expensive than we would have liked. It's run by a middle-age woman who must be an android, since she's immaculately dressed and coiffured, does six things at once, and is still there early next morning! We marvel at (and even use) a credit-card phone and then set off on the perennial search for food. We have regressed to hunter-gatherers, unable to herd or grow food, stalking easy prey through the concrete jungle. We pounce on a Chinese restaurant and devour the set menu. It's good, even though we have to ask for the final course of almond cookies.

#### *Next Day*

We decide we can't face another long drive today, so we book another night at the motel, and set off to explore the city. We park the car next to a lot of other cars near a subway station, and proceed on the train. We have no idea where we're going except towards the centre. We emerge in what is clearly the business district, which isn't quite what we want to see, but we follow signs to the central station, and from there follow more signs to the tourist information office. The on-line information draws pretty pictures but isn't very informative, so we take a free map and guide-book and go.

Nearby is a curious sub-street-level area, full of shops. In the centre are a lot of tables and chairs, surrounded by a dozen or more food counters, selling everything from hamburgers to alfalfa salad. It's all very civilised. Clearly this is where the local office workers have their lunch, and since it's lunchtime, we join them. I have crêpes, and Christina has a hamburger. Between us we study the map.



*Next place*

In the park of the Mont Royale I pick up a maple leaf. There are thousands. We climb up a long way to the top and survey the city. It looks a lot like other cities.

*Next place*

Inside the Notre-Dame Basilica, we stand in awe. The blue-backlit altar-piece looks like something designed by Walt Disney. Everything is carved and painted. It is fabulous.

*Next place*

Resting from our tour of the Old Quarter, we sip Canadian beer outside a café. On the other side of the square is Nelson's Column - well, a Nelson's Column, at any rate. Nearby is a smaller monument to a more Canadian, but less successful, hero.

*Next place*

Back at the car we find a rain-sodden parking ticket, in French. It turns out we were obstructing a bus stop. Apart from that it's been a great day.

*Next place*

The boat edges ever nearer to the descending cliff of water. Occasional gusts of wind drench us with spray, making us grateful for the baggy blue oilskins. Above us, and almost all around, millions of tons of water fall, and fall, and fall, and fall, but it is surprisingly quiet. In the spray below us is a rainbow.

*Next place*

How blasé can you get? We can't be bothered to go on a Tour of the Universe! Even though the CN Tower, not content to be 'the tallest freestanding structure in the world', is also the launchpad for trips across the Solar System. Or so it says. Flight-suited staff issue interplanetary passports (for a small fee), and then Star-Trek style lifts take parties of trippers off for their voyage - it's all well done, but the queues are too long and there's the rest of Toronto to see, so we move on.

*Next place*

I knew it was too good to be true - a fanzine convention in Toronto the weekend we were going to be there anyway. This is the time - 7 p.m. on Friday - and this is the place - a room in the Brownstone Hotel - but where is the convention? There's a duplicator in one corner, and the standard rows of chairs, but no people. One guy turns up knowing as little as we do, but of the organisers there is no sign. Eventually we use our initiative and phone the room in Catherine Crockett's name. She tells us that the convention is in the Con Suite - of course - room 901.

Room 901 isn't exactly packed either, but it clearly is part of a convention, and we soon get into the swing of things. We're made to feel very welcome, and there are ample supplies of beverages. Someone admits to not knowing how a bong works, so of course there is a demonstration.

Eventually Mike Glicksohn turns up, and collation of the convention fanzine can begin. Some time later the convention itself is ready to start, so we vacate the Con Suite and go back down to the scene of the action. Mike, looking like a woodsman with his tanned skin and bushy beard, introduces the rest of the committee, which includes Taral (looking like a good-natured bear), Catherine, and the gaunt figure of Alan Rosenthal.

*Next place*



Later, in the Con Suite, I discover that Moshe Feder - whom we had dinner with - is into Coke. Coca-Cola, that is, that most international manifestation of American culture. I also discover that Taral has a large metal Coke advertisement that he has been keeping for Moshe's collection for several years; and I also discover that we have volunteered to take it back to New York in our car (no-one else having been daft enough to drive from New York to Toronto!).

#### *Next day*

Taral and Moshe turn up at the con with a large, flat object wrapped in black plastic. After some games and panels have taken place, Moshe and I take it out to the car. By lowering the back seat we can fit it in quite easily. Moshe is very grateful. I say it's nothing, although I am slightly worried about getting it across the border.

Later we set off in a large group for a highly-recommended Mexican restaurant, but before we get a hundred yards, Catherine exclaims "Crad Kilodney!" and we are gathered around a man at the edge of the street, holding a handful of pamphlets, with a sign around his neck saying 'Depraved Filth: \$2'. Apparently he is a local science fiction writer, who sells his own work on the streets in this way. Christina is persuaded to buy the last copy of 'I chewed Mrs. Ewing's raw guts', but Crad Kilodney is not persuaded to attend the convention.

We press on through the intricacies of the Toronto public transport system, which involves getting 'transfers' from the subway to use on the trams. I am quite excited about using a tram, which is impossible anywhere in Britain. We arrive only just ahead of the other group who went on foot.

The restaurant has changed management, and Hope Liebowitz keeps saying "It wasn't like this when I last came!" every five minutes until everyone has told her to stop apologising. In fact the food is fine, though more Jamacian than Mexican. I learn a lot about which US fan groups are still extant, and forget it all as quickly.

Back at the convention, the TAFF/Ditto auction is rescheduled to occur when everyone returns from the restaurant. Catherine and Christina start the proceedings, but after a while I join them in order to be involved (since I am no way going to buy any fanzines). I read out suggestive passages from the zines under the hammer to stimulate interest; the audience buy them anyway. I am astonished by the amount people are prepared to pay - Christina tells me later that it went much better than the auction at Nolacon.

Later, in the Con Suite, we talk to Mike Glicksohn a lot. He strikes me as a mellow version of Greg Pickersgill. In fact, quite a few of the US/Canadian fans remind me of British fans I know; 'Covert' evokes Alex Stewart (which won't mean anything to either of them); Catherine Crockett brings to mind Joan Patterson; and so on. Obviously this is because I don't know them well enough to distinguish their own uniqueness. And I probably never will, since we have to go in preparation for a long drive on the morrow, even though we haven't contributed to the convention one-shot, nor talked to half the people there. Mike and I exchange a big hug, and then its goodbye.

#### *Next place*

The US customs post is a row of booths like toll. I wind down the window and hand over our passports. I cautiously mention the Coke sign in the back, but the bored-looking officer has waved us on before I have finished explaining.

#### *Next place*

The rides are all closed, the boardwalk is being demolished, and only one seafront cafe is open. It's out-of-season on Coney island, but at least the wide, sandy beach is there, even if it is littered with broken bottles and empty cans; New York



shows another face. Christina pines for a swim, but we only have time to buy some lunch from the cafe, and eat it on the remains of the boardwalk, before driving on to JFK airport for Christina's plane. Her holiday is over.

#### *Next place*

Stu Shiffman's apartment is a lesson in fannishness. There are more books, fanzines, and examples of artwork than one could reasonably expect in a one-bedroom flat. I know how small it is because I'm staying in Bill Wagner's identical apartment directly below, where the Coke sign now resides. After Stu, Bill and I have consumed our Chinese takeaway, I'm introduced to the cult of Roscoe, who is depicted in several places, including a relief carving on a light-switch. It's all a bit overwhelming, and when I phone Moshe to arrange a meeting for lunch the next day I'm too out of it to write down any of the details he gives me.

#### *Next place*

In the middle of Grand Central Station, panic gradually rises. I've forgotten how to find Moshe's office, and trying skyscrapers at random hasn't worked. I've already phoned him once to postpone lunch; that was from the Staten Island ferry terminal, when I realised that taking the next sailing would make me late. I wanted to do it, though, since it was one of the things I've heard of, it's cheap, Christina said it was fun, and I'd taken the trouble to get there. So I phoned Moshe, who didn't seem to mind, and did it anyway. It killed several birds with one stone, since I saw the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island and the downtown skyline, wrote some postcards and got some fresh air. I got back to Grand Central easily enough, but now - where's Moshe? Eventually I give in and phone him again; he says stay put, and sure enough five minutes later he turns up.

Moshe somehow fits my image of New Yorkers, which is probably derived from Woody Allen films. He's well-dressed, thin, and speaks and moves rather fast. He seems barely able to contain his enthusiasm for New York, and gives me a short, but interesting, tour of the Chrysler Building lobby. He's equally knowledgeable about the food in the deli he takes me to. Feeling like a character in a black-and-white movie, I order 'Pastrami on Rye', which turns out not to be too hard a taste to acquire. Moshe has 'corned beef' which is nothing at all like the English substance of the same name. I've never seen sandwiches so full of meat; British Rail would have a heart attack! Moshe tells me that the pickled gherkins aren't as mature as they might be, but everything is authentic - and very tasty too. I am grateful for the native guide, since I would never have found the place on my own.

#### *Next place*

On International Territory I gaze at a pile of coins from Hiroshima, fused by the blast. The UN might not be everyone's idea of a tourist attraction, but I'm glad it came. However weak, it is a force for peace, and we need every one we can find. Am I strange to find the Security Council chamber fascinating? Or to be more impressed by the fact that our guide is from Sierra Leone than by the art treasures donated from around the world?

#### *Next place*

I have to go *right now*, but ... I've just found the Tiffany glass! I've only explored a tiny corner of the Metropolitan Museum of Art - well I only had an hour - and now I have to leave to be quite sure of catching my plane. The Far Eastern sections were beautiful, and the American period rooms fascinating, but the Tiffany display is simply fabulous. I tarry a while, and so have to leave in a hurry, but it's hard to rush past a complete Egyptian temple reconstructed inside the museum. And where's the exit anyway? I go through a door marked 'Exit' and find myself in the basement; the door locks behind me and I have no choice but to descend further. I debate whether to ring the bell that says 'Ring bell and wait for door to open', when the door buzzes anyway. Eventually I go through it and find myself in an



office with some amused looking workers. Obviously they could see me on a monitor. They show me the exit and I run for the subway, only to join a queue to buy subway tokens!

*Next place*

After all that my plane is delayed an hour and a half. I realise that I have forgotten to give Bill's spare keys to Moshe, so I phone Bill to tell him and pass the time. After a while I suggest that I might be cut off soon, but no, Bill tells me - the phone will ring me back to ask for more money. Sure enough, it does. Bemused, I put it down, and it rings again. This time a human operator asks me, but I don't have enough change so I put the phone down again for the last time and walk away. *Rekjavic, here I come.*

*Next place...*

\*\*\*\*\*  
*Next place, a break in the travelogues to consider the concept of time travel. Oh, all right, just Marina Durovsky doodling on about the latest series of Dr. Who.*

Is Ben Aaronovitch trying to do for daleks what Alan Moore et al did for superheroes? At last an intelligent attempt to try something different with the daleks. Peter-Fred is excited - they've brought in the dalek emperor just like he was in TV 21 twenty years ago. "I bet he's gold, I bet he's gold," enthuses PF staring mesmerised at our black and white TV set. Me, I'm rooting for that shiny black dalek (don't need colour to appreciate that) and the little girl who miraculously wasn't Davros. Episode three and it hasn't degenerated into boring drivel - what can the BBC be thinking of? Pace and plotting yet. And allowing that punkish Ace go for the daleks with a baseball bat (admittedly an augmented baseball bat) and then allowing her to be surrounded by daleks, end music imminent AND NOT SCREAM. I was impressed - though you could see the anguish on her face as off screen John Nathan Turner threatened her: "Scream, dammit, scream! Call yourself a woman. Scream, hear me, or I'll set Bonnie Langford on to you!" Won't, says Ace's face. Won't. Core, what a cliff-hanger. They never used to make them like that.

Ace's ghetto blaster gets blown up. "Good thing," says Doctor. "Imagine, if that fell into the wrong hands, microchips might have been invented 20 years too early." What he's failed to notice as they all sit around in Ali's cafe for their fourth cup of tea, is that EastEnders has been invented 20 years too early instead. "I think I'll have to give up all this scientific stuff," says the awful bitch who plays Joanne in EastEnders, but who is valiantly trying to fight the daleks back here in the sixties "and retire to run a wine bar." "And I'll go and sign on down the soce," says the doctor, wondering if he should audition for the part of Arthur Fowler in his next incarnation. "But Professor, think what it'll do to the space-time continuum," urges Ace. "The sixties would never happen - everybody would be at home watching EastEnders instead of out screaming at the Beatles or showing off miniskirts in Carnaby Street. Ringo would get a part in Brookside! Rolf Harris would be on twice a day trying to make kangaroos into actors! And somebody would have the bright idea of turning Doctor Who into a pantomime!"

"Too late, Ace - they've already done that!" says the Doctor. "Pass me those spoons, Duncan, I feel another number coming on!"

*Hmm, yes, thank you, Marina. Pity about Davros showing up in episode four, but you can't win them all. And now back to the travelogue.*

\*\*\*\*\*

REENTRY, Part 1  
by Christina Lake

It's strangely comforting to travel across America to the sound of rock radio. It's like Caroline never went off the air. Like the Beatles never split. Like I'm back at school again. One night I dream that the Beatles had turned into terrorists



and were planning to blow up the arena at one of their big concerts. Only Paul didn't want to go through with it and was asking me my advice. "Gosh, the Beatles terrorists!" I was too overwhelmed by the concept to say anything. And then of course I woke up - leaving Paul to his dilemma.

Heavy metal is great to drive to. I feel I've regressed to an uncomplicated world where reggae, soul, funk, folk and jazz never existed, pop is a dirty word and you only have to say you like Genesis to make a heap of new friends.

Now it's dark and I'm being driven on the right side. That is, the left. And the cars have big number plates. I imagine the American style slogans they might have. 'Glasgow - Miles Better', except on the new cars which say 'European City of the Arts'. There is a picture of a firework exploding into the face of a flower in the middle of the new shopping centre. Not quite as emblematic as the Statue of Liberty on our hire car, perhaps, but it all takes time.

I'm the only one on the night coach from Glasgow to Bristol who wants to stay awake. I slept most of the day after flying in from New York at eight in the morning. I'm feeling hugely optimistic and full of energy. I think of all the things I'm going to do when I get home, all the ways in which my life will be sane, organised and creative. No more chaos. No more anomie. This time I'm going to crack it! I consider writing a list of all the things I will do, but the coach is too crowded for that so instead I lean forward to catch the light from the aisles and plunge back into the dense print of my American blockbuster novel.

We only found one bible station. That was in Pennsylvania where the hotel pasted the name of the duty chaplain on a card on top of the television set - next to the listing of cable channels. The station was called Inspiration and warned us about the sins of the flesh. "Elvis is alive," proclaimed the Presenter. "He took on all the sins of our modern world : drink, drugs, rock n'roll and hamburgers and died for us. But now he has risen and is doing a tour with the Virgin Mary. When you send us enough money, you too will see him."

After that we made some rules.

Rule 1: Never eat in a hamburger place more than once in a day.

Rule 2: Switch stations every time Phil Collins comes on.

Eventually we reach Manchester 'The United City'. Nights are longer than you can possibly imagine when you're asleep.

It's 4.30 in the morning, and we're stopped at a motorway service station. I buy a stale doughnut in the truck-stop cafe. Everyone is watching the Olympics. In Montreal you could watch in French on three different channels and not hear the Chariots of Fire theme tune even once. Back on the screen, everyone stands for the American National anthem as three American's share the medals. In the next race, the British runner comes in seventh and won't even qualify.

On the American coverage I'm lost. Who am I meant to look out for? Who are the British medal hopes? Which events should I be watching? The only answers is to eat at MacDonalds where they give you the name of a race and if the Americans place for a medal you get a free hamburger and fries. But I never find out : do you have to give them back if the winner is disqualified for drugs?

We reach Stoke-on-Trent. 'Home of The Organisation' say the number plates.

Somewhere Catherine Crockett is offering me drugs. I suck into a large hubble bubble pipe. "If you bite on this side of the mushroom you'll grow larger." Mushrooms, explained Catherine. They're hell to get through in large enough quantities. I realise I'm back in my aunt and uncle's house in Burlington, just outside Toronto. My uncle has given us all a huge glass of rum, mixed with a dash of soda and we've drunk most of it. My uncle, I see for the first time, has my grandmother's eyes. And my cousin Russell has grown to twice the width he was fourteen years ago when I last saw him. We look at some photos, just to check. Everybody's changed. I look like a hippy or a 60s folk singer, for God's sake,



because my hair's long and straight and parted in the middle with no fringe. Everything about me is long and straight. Russell looks like a '70s rock guitarist.

My aunt is wistful. "Look how thin you were back then, Gerald-Fred."  
Gerald-Fred?

Suddenly we're back in the convention hospitality suite and Mike Glicksohn is saying "Why are you called Peter-Fred?"

"Why do you call him Gerald-Fred?" I ask my aunt.

"Because it's his name."

"Here, use my lighter," says Catherine Crockett. "It's gone out."

"No, you have it," I say, passing on the pipe. "I think I've had enough."

The new driver has turned the centre lights off, but now there are enough seats for me to have my own window and my own light. The heroine of the novel has just discovered that she is pregnant and has to decide whether to stay with her husband who is the President of the United States or run off with her journalist lover. I keep staring at the sky, imagining that the white streaks might be about to turn into dawn.

Back in Burlington, all my relatives are sitting round the television, watching the Olympics. "I've put ten dollars on Carl Lewis," says Russell. They're all waiting up for Canada's first gold medal as hope after hope fades. Ben Johnson barely qualified for the final and even the Toronto Sun has written him off, but you can tell from the way Russell says it that he's really hoping this is one bet he'll lose.

"Oh God, he must be on drugs," I say while the Canadians hug each other as their hero comes in first, making a new world record. Fortunately they can't hear me as I'm still at the Convention. "Golden Ben goes all the way!" headlines the Sun the next day.

Birmingham, 'What's wrong with Critical Wave anyway!', say the car registration plates as dawn breaks. They have a picture of a broken-down duplicator on them. We wait the mandatory half hour in Birmingham coach station.

There's an optimistic early morning sun over the green fields of Gloucester, but by the time we reach the outskirts of Bristol it has begun to rain. So, this is it, I think, home. I want to cry. I normally love coming home, now all I can see is a dull greyness and commuter traffic snarled up round the Queensway roundabout. My night-time optimism fades. It will all be just the same. I'll solve nothing, achieve nothing. I know this is tiredness speaking, as I contemplate the prospect of battling onto a bus with my suitcase. But sometimes the truth is more obvious when you're tired.

\*\*\*\*\*

Peter-Fred arrives back via Reykjavik later that afternoon, looking remarkably lively for someone who's been up for about twenty hours. He sleeps perfectly that night. Jet lag, nothing! Then spends the next night wide awake. We go down the pub to see if the Bristol SF group has remembered we're coming back. Apparently not. There are only Dave and Richard I sitting there looking bored, and saying things like: "Oh, are you back already!" Then in come Tim and Richard III, closely followed by Alan and Nathan and things pick up. It's decided that we will go on a pub crawl in Thornbury the next night, not to celebrate my return, of course, but to get it in before Richard III leaves for Lancaster.

"I was in Lancaster the night before last," I tell Richard, conversationally. Well, for five minutes at the coach station.

"Oh yes", he says. "Have they got the barbed wire out yet?"

"They were just getting it ready," I assure him solemnly. "And all the 'No students' signs. But they let my coach through because it was too dark to see that all the passengers were using Walkmen."

Richard and I decide to split a round since it's his last meeting for a while and my first. For a wonder we don't forget to buy Nathan a drink.

The pub crawl is a success, even if there are only two people still drinking by the end of the fifth pub. We take Nathan and Alan back to find their motor bikes,



after we have been battered into submission by accidentally watching the whole of 'The Man with Two Brains' on Tim's video. "Oh dear, we really shouldn't have eaten all of Tim's biscuits," says Alan remorsefully, as we drop him off.

"Maybe I'll write something for the fanzine," adds Nathan, as if this will make amends.

"Quicker to buy more biscuits," I say. But Nathan doesn't listen. He's still trying to digest a weekend playing at business in Exeter. It has obviously got to him, because a week later he comes up with the following transcript (untitled of course, but for the sake of argument we shall call it):

#### THE GAMES WE PLAY

by Nathan Sidwell

My holiday this year consisted of a hectic 5 days role playing. Not your tame D&D or Star Trek type, but the more cut throat world of real life emulation.

To put you in the picture I'll tell you that I'm a Physics PhD bod. As it seems too many of us are staying on in academia or - sin of sins - brain draining ourselves there are these things called Grad schools where you find out about the wonders of marketing, town planning etc. It seemed worth it when the bumpf came through, after all who'd turn down 5 days of free food in Exeter?

Thus it came to pass that I zipped off to Exeter on my two wheeled stallion (ok so it's a 125 with L plates) in the middle of September. After 70 odd miles the signs to Exeter suddenly disappeared, then I caught on - I'd arrived.

Off to St Luke's to register and I find my room is half a mile down the road from where they are holding the course, which means I will have to get up that bit earlier. I see from the list of attendees that there are about 100 students of which 10% are Southamptonites (for no apparent reason). There were also about a dozen executives who were from industry but were doing the course.

After the general intro we get cut into groups of ten to deal with the activities of the course. First task scenario - being part of a gigantic multinational computer company. Your director has decided that you very rapidly need to get into the small computer market. You are part of a Task Force which has to come up with a one year plan to produce it. Great pains were made to stress that this was a purely fictitious scenario but I reckon that the company was bigger than Belgium. We came up with a pretty good plan (well, I thought so), consisting of cobbling together some old PC ideas and putting it in a new box.

During lunch I discovered what other PhDs are like, and got the dirt on some torrid goings-on in the Aberystwyth bell ringers group.

Next, the Business Game. The longest running role play of the lot. Your task (should you care to accept it) is to run a boiler manufacturer, competing with the other players. In an assertive five minutes I elected to be Managing Director and decided on inside information to set up the largest plant possible. So, on to the form go the decisions to get sent into the nether world of computer simulation.

After dinner - yes this is a 9 till 9 course - was the IBM 'large computer company' story, part two. After a successful US launch IBM wants to hit the foreign market. Come up with a marketing strategy and two adverts for one of the following countries: Iran, Italy, Russia, France, Spain (to name a few). Also, what is wrong with using the American campaign (as personally devised by Hirem Firem Jnr III)? Our Italian campaign plan was to call it the Vendetta and have slogans like "*A Vendetta will solve your problems*" or "*The Mafia never make mistakes - now you know why*". Iranian Business Machines came up with a good one too.

Then just enough time to discover that the on-site bar had a choice of one bitter and one lager. Roll on Saturday when we get a whole evening off.

Day 2 sets off with another decision in the Business Game, so I have to get into an MD type frame of mind. Did we do ok? Have we gone bust before we've even started? No worries - sold everything. Now to try something new - industrial espionage. My Production Manager, Jonathan, and I went snooping round the other companies. Lo and behold someone's left their folder unattended! We get the gen on all the possible customers for free. Decision made and off to trust to the



computer. Then to a John Cleese/Graham Garden film on meeting organisation. No rest for these high-flying executives.

With the next boiler business results came an offer for half price steel. "There's got to be a catch," we all said. But we couldn't see it, so we bought - if only we'd investigated.

Later that evening - the escape to Exeter. Not a task to be taken lightly as the NF and Anti-Fascists had been having a march there. The cop shop opposite was bundling people in cuffs out of vans, and a helicopter had been buzzing us all day. Off we wandered to the Black Horse to see the CD juke box (with muffled speakers) and try out the self-destruct chairs. I can't remember much more, but good fun was had by all, discussing the usual post-grad stuff.

Ow! How uncivilised! I mean even a token one hour delay would be appreciated, but no. Same time Sunday morning too. After nibbling through breakfast another boiler decision had to be made. Well the steel seemed ok, but we're not selling enough. We put the salesmen on a bonus and get some info on our competitors.

Now we're off to shut some schools - or try to keep them open. Well, that was a bit of a wash out. Most people couldn't remember anything for more than thirty seconds, let alone come to a decision about it. That must have been one of the most subdued pseudo council meetings ever. I hear that some company's boilers have blown up, and some steel came from South Africa.

Ha! I knew it! I knew it! I knew it! The steel came from South Africa, our workforce went on strike, but we didn't know about this 'cos the computer didn't tell us - it told some other company. We had to pay the South African Black Otter Appeal Fund the saving we made as the shop steward seemed to want this. Only problem is the lost production. Hope this doesn't affect the trade fair coming up.

In the afternoon we get another JC movie about accounts - made it all seem quite easy, at least if you happen to run a spoon factory. Another boiler decision. I don't know what's happening about the lost production. There doesn't seem to be any - oh well.

Next to set up for the trade fair. Having bid £17,000 for a stand we'd better shift some boilers. We acquired a fridge and wrapped it up vaguely boiler-like, and set to putting up some other blurby-type promo stuff. The fridge got a few laughs as being the biggest boiler about, but at least it was sturdy. The tutors came round as sexist sheiks, mad Spaniards and cold Russians, etc. Our job is to sell them boilers, but due to some more espionage by our marketing guy we know that they've already decided who to buy from. Ms Gorbachev of Moscow wanted to pay us in caviar.

Final day. Industrial relations - I get to play a Jefferson Airplane shop steward worried about parity with Skyline employees in a merger. As we are forced to come to an agreement within an hour, it all kind of gets worked out in the last five minutes where one of our number confuses the management with jargon and we get a stupendouse share deal offer.

Final business decision. Whoopee! Sold everything, made a huge profit. What a capitalist I've become.

Now for County Council cuts back. How to cut a £10M budget to £4M in forty five minutes. I get the hot seat of being Chief Executive. Well, it took about twenty five minutes to do that, so it looks as if I can put my feet up. But no, Mr. I.M. Tight has just delivered a note saying the new target is £2M with a revenue of £300K. AAARGH! After another frantic round of bargaining I persuade education to drop another school, social services to drop an OAP home, but we're still £80K over and down to our minimum legal requirements. Then the transport officer admits he lied, and we don't have to resurface the main London comuter road. (That'll teach those city slickers.) The 15K we're over on the revenue is going to be met as I've just received an offer from a boiler manufacturer.

Final Business Game effort - the company reports. We discover that we made the biggest profit, even though we hadn't the foggiest what was going on towards the end. It just seems that our executive decision making coin knew better than the opposition. We never did find out what happened to our lost production.



Finally the end of course party. Unfortunately I can't remember much about it, which is upsetting as I recall dancing with an attractive girl. Maybe I was just too hyped up and got completely high.

Woke up with a sore head and very sore toes - too much bopping in bare feet. Now to stagger to breakfast and off home. Who am I? The MD of a leading boiler manufacturer? Shop steward for Jefferson Airplane? Marketing for IBM? That's the problem with adopting two new personalities a day. It took me two days to get my own persona straight - how do actors manage?

I now know that I want to stay in the technical field. Back to Bristol for the welcome routine of cutting edge research, including such delights as the OS/2 bug (bloody IBM again).

(This has been written in Nathan's new improved drift-o-Tense)

++++  
RE-ENTRY Part 2  
by Christina Lake

Why does travelling at night, walkman playing, seem somehow more real to me than anything else? Watching the shadowy hump of a freight train passing; running through some outer London underground station so fast you can't even see the names. What is there about travelling alone at night that gives this kick, that makes the experience seem more in touch with primordial reality than the rest of my life?

I went to London to try and recapture some of the feeling. You know, the one I lost when I came back to Bristol. And what do I find? They've changed the ticket machines, that's what. Good, it seems more foreign. But, the subway. Is that graffiti I see on the side of the trains, or has someone scrubbed it off? Very New York. After all, who wants to live with graffiti year round, even if art critics worldwide rave about it? I get on the train, and notice, good God, it's all upholstered. And if one person stands between the seats you feel threatened. Claustrophobia. Didn't huge groups of us stand around between the seats, straphanging and talking on the New York subway trains? I picture Bill Wagner, hardly a small guy. Bill speculating "What's in that box? What's in that big box over there? How does it breathe? Stu, Stu, go and ask." "It's okay," Stu answers, laconically. "He says there's nothing in there."

I miss it. I was only there for a week. How can I miss it? I do.

I get to the 'Ton and wonder if I'm invisible. People who've been to New Orleans see me, but I'm not sure that many of the rest do. Dave Wood explains that I'm out of context. Harry Bond offers me a second copy of his fanzine. I could be a lost soul, except that John Jarrold hugs me and mumbles incoherently about New Orleans and New York. Then I find a travellers ghetto. Kate and Pam exchange glazed looks. Sienna, sighs Kate, who's spent two months touring Europe, Reykjavik, sighs Pam who's lost her heart to Iceland. Seattle, I sigh, equally glazed.

"But did they take you to the chocolate restaurant?" breaks in Avedon, impatient with all this sentimentality.

"No. But it was still wonderful." I glare at her with a new brusqueness that America has given me. Avedon laughs. "I had a postcard from Ditto. Ken Rosenhaus, Moshe & ..."

I sigh again. Ditto. A fanzine convention in Toronto. My last link with American fandom. Sentimentality bubbles up.

"Hi! How are you doing?"

I look up in surprise to see another person out of context. It's Caroline Knight from Bristol. I haven't seen her since the post-wedding meal. She never comes to the Bristol SF group - what's she doing at the Wellington.

"I'm off to America tomorrow," she explains.

"Really? Where?" America. How could she? And me still not adjusted to Britain.

"California." Will the torture never end? I try to make Avedon set a date for her pyjama party. It'll be a Saturday. The men will go off to Pam's flat and we'll read all of Rob's comics. Pam of course will be round at the party. And we'll all



knit condoms to sell for TAFF. The boys at the front would be proud. (And the girls grateful?)

Zy Nicholson keeps buying us drinks to make up for not contributing to the conversation. But are we even giving him the opportunity? Still, when someone's buying drinks you don't stop to argue the ethics of it all.

"Fans can't dance," mutters Nigel Richardson. But he's not so sure any more. Kate Solomon is waltzing with John Jarrold. Abi is trying to jive with Malcolm Davies. And it's all because fans are actually holding a meeting in a pub with a juke box. Earlier on, John Jarrold tried to put a pound in. "Chose, chose!" he urges me. "But it doesn't take pound coins," I point out. J.J. puts the pound in and presses lots of buttons. I press a few, then decide it's not doing anything. I press eject coin. I hear coin eject. But where? Where? Pete Watts comes up and talks to me, and I keep looking the juke box up and down. "What did you say? Where do the coins come out, do you think?" J.J. comes back with another pound coin. I look through his change and pick out 50p. This gives us four. J.J. presses numbers at random. "You've just put on the Bangles," I say with asperity. "I know, I know," he mutters. "What's wrong with The Bangles?" I give up. "There's better fun over there," I say. "Let's go over there." It's that sort of 'Ton. Julian Headlong brings out his New Orleans pictures when I already know it's past time I left. "You're out of focus," he says. "Maybe you shouldn't have drunk so much." But on closer inspection it turns out I'm not in the photos at all. "Good, good," I say. There's Linda and John Jarrold doing strange things with Alan Moore's Hugo; there's Alun and Nigel doing strange things with Lucy Huntzinger. But there's nothing incriminating of me at all. Good, time to go.

I walk to the tube with Nigel and Pam. "You're going back to Bristol tonight," says Pam. "Yes, sure." It's eighteen minutes past eleven. "I think so." If I make my train. Pam helps me punch out a ticket on the new machines. Why the hell did they change them? To make me feel a stranger in my native city? Phil Palmer is standing at the bottom of the escalators, surveying the incomers for congenial company. He spots Nigel. I have one of those feelings you get in the underground. Hot air blowing through tunnels. There's a train. I follow my instincts - Bakerloo - Paddington - this hole. The air's getting faster. I dive into the carriage. The doors shut. Outside I see Nigel running onto the platform. The end doors reopen. Nigel dives in. I feel cheated. Nigel explains that it's change at Kilburn for Cricklewood, and isn't it depressing to be back in Britain?

Ah, someone who understands at last. Maybe I shouldn't have laughed so much every time I saw Lucy and Nigel together. Especially as Nigel was suffering from the handicap that the only public washing machine in Cricklewood broke down the morning of his trip to America, while Lucy had been planning and collecting her wardrobe for months.

"This train is approaching Bristol, ladies and gentlemen. This train is approaching Bristol."

I guess I must have made my train after all.

So I get off, still wondering why quarter past one should represent the time of quintessential reality, even if I am playing Marc Almond on my walkman.

In the end it all comes down to forward motion, I decide.

But some time you have to stop. I wonder if I'm going to like it back here in Bristol? Back in this city with its Exploratory, its restaurants, its Balloon Fiestas, the pub every Thursday, forgetting to buy Nathan a drink. The old routine. Why should six weeks in America change anything? I get on my bike, and cycle back home. It's against the wind all the way, and in three days time I have a cold. Such is England. Such is life.

"The only thing to fear is fear itself."

Repeat.

Sorry, no letter column this issue. Apart from anything, I couldn't find many letters. Maybe nobody wrote; maybe I just lost them all. Never mind - thanks anyway to Sue Thomason, Alan Sullivan, Bernard Leak, Geogre Bondar, Jeremy Ball, Pascal Thomas and Irwin Hirsh. We'll hear from the rest of you next time?



## BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 2

---

### CONTENTS

Perfect Day		
Christina Lake	1	
Night of the Gastric Acrobat		
Richard McClaren	3	
Balloon Crazy		
Tim Goodrick	5	
Easy Driver		
Peter-Fred Thompson	8	
Re-Entry, Part 1		
Christina Lake	15	
Games We Play		
Nathan Sidwell	18	
Re-Entry, Part 2		
Christina Lake	20	

---

Balloons Over Bristol 2 is available for packets of maltesers, strawberry daiquiris, streetmaps of Seattle, shares in IBM, or donations to TAFF (50p) from:

Christina Lake and Peter-Fred Thompson  
47 Wessex Avenue,  
Horfield,  
Bristol,  
BS7 ODE

30th October 1988