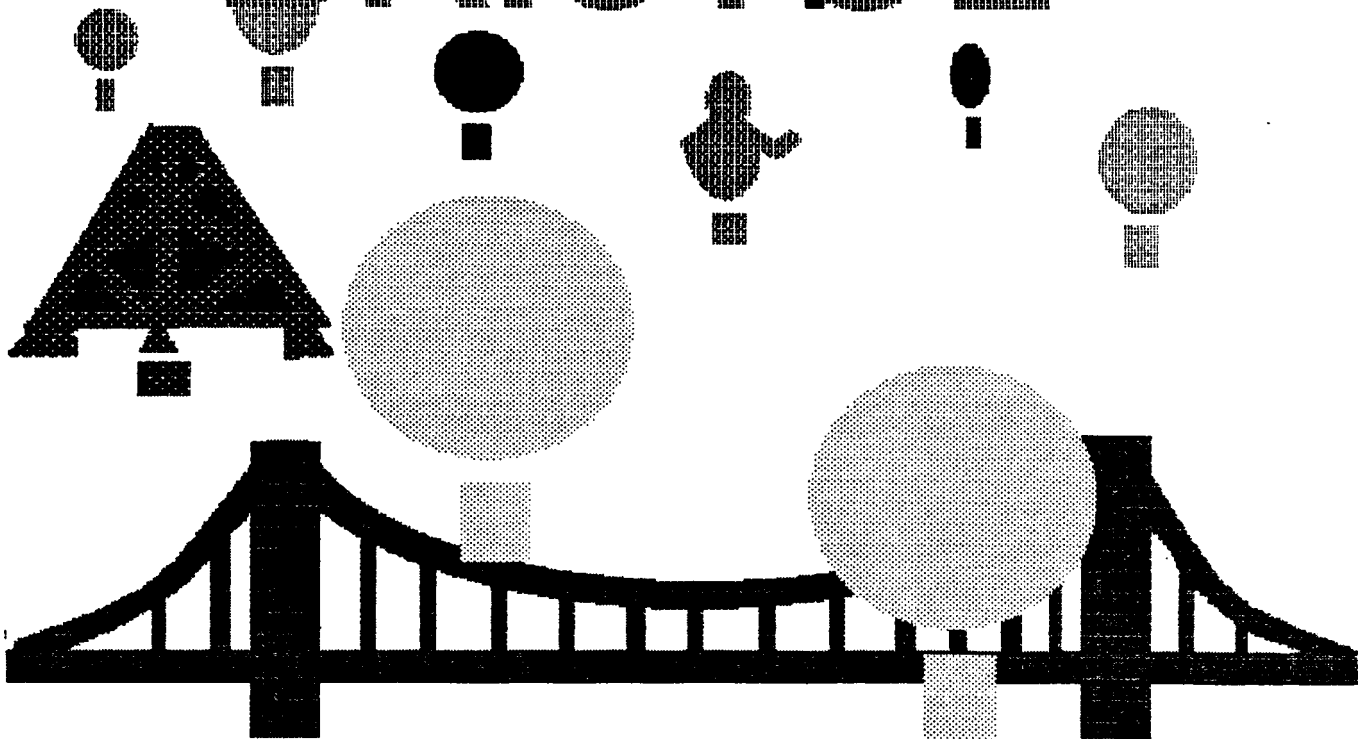
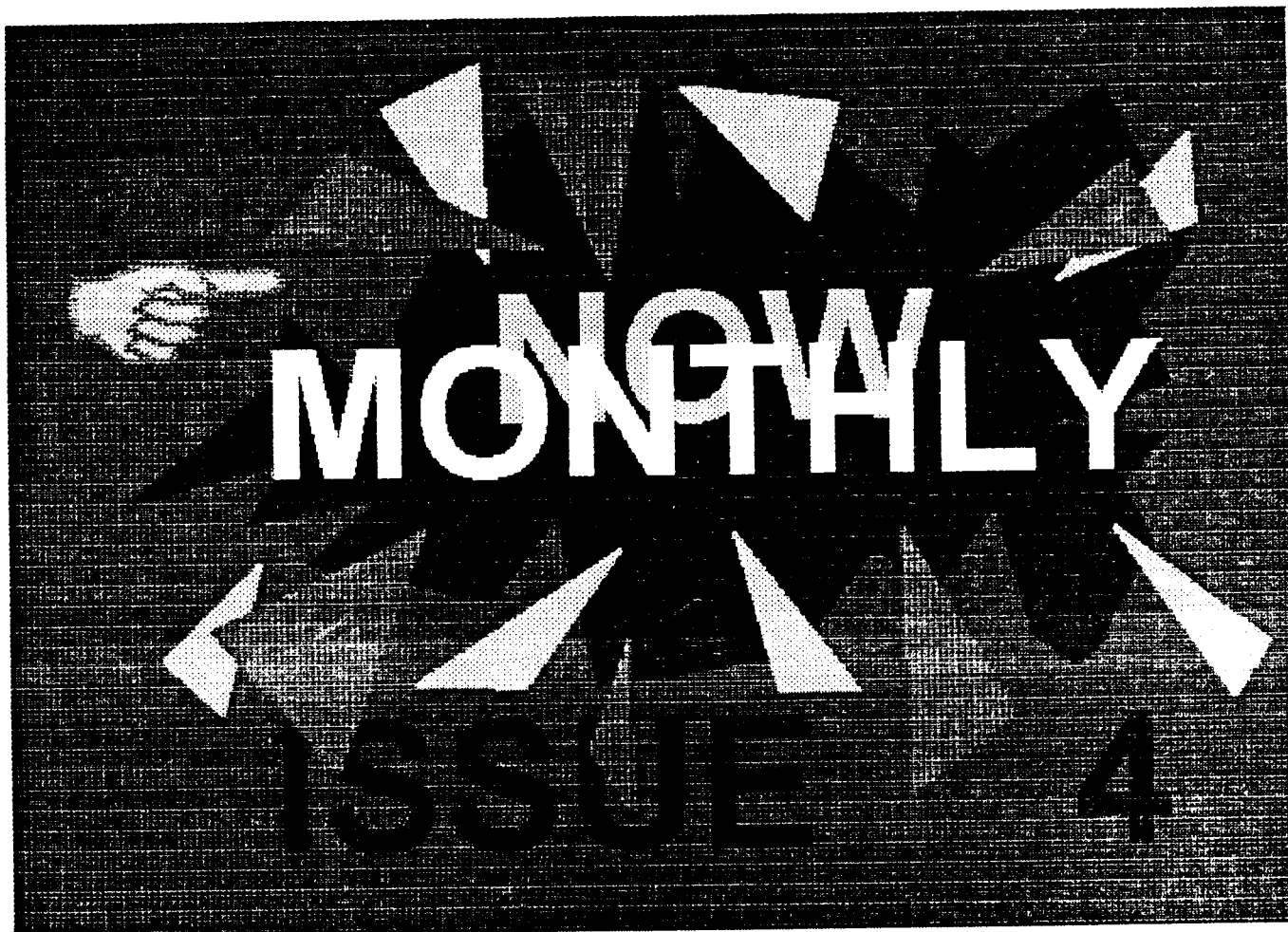


**BALLOONS**

**OVER**

**BRISTOL**





**NOVACON  
NOVEMBER 94**

## BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 5

### The Cover

No, it wasn't an elaborate hoax, an attempt to turn fans cross-eyed or a psychological test. The truth behind the dots can now be revealed for all those too lazy to take off their glasses and squint. Just turn to the front of the fanzine to see last issue's cover stripped of its disguise and revealed in all its glory. As you can see, it was simply a load of balloons as usual!

### The Frequency

The backcover (reprinted on facing page) also safely concealed the claim that, impressed by Andy Hooper's venture into weekly publishing, Balloons Over Bristol, intended to go monthly. In fact, so well was that fact hidden that the schedule has slipped already. So in the best tradition of periodical publishing, I could say welcome to the December/January issue of Balloons Over Bristol! But being a more realistic soul, I think we'd better aim for a bimonthly schedule instead. Why monthly (bimonthly) you might ask (as did certain distraught member of the Bristol group.) Balloons Over Bristol has not exactly been known for its rapid publication schedule in the past. In fact, gaps of two years between issues have been closer to the norm than two months. Well, therein lies the answer. What the fanzine's lacked in the past, is impetus. Who wants to write to (or for) a fanzine that may not appear for a very long time? I felt it would be easier to get people involved in a fanzine that comes out regularly than one that hardly comes out at all. And so far it seems to be working - at least I've had enough material to fill two issues, and haven't lost ALL my friends yet!

### The Letter Column

Since there haven't been many letters - in part due to the deliberate anonymity of the last issue - I propose to hold over those we have received to the next issue (due early April for Confabulation). Which means Pat Silver, Bridget Hardcastle, Ken Lake and (I suppose) Steve Green are let off the hook, but the rest of you out there, get writing, or you may find yourself slung overboard when we next run low on fuel.

### The Contents

The fanzine column is an experiment in mixed reviewing, the convention report is an experiment in sleep deprivation, the music column is an experiment in discovering our readers tastes, and the Miss Lee letters is a sequel.

### The Contributors

Balloons Over Bristol comes from the same hard core of culprits as last time (though Brian could do better). These are Steve Brewster, Tim Goodrick, Richard Hewison, Brian Hooper, Simon Lake, Peter Fred Thompson, Tony Walsh and myself - Christina Lake.

This issue and the previous one are available on request from : 12 Hatherley Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 8QA. Balloons Over Bristol 4 can also be obtained electronically from [Steve.Brewster@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Steve.Brewster@bristol.ac.uk) (where you can also send electronic locs if so inclined)

January 1995

## LIQUORICE ALLSORTS (aka the fanzine reviews)

Traditionally fanzine review columns feature a form of compare and contrast by one reviewer who ploughs her/his way through a number of fanzines and comes up with an elegant, well-formed theory about the state of fandom as we know it. We, being mere mortals, with a sad lack of time management expertise, have gone for the distributed approach. We may not tell you which fanzine is best (I found myself hard pushed to answer that question when Tony Walsh, so impressed with Empties, asked me if I had given him the best of the bunch to review), but we do give you six people's honest (and, in some cases, lengthy) impressions of what they have read. Now all we need is a weekly publication schedule, a star rating system and a pile of records and we could compete with the NME!

### WHAT ABOUT BOB?

#### Review of Ian Sorensen's BOB #7 (Tim Goodrick)

Novacon is one of the few cons that I can find a legitimate excuse for not attending (I visit my brother, his wife and my nephew for a bonfire party that weekend every year). For most other cons I have to rummage around in a scrap heap of tired old excuses to find a threadbare *something* that will allow non-attendance. I've been to three cons and enjoyed them all so I'm not sure why I always try to avoid them. Perhaps it's just my natural lethargy - after all, not going is so much easier.

But I ramble, one of my many endearing faults (well *I* find it endearing). At the meeting of the Bristol S.F. group after Novacon Christina produced a pile of Fanzines so high that if Harlan Ellison had stood on them he'd have almost come up to Geoff Ryman's waist which might well have produced Harlan's Last Dangerous Vision. "You've all got to review one of these," she ordered, plonking the critical mass of Fanzines on the table and disturbing Brian's aesthetically arranged array of empty pint glasses (Brian is the only Real Drinker in our group and now regards it as somewhat inevitable that he has to order Embarrassing Beverages such as ginger beer, orange juice and, gasp, mineral water). I stared at the pile of Fanzines, some of which looked Horrendously Thick and Christina took pity and sorted out some of the slimline ones for me to choose from. She could have taken pity a step further along the road to generosity and told me that I didn't have to bother at all. No such kind-spirited words slipped her lips however, so I chose the Fanzine that had the most pages taken up with pictures.

There were several reasons why I didn't want to do a review. The last time I had to review anything was when I was 12. I had to do a review of Arthur Ransome's Swallows and Amazons, and thirty years later it remains a book which I have still not read. I read the first few pages, decided I didn't like the book or being told to read it so just skimmed through the rest. Naturally, my review lacked a great deal and didn't fool the English teacher one bit. I recently watched an episode of the Simpson's, where Bart is supposed to have read Treasure Island for a review. The memories came flooding back, with Bart, not having read the book, trying to do a review from the picture on the cover.

Another reason for wanting to shirk this task is that I don't even seem to be able to get down to reading the things I really want to read at the moment, let alone stuff which I was convinced would be cliquy or boring or full of impenetrable abbreviations (I've

never been on the Fan scene and only very recently found out what a LOC was). But, I hear you cry, What About Bob? Well, here goes.

I started with the pictures, of course, and grudgingly found them amusing and not too opaque (although those damned abbreviations made a guest appearance and it took me a few moments to decode DNQ (Do Not Quote - I assume)). However, Angria and Gondal fan fiction left me totally bemused.

Things went from bad to worse when I found myself enjoying reading the Albacon '94 report. I have to admit that this was mainly because there was a mention of Babylon 5 in it, far and away the best SF on TV (Satellite included). As to the point about the lead actor leaving, apparently the series creator, J. Michael Straczynski, has created what he calls a 'trapdoor' for each character. By means of the trapdoors he can remove characters from the plotline and, if necessary, re-introduce them later on. I find it hard to see how he can do this with a character that seems so central but look forward to finding out in the new year. What I like most about the program are the little things. A friend at work, having borrowed a tape of the pilot from me some time after the series proper had begun, came up with what he thought was a blunder. "How come," he asked, "if Ambassador Kosh was wearing that environment suit, did we see him being poisoned on his hand? Surely it would have been protected by the suit?" I gave him some flimflam answer, refusing to believe that they could have made a mistake. In the next episode I watched Sinclair was talking to Garibaldi (at least I think it was those two) and he commented about the very same thing. Neat. He also commented on the fact that the only people who'd seen inside the Ambassador's suit had been immediately transferred back to Earth (in fact the actors had not been taken up for the series proper and had only appeared in the pilot. Nice). Oh, dear. What about Bob?

Fannus Horribilis made wonderfully depressing reading. Sunday evenings certainly seem to be the burglars' favourite time. Christina had her attempted burglary on a Sunday evening and on my section of ten people at work, three out of the four that have been burgled were done on a Sunday evening. Perhaps I've only avoided the dread intruders so long because friends usually come round to my place on a Sunday, so I'm rarely out at the high risk time. The car radio story had the inevitability of classic tragedy and reading the farce of the motorway telephone cheered me up tremendously (I am off work with some vicious virus and decided that this would be a good time to try my Fanzine assignment on the principle that reading it couldn't make me feel any worse. And, what do you know, despite myself, I feel better). But what about Bob?

Earlier in my week of sickness, brain at an almost dead stop, I'd been rooting round the house for mindless entertainment, watched the Back to the Future trilogy in one sitting and, on putting it away found my Fawlty Towers tape. And now here's Sitcom Verite, with its Basilesque cafe proprietor. Why do these people always run shops or restaurants? Or is it the job that makes them the way they are? And why do they always have the moustache and the glare? The format of this article was inspired and the radio and TV snippets had me chuckling, some of the time at other gaffs I remembered hearing myself. (My favourite is still the Olympian folly of -"And now we can bring you the pole vault over the satellite from Montreal." These athletes just get better and better. And no space suits either.)

What about Bob? All in all it was a very good read and BOB #7 can be heartily recommended to anyone suffering from lurgies of any kind. It might (only *might*, mind you) have changed my opinion of Fanzines.

(As for What About Bob? it's a film starring Richard Dreyfus as a rather pretentious psychiatrist and Bill Murray as a patient who won't leave him alone. The small dollops of gooey sentiment are worth enduring for the rest of the film which is hilarious at times. Damn! Another review! )

Better smeg than dead (boring)

Review of Tommy Ferguson's TASH 12 (Richard Hewison)

When Christina was doling out fanzines to review, I took this one because it looked the shortest. Lazy? Moi! As if! But I can't see any point in doing more work than I have to. So, I suppose I only have myself to blame if I found this, the first and only issue of TASH I've ever seen, rather unexciting. It started well with talk of some sort of feud with the entire membership of Octocon, but all this promise of insults and aggression fizzled out into a seemingly endless succession of life histories of - surely - the dullest members of Northern Irish fandom. This is the kind of issue that makes Tony Berry's mooted theme issue on banks sound like an inspired choice. How I got into fandom stories could be interesting, but in my opinion, only if they involve explosions, excess alcohol or naked women. These only seemed to involve library books and acquaintanceship with Tommy Ferguson. What else can I say? More artwork than the Bristol Sf group zine, but apart from Tommy's intro, severely lacking in zest, cream cakes and chemistry.

14 Empties lined up by Tony Walsh

Review of Martin Tudor's Empties 14

Outside, a silly invention of a name; inside, a silly ramble of juvenile trivia ridden with cliché and fanspeak. That was how I saw almost all of the fanzines which came my way when I joined fandom. I seldom commented and almost never contributed, believing it enough instead to socialize with fans, to talk SF and other serious subjects, to go to conventions (and organise conventions), to set up a fan group; all much more mature activities than pubbing. Indeed, I pitied fans whose enthusiasm for it seem wholly misdirected. Thus can some forms of prejudice and intolerance bar access to a potentially enjoyable activity.

Even as it was passing from Christina Lake's hand to mine with a request to review, Empties was making a good impression. Fanzines this thick, I thought, do not run to 14 issues without a competent and popular editor. It felt and looked interesting, and, plus point, on the outside it had a real word for a name. So what of the inside?

The style (design? layout? whatever you call it) was so uniformly bumpless throughout as to be a positive aid to easy absorption - evidence of how effective use of technology makes life a little easier - and the whole was made even less bumpy by the 'first time' theme which flowed smoothly through the separate articles.

Collectively, the articles made a balanced set which holds variety and contrast enough for an hour's interesting reading : thrilling, poetic, horrific, neolithic, expectant and

even provides for those who enjoy being bored by lists.

I enjoyed most reading David Redd and Harry Andrushak. David because he showed me a poetic view of the Punch-And-Judy man I have never dreamed of, and Harry because he showed me a thrilling view of the world I have often dreamed of. Richard Standage's story about his cock was terrifying enough to make my mouth go dry. Although I knew it can never happen to me I still was horrified by the images arising from the juxtaposition of doctor, scalpel, hypodermic and penis. Mind you, the fact that it was a lady doctor may have generated a different sort of reaction in some areas of your readership. Well, was she wearing black stilletos, Richard?

Darroll Pardoe's time trip to Neolithia caused a few memories to stumble forth and peer at the nineties (sorry lads, it's even shittier than you expected - best return to 1959.) He seemed also to echo some of the sentiments of my opening sentence, but much more diplomatically : "LES SPINGE...truly remarkable...very high spirited...ebullient...unbelievably messy...' Incidentally, Darroll, I had a copy of the famous Black Spinge but the dog took it off somewhere twenty years ago.

Helena Bowles's report on her new project had a pleasantly happy tone which caused me to reflect that there was a time when it would have been a miserably unhappy tone; if, that is, she had dared to reveal her awful secret. How the changing times have reduced the misery that accompanied illegitimacy. But I disagree with her thought: 'that my body could be doing this...' People don't make babies; babies make themselves. Vital as she is, the mother is still only the vessel used by nature to ensure the success of its most profound and most astonishing process; a process before which my sense of wonder stands awestruck. Good luck H.B.

Some of the articles had a potentially interesting content but suffered from being pedestrian - a condition affecting communication often caused by the 'cliche' virus. E.g. Mick Evans's father : 'became involved in an altercation with a fellow Albion fan about the merits of our right back.' How that does plod across the page.

The illos are a different matter : quite unbalanced. Were I a woman I'd be very pissed with MT. Decades of working towards sexual equality and we feature in only 2% of his artwork! And even then it's a tired old chauvinistic joke about a pussy and two Bristols. But I am not a woman and therefore have no reason to be pissed with MT. On the contrary: I am pleased with MT for showing me how enjoyable a fanzine can be. And were her surgical gloves black, Richard?

### PASS ME A BLUE ONE PLEASE!

#### Review of Simon Ounsley's Lagoon 6 (Christina Lake)

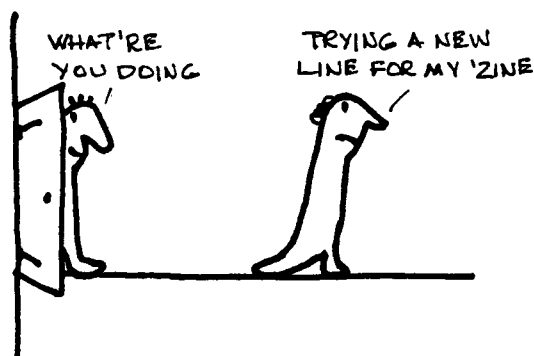
This first Lagoon, one year on since Simon's two Nova awards, is still a good read. The strength of the fanzine remains in Simon's writing, his honesty about life, and, to a large extent, the humanity he's gained from his years of illness. This issue mixes the pre- and post-M.E. Simon, with a large portion of the fanzine devoted to a reprint of a Novacon report first written for mine and Lilian's fanzine This Never Happens. This report seems to stand up well to the passage of time, though I have to admit that it has particular resonance for me as I re-read it just after an enforced stay in the Grand Hotel where it is set. It's clever and witty and deconstructs quite effectively both the Michael Ashley article it set out to take issue with (handily quoted in the text so that remembering Ashley's arguments is not a problem) and the

gap between the actual experience of conventions and the way they are written up. And, if you were around at the time, it would probably afflict you with creeping nostalgia too! If not, then treat it as a slice of life from the early 80s. Simon's viewpoint is strong enough that it can be read without needing to know who all these weird people actually were.

This convention report is on the whole more stylish and crafted than the writings of the present day Simon, but, as he admits himself in response to one of the Michael Ashley character's criticism, this isn't about real life. "So that's the height of your aspirations, is it?" says Ashley. "To take part in a piece of humorous fiction - a weekend in the pleasure dome? But what about Real Life? What about unemployment? High rise flats? What about Bob Monkhouse, for God's sake?"

The present day Simon does not yet write about high-rise flats, but he does skirt the subject of unemployment in his discourse on the consumer culture and our increasingly unsustainable lifestyle of overwork and overpay for the chosen few and redundancy for the rest. Like many before him, he diagnoses the problem quite clearly, and the potential solution, but with typical late 20th century British pessimism, admits that nothing is likely to happen. This is not going to inspire the readers to go out and set up the barricades. But then Lagoon has never been much of a campaigning fanzine. Which is perhaps what makes the other long article of the issue, D West's diatribe on fandom's collective lack of response on art work, seem slightly out of place. Not that D isn't thought-provoking, as ever, just that it seemed a bit of an imposition on me to think about the aesthetics of fan art in the middle of pondering about life. Or perhaps it wasn't the subject matter at all, perhaps it was just something as stupid as the fact that this part of the fanzine was photocopied while the rest was duplicated. I also felt that it was not quite fair of D to compare the reaction which fans give to art to what they give to a piece of writing. What most fans react to is the content of the writing, whether they agree or disagree, or even simply respond to a random sentence that reminds them of something they once did in the past. The amount of comment a fan writer receives on the technique of their writing is probably as little as an artist receives on the qualities that D is talking about here. People write in fanzines to entertain/ move/ lecture - whatever. If they want to find out what's wrong with their prose, they go to writers' workshops. Maybe artists do the same - put their work in fanzines for appreciation, but talk to their peers for criticism. Quite likely, they do get too little written appreciation, as D maintains, but if any of them had been at Joseph Nicholas and Judith Hanna's party when Attitude 4 was first given out and everyone turned to the cartoons and exchanged comments over which they liked best and what they found funny, then they would have felt well-rewarded.

Unlike D West, the other outside contributor to the fanzine, Steve Palmer who wrote an article about his hellish neighbours, seemed to fit right in the with the victims of life ethos of the fanzine. And I bet Simon will get loads of locs with people's own bad neighbours stories (I've written mine already). Overall, then, the fanzine was a good read - even the letter column, which I tend to skip, and it shows that you don't need a theme to produce a hefty issue (though you do perhaps need a D West article!)





### The Right Leggings?

A review of Lilian Edward's The Wrong Leggings 2 (Peter-Fred Thompson)

Well, you may or may not be glad to know that the trial separation seems to be working well. Relations are amicable (they still share a room at cons) and both parties are getting on with their lives as well as they can after the break-up of a ten-year partnership. Of course it's bound to be difficult to establish really distinct identities after being perceived as inseparable for so long, but Christina broke away some time ago, and now Lilian is continuing her own development with 'The Wrong Leggings', currently up to issue 2.

In issue 1, Lilian struck at the heart of fannish orthodoxy by daring to suggest that she might possibly not experience multiple orgasms every time a letter-of-comment struck the doormat. In no. 2 she recants, even starting with a letter column, although for some reason she doesn't seem to have all that many locs. So this becomes more of an editorial on the value of locs, absent fathers and the nature of fandom, interspersed with an occasional quote from one of her brave correspondents. Having disposed of that reprise of issue 1, we get into the meaty bit of the fanzine, which turns out to have a 'foreign travel' theme. Just to prove that they Really Are Still Friends, Christina donates an article (which would otherwise have been perfect for her own Never Quite Arriving) on her currently thwarted ambition to See the World (other than Europe and America, which she seems to have accidentally done already). Then Lilian herself wades in with a classic fan-anecdotal account of a trip to Prague, dropping in definitions of 'Gothic' and 'Baroque' so that one can correctly interpret the carefully scanned-in photos. This meanders into a nostalgic recollection of how Lilian and Christina (back when they were still the Six-year-old Twins) were going to give it All Up to run a feminist bookshop/ comic shop/ wholefood cafe. I remember that idea but I never knew Lilian took it so seriously...

The burgeoning capitalism of Prague is contrasted with that of Budapest in Lilian's final jaunt. In between is some more heavy-fannish dialectic on the future of TAFF, which Lilian - as the Lost TAFF Administrator of Bruntsfield (sic) - is well-qualified to discuss. She concludes that "TAFF is a McGuffin" - presumably something you buy from an American fast-food chain almost anywhere in Central Europe.

The writing is lucid - if a bit over-endowed with dashes - and the tone friendly. Anyone who isn't interested in travel and can't stand reasonable discussions about fandom probably won't be reading this review anyway, and to everyone else I can safely recommend Lilian's Leggings.

### A GIFT TO POSTERITY?

Review of Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk 7, edited by Greg Pickersgill (Steve Brewster)

Rastus Johnson - err sorry, Greg Pickersgill; who is Rastus Johnson? - writes the first eight pages, and the other twentysomething pages contain the letters arising from the previous instalment. That's all; no artwork (not even on the cover) other than the odd makeweight column-decoration. Just two columns per page of quite dense type, rather beautifully formatted with sensible use of fonts.

I've tried several draft summaries of Greg's editorial or whatever you want to call it, but you can't compress the thing into a neat precis, and to quote any of it is to risk losing the all-important Context. It'd be far less trouble just to re-key it. It's a genuine, well-crafted monologue which meanders through The Trouble With Young Fans of Today, DM Sherwood's telephone manner and thirty years of SF magazines, via a suggestion that Fanzine



## NOVACON DREAMING

by Christina Lake

How can we tell that this is not the dream and the dream real life? asked Dr Keith Hearne as if we were an audience of white collar workers who would be freaked out by such radical ideas. This particular audience of white collar sci-fi readers just looked impatient. Sure. We've heard this one before. But it simply ain't true.

I've had convention dreams on and off for years. Most of them take place in the lecture rooms of the science building at Warwick University, which probably means they're really disguised dreams about being a student. But sometimes I find myself in the bar at the Royal Angus...

It's six pm and Peter Fred and I walk in. The bar area is dominated by a smiling Greg Pickersgill. Dave Langford is there too, Martin Tudor, probably Pam Wells. The Leeds group corner is already full of smoke. Peter and I sit down at an empty table, not ready to plunge into the full experience. It's not a long drive from Bristol to Birmingham, but the trip round the one way system from the Grand to the Angus seemed to take a life-time. So I sip at a coke, letting my nerves unwind, wondering if any of the beer will be drinkable. People come to join our table. Richard Hewison reports that the bar prices are astronomical, then promptly orders a vodka and orange from the next sucker to offer to buy a round. I discover that the beer IS undrinkable, but in spite of this, I seem to be enjoying myself. Simon Ounsley gives out his fanzine, and tries to make us do the D West art quiz. "You must know who that is," he eggs us on. As one-time co-editor of a fanzine with pretensions to caring about fan art I feel ashamed. To cover this up, I start complaining that I didn't receive one of the brand new envelopes the Attitude team are giving out with their fanzine. Never mind that I had accidentally received two copies of the zine, I wanted to have my free envelope too. Eventually, to shut me up, Simon Ounsley gives me his. At this point, I notice that Lilian is now sitting where Peter-Fred used to be and she is looking at Simon's fanzine with a pleased look on her face. "It's obvious," she says. "All the art was done by D West."

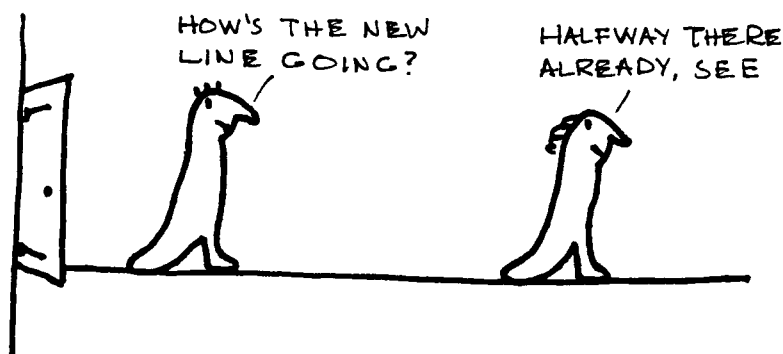
I turn over on my side, hoping the alarm is not about to go off. I've never had a lucid dream, but sometimes as I think back over a dream, I see that my sub-conscious is dropping large hints to me that I am in dream situation. For example, it wasn't Lilian who told me that all the art was done by D - it was Simon. And it wasn't on the Friday night of the convention, but some time on Sunday.

It's almost impossible to dream about the Sunday of a Novacon. By some curious alchemy, all the chairs which were upright and eager on Friday night, are as soft and engulfing as a bed by Sunday afternoon, and fans sprawl around in them, asleep from the head down, only their eyes making a desultory pretence at reading the Sunday papers. Ken Lake tells offensive stories about prostitutes to an unresisting audience who try to pretend he's not there. In their heads, they are already back at work, reviewing last week's problems, working out when they'll have time to do the washing, renewing their travel cards, setting the video, eating a burger on the way home. Some of them are even wondering what it was all for - these late nights, the money spent at the bar, the encounters with people they are not even sure they like - but they don't wonder very hard. Sunday afternoons at Novacon are always like this. It doesn't mean anything. A waking dream.

Dreams have their own physical law, Dr Keith Hearne explained to his by now somewhat sceptical audience. For instance, you can't switch a light on in a dream.

Richard switches on the light as we all troop into his room for the room party. Oh well, then this can't be a dream, I think. Shame, as I feel in desperate need of sleep. Still, Richard has a bottle of champagne, and Bridget Hardcastle seems willing to dish the dirt on Bristol group member Steve "beardy" Brewster. Steve and Bridget are sharing a room for the weekend, but purely on a business basis, Bridget assures us. We believe her. After all, Steve has gone to bed, and Bridget is still here. "It's my turn to have breakfast tomorrow," she pronounces. Eventually Richard's champagne runs out, but any chance of escorting Lilian back to our room at the Grand recede as Tommy Ferguson offers to buy another round. Besides, we're all waiting - God knows why - for Ian Sorensen to return with his promised consignment of crisps. I put my head on to Richard's bed and contemplate sleeping there. I never go to sleep in public, but this could be a good time to start. Perhaps someone had been running conventions for years as a huge sleep deprivation experiment? It sounds like the sort of thing Keith Hearne might be interested in. I still can't get over him saying that REM sleep deprivation does not make people go mad. It completely undermines the premise of the Star Trek Next Gen episode where the crew of the Enterprise have their REM sleep blocked and have to send Deanna Troy out on a lucid dreaming expedition to contact the aliens. I'm not sure I'm ready to have my faith in the quality of Star Trek plotting shattered at this point.

One of my more common dreams features me wandering around endless corridors looking for a toilet, only to find that whenever I come across one, there is no door on it and I have to use it in public. Fortunately the loos at the Royal Angus have the requisite amount of door and wall to ensure privacy. More proof that I'm not in a dream, I think, until a voice wafts into my cubicle, ordering all delegates to assemble in the programme room for the opening ceremony. I panic. This means it is only seven o'clock on the first night of the convention. I walk back into the bar, noticing Pickersgill, Langford et al at the bar, Leeds group in the smoky corner. Why has nothing changed? I go over to the table where Peter Fred and Richard and Simon Ounsley are still sitting, and ask them if they heard an announcement telling them to make their way to the programme room. They laugh. Of course there's been no such announcement. The programme's over, and we're only waiting for the beer and sausage tasting then we can all go home. I start to relax, then a memory prods at me. An alternative version. I stir uneasily, pulling the duvet up around me, striving for lucidity. Didn't I go to the toilet and come back to the bar and find it was completely empty, apart from Paul Dormer who was laughing at me? And then, when I dashed over to the room where they were serving the beer, I found all my friends had gone in without me, and Peter Fred still had my ticket so I couldn't follow them? Or was that, with its elements of the classic nightmare rejection scenario, the dream? And this comfortable gathering in the bar the reality? I decide to go with the flow and follow the others into the beer tasting. It's odd. Now we're all together in one room, it is like the weight of the recurring Novacon Sunday falls from our backs, and liberated we all talk to each like we were at a party and really enjoying ourselves.



I taste the beer I have been served and after due consideration pronounce with complete conviction on its flavour. "Jerusalem artichoke" I say proudly. My friends look unconvinced. Still, many of them have never experienced Jerusalem Artichokes, so I discount their scepticism. Oddly enough, when I try the next beer, it also tastes of Jerusalem artichoke. The sausages are late, but eventually someone brings in a trayful of hot-dog rolls and an eager throng clusters round the table, admiring the phenomenon. I am standing at one end of the table, talking to Eileen Weston, trying to convince her that she should agree to be Cilla for the Worldcon's fanroom's version of Blind Date. "If you do it, we'll set up a blind date for you," I promise madly. "You can have anyone you like." I look round the room for inspiration. "Richard Hewison, Martin Smith, anyone." I smile weakly at Peter Weston, hoping he is not taking this the wrong way. Eileen is beginning to look interested, but then the sausages arrive. Apparently Eileen and I are at the wrong end of the table to be in the queue, but Eileen is having none of this. "Nursing mothers first!" she cries irrelevantly, and pushes me along the table in the direction of the plates. Declared by Eileen as de facto head of the queue we proceed to help ourselves to a pile of sausages, smearing them with sauce using cocktail sticks, since there are no spoons out yet. I beat a hasty retreat from the table as soon as I can, avoiding the accusing glare of my friends who have all gone dutifully to the back of the queue and sit by myself on the floor, wondering what to do with so many sausages.

Dr. Hearne did have one practical achievement to show for all his years of research - the dream machine. This device allows for communication between the dream world of the sleeping subject and world of the observer through the movements of the eye, the only part of the body not to be paralysed in the dream state. Using this machine, Dr. Hearne was able to assert that the commonly held belief that dreams take no time at all was false, and that therefore, I suppose, the familiar sensation of waking up, looking at the time, falling asleep and dreaming the equivalent of the Dune series, is all an illusion.

Illusions about where our money go seem to be the order of the day for the "Are cons a con?" panel. For example, the Birmingham Science Fiction Group do not have the vast untapped riches from running conventions that is sometimes alleged, and these days barely break even. Most of the money goes to the hotels, who are no longer content to have their professional image ruined by a bunch of poorly-dressed individuals hanging round their Sunday lunch area just for the promise of extra beer sales. But the professional pretensions of the hotels are not the only culprits. When Lilian Edwards calculated that the programme book represented about £7.00 per head of convention membership, the audience voted almost unanimously to abolish the glossy programme book in favour of the succinct Read-Me. Ironically, had the panel stuck to the original title displayed in the programme book, then no-one's illusions need have been destroyed. After all, who but Kenneth Clarke would attend a programme item called "Budget Panel"?

Knowing fandom, we'll find that was all a dream sequence too," commented Lilian as she left to catch the 5.15 back to Edinburgh, "and we'll be stuck with the bloody glossies for another decade."

I go back to watch the closing ceremony, wondering if I could develop a talent for lucid dreaming in time to influence the Nova results. Ian Sorensen sidles up to me. "Where's Lilian? Jackie's just told me that the Wrong Leggings have won." I look at him in disbelief. Not that Lilian's fanzine doesn't deserve a Nova, but we all know that Greg Pickersgill is going to win. Ian starts to laugh. "But it's the wrong Novas," he chortles, evidently thinking this is very funny. "Oh you non-Nova winners are so easy to wind up." Greg goes up to collect the Nova for best fanzine, then a moment later he is up there again collecting as best

writer. It's just as well the guy doesn't do artwork. The achievement is not even marginally eclipsed by Richard Hewison going up twice to collect bottles of wine in the raffle on the tickets I had talked Simon Ounsley out of buying. ("What's the point? They're the same colour as the one you've got already.")

"Dreams can be premonitions," Dr Hearne told us. "I once dreamt about a girl called Jane and a few weeks later I met her. We went out for almost a year."

I had no premonitions about meeting anyone at Novacon. Every year, the women of TWP go out to a tarty clothes shop, probably the most crowded place in Birmingham, to attempt to squeeze themselves into leather basques and lycra jumpsuits in order to get something outrageous to wear on Saturday night. This ritual does not seem to have anything to do with picking up men, since most are in happy relationships. Perhaps it's about affirming our body image in a safe environment or playing out power fantasies, becoming our fictional self far removed from the sensible professionals many of us have become in real life. This year, the Oasis expedition seems a half-hearted affair, and only Jaine Weddall and Ashely Pollard throw themselves into it with true gusto, though Lilian does succeed in selling me a tartan mini-dress. Anne Wilson looks at it with extreme mistrust, so I hastily try on a black basque top in the hope of finding something more acceptable.

My premonitions about not being swept off my feet by a romantically bearded and bespectacled science fiction fan prove completely correct. I do get asked for a dance by the unfannishly slim Tommy Ferguson, but half way through the number, he announces that he is too tired to continue so amid barracking from me, we depart the dance floor. I decide after that that I would rather dance by myself. There is something weird about dancing at the Angus. When I first came here, I was still a student. It was my second convention and the possibilities were endless. But gradually over the years, all those possibilities have closed down, and now it only feels like the school disco, something corny that you do for fun with the girls in your class. Yet at the same time, I feel sentimental about the continuity of it all. The good times had. The fact that so many of the same people are still here.

Dancing in a group with friends, affirming wordlessly the connections built in slightly different combinations each convention, each year, it doesn't seem to matter whether this particular Saturday night is real or not. It's all happened before at some point in time. No wonder I go to Novacon in my dreams. No wonder Novacon feels so much like a dream when I'm actually there.

"Dreams are real things. Fictions are real things. How we choose to let them influence is up for grabs. We select our reality from a number of possible realities, and act accordingly."  
Graham Joyce. Novacon 24 programme book.

-----  
It has to be admitted to the detriment of our street cred, that the Bristol SF group are more likely to be seen booking tickets for the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra or the Welsh National Opera than hanging out at the Bierkeller, Fleece, Mauretania or any of the numerous small musical venues scattered round the city. However, a straw poll of the members did reveal that collectively we saw the following bands in 1994 - Bad Influence, Blink, Chumbawamba, Crowded House, Mazzy Star, Saw Doctors, Sparks, Tori Amos. Not too impressive, but Tim did buy an awful lot of CDs (before he started spending all his money on Magic The Gathering trading cards), and Simon, our new columnist (who not living in Bristol wasn't available to be polled on his live music consumption) spends most of

his time producing weird sounds (which he calls music) and listening to the latest vinyl (normally) offerings. He kicks off what we hope will be a regular series of columns with an assessment of what, in his opinion, constituted the best five LPs of 1994.

## **DEPTHCHARGE - Simon Lake**

### **1. Massive Attack - Protection**

Bristol's finest return after a three year absence to take on all comers with another album of sumptuously produced soul music. Eclectic as ever this LP brings together a varied cast of guests that includes reggae star Horace Andy, rappers 3D and Tricky and singers Tracy Thorn and Nicolette.

It's Tracy Thorn's two contributions which initially stand out - largely because her wonderful voice has been wasted for so many years amongst the cocktail dross that her regular band Everything But The Girl tend to produce - but in truth all the tracks here are wonderful. Attention to detail is very much the order of the day and everything from the sumptuous strings on 'Sly' to the little sampled effects on 'Karmacoma' are used to maximum effect. While much modern music is cold and digital, here the drums and bass are pushed to the fore to give a warmth and space that owes more to the classic Studio One productions of the seventies than anything around today.

Nothing on this LP can quite capture the majesty of 'Safe from Harm' on their first album, but that's about the only fault I could find. Sure, Massive Attack aren't the first people to do this kind of thing (Adrian Sherwood's been ploughing a similar furrow for over a decade with various outfits) but no one else carries it off with such style. It may have taken a long time to make this record, but with music this good the waiting is more than worthwhile.

### **2. Kitchens of Distinction - Cowboys and Aliens**

In a time when the guitar is widely used in a celebration of screeching mediocrity and little substance or poetic licence, the Kitchens of Distinction's shimmering pop songs offer a welcome contrast. Forever on the fringes of the indie scene - not controversial enough, not blessed with the requisite bone structure and lacking designer drug chic - they continue in their unassuming way to create the quiet masterpieces that sustain a broad and dedicated fanbase.

The Kitchens are not out to break new ground and 'Cowboys and aliens', their 4th LP, remains faithful to their blueprint of feedback drenched songwriting. Singer Patrick Fitzgerald writes intelligent and moving songs about the personal tragedies that affect all our lives. These songs are often sad, sometimes angry and sometimes bitter, but rarely without hope, as exemplified by the title track, a pounding clarion call to the abused, disaffected and marginalised underclass of our modern society.

'Cowboys and Aliens' is a dangerously addictive LP, unassuming on first listen, but guaranteed to seduce you with repeated playing.

### **3. Pram - Helium**

Pram are very much out there on their own, making a sound that is uniquely theirs. Sure the vocals remind you in passing of the Raincoats and other new wave girl bands and the

music has echoes of Beefheart, the Residents and a number of leftfield noise creators, but in essence Pram are Pram and that's what makes them special.

They've released several albums before this, though only last year's 'The Stars are so big...' has been readily available in your vinyl friendly indie store. That album was proof enough that they could improvise their way through a good tune, but it really stands as a pale blueprint of what was to come when compared with 'Helium'. The opening number 'Gravity' offers a straight forward rush of drums propelling the listener into the aural equivalent of a chase scene from a silent movie. The next few tracks pull off a variety of similar tricks while 'Blue' takes a simple song structure and stretches it over eight minutes, gradually metamorphosing into something deeper. Standout track has to be the instrumental 'Meshes', a haunting space symphony with twisted bursts of static and a minimalist rhythmic refrain. Gripping and not a little unnerving.

The uninitiated may not take immediately to this LP, this being the kind of music that demands a bit of concentration, but patience and persistence will bring its own reward. 'Helium' offers an utterly original and quite electric listening experience.

#### 4. The God Machine - One last laugh in a place of dying...

Not quite the vast sprawling epic that was their debut LP, but the exiled Californians serve up another feast of swamp tunes and claustrophobic nightmares. Manic depressives will love this album and there is certainly much to wallow in (sample lyric: 'She said life could be painless, well I'm sorry but that's not what I've found'), but it would be wrong to see this LP as simply a collection of grinding noise workouts. The God Machine have a fine grasp of light and shade and the pretty orchestral strings on 'The Hunter' and the spacious rumblings of 'The Train Song' are as much a part of what they do as the abrasive inferno of tracks like 'Mama'.

Sadly God Machine bassist Jimmy Fernandez died of cancer shortly after this LP was completed and at the moment their future remains uncertain. It's a sad story for a band that had more than their fair share of music biz hassle too, but whatever they decide to do next, this LP and its predecessor will remain as legacies of their unique vision. Three minute pop tunes are fine and dandy, but occasionally it's good to listen to something deeper.

#### 5. The Prodigy - Music for the Jilted Generation

In a year where the Criminal Justice Bill eroded the civil liberties of vast sections of the population, this LP more than any other seemed to encapsulate the mood of outrage and rebellion among the nation's youth. The Prodigy were once seen as a novelty dance band, but here, spread over four sides of vinyl, Liam Howlett and co. push the genre forward several light years.

Forget easy prejudices about computerised music, the Prodigy intelligently use a vast array of sampled sounds to produce complex collages of noise that many feted modern composers would be proud of. Crunching beats blend with eerie vocal samples and washes of synth noise, but there's always a steady rhythm to steer the songs away from that avant-garde abyss.

The Prodigy take hundreds more risks than your average rock band and on this album veer from the pummeling outrage of 'Their Law' (where the sound of breaking glass provides the beat) to the dancefloor-friendly rhythms of 'Start the Dance' and by side 4 melt into a gorgeous soul groove that confirms just how far removed they are from the formulaic dance acts they were once grouped with.



## HALFWAY UP THE STAIRS - THE MISS LEE LETTERS PART 2

After the Mystery of the Missing Hammer, there was something of a lull in the outpourings from Miss Lee, perhaps the exceptionally cold Winter sent her into some sort of hibernation. Whatever, in the Spring she was back in full flow with a veritable torrent of Lost Articles. The mention of Warlocks in the letter made me wonder briefly what manner of Pagan Rituals she thought were being conducted on the premises. I found out later that Warlock was just the surname of the people who used to live in the basement flat.

*First Floor Flat*

*April 30th - 1982*

*Dear Mr. Goodrick*

*Yesterday I ran down to the front door to let out my cat for a short time. My pockets were full of various things and I'd either dropped my reading glasses (in a red case) on the stairs or left them in the flat, but when I looked for them they had gone. I am wondering if your lodger or anyone coming up to you found them & would not know who the glasses belonged to. There is a photograph of myself, also my brother's address on the back of photograph. They are my reading glasses. I need them. I would give a reward to have them returned. Please will you enquire about this. Thank you so much for not leaving my light on in the hall when you go out at night and return late. It is good of you to remember. It seems you do not trust people either as I notice you always carry your bike upstairs & never leave it in the garden as the Warlocks used to. I have had so much taken from my flat & it has really made me feel quite ill. Mrs Addison is good & kind and on one occasion she came up stairs with a £1.00 note that my taxi driver dropped, which I naturally returned to the company. Now, when I first came my dust bin was hidden in Mrs Addison garden, but she was honest enough to give it back to me. But I wonder if some of my things got taken to your flat. Things missing are \_\_\_\_\_ One green wool Merino blanket. One new black enamel grill pan. One pale blue plastic colander. Numerous pairs of shoes and so many other things. A Readers Digest Condensed book I was reading at the time it was taken. I was in the middle of a story. So many lengths of materials I bought. I wonder if any were given to you. I'm quite sure a man of your intelligence would not knowingly accept anything that had been stolen. Please I know you are a Christian please inquire about the glasses. I will give £4-00 reward.*

*With kind regards*

*Yours Sincerely*

*Miss Lee*

The vision of Miss Lee running anywhere, let alone downstairs with her cat, would boggle even the biggest brains in Britain, but stranger things have happened. Well, in her mind they have. The cat was so rarely let out that I wonder she hadn't advertised the event in the Evening Post. In time, I came to suspect the cat of being a criminal mastermind.

My mysterious lodger will crop up more and more regularly in Miss Lee's letters. No matter how many times I informed her that I had no lodger, never had had one and had no intention of getting one, she persisted in accusing him of things. He acquired a character over the course of time. He was out of work, immature, smoked and was a persistent thief. At one point he was a murderer on the run and lived in the attic. Miss Lee informed me that all the flats in Clifton had such a person hiding out in the attic. Obviously, a lot of the comments about my imaginary lodger were thinly veiled accusations against me and although most of the time I could accept that she was just a bit potty and was harmless, sometimes I let it get to me. Once or twice I sent her very terse replies to her letters. Fortunately, this is my side of the story, so you won't get to see any of those.

The back garden belonged to the basement flat, which is why the Warlocks kept stuff in it. But she was right - there was no way I'd leave my push-bike outside all night, not if I expected to find it there in the morning. I wondered if I could sue her for accusing me of being a Christian.

Someone took over the basement flat. He seemed sane at first. It didn't take long for him to crack. Every time Philippa, her son or her au pair moved around at night (i.e. after 10.00 p.m.), Ron, the chap who'd bought the basement flat would begin screaming for them to shut up. He'd swear and occasionally go up to their front door and hammer and bang hard enough to literally shake the whole house.

Philippa was also being pestered by her ex-husband and got a job in New York, took her son with her and put her flat up for rent. This meant that I had to take over the running of the management company for the flats. That very quickly became a nightmare.

Apart from a few notes about management company business I heard very little from Miss Lee for some considerable time and was beginning to think flat life wasn't so bad. We were having problems with the roof and had to get the builders in, but I suppose you expect that sort of thing. A nice American couple moved into Philippa's flat. Of course, it couldn't last.

*First Floor Flat*

*28th August '84*

*Dear Mr. Goodrick,*

*About 3 weeks ago a thief must have come into my flat, because when I went to my cupboard where I keep my sheets, a single one with a wide green border (I had machined on myself) was missing from the cupboard) I am very distressed as of course I have to change my sheets, & now I have only one left \_ I have had so much stolen including new books. If our communal front door is closed day & night it must be some person inside \_ When I returned home from shopping one day I noticed a strong smell of cigarette smoke in the hall outside my flat & also in the hall inside of flat \_ What I cannot afford to buy I do without. If people find it so expensive in Clifton that they have to steal, they should live somewhere else. I need my things & that's why they have been bought.*

*The thief also took a black with coloured flowers design sponge bag \_ a blue celenese petticoat and a pink Swami celenese petticoat that I bought in Perth Australia. I resent this very much as I am not a thief & would not touch anyones possessions even with a barge pole. \_ The oil water mark i e*

*your accident is still on the ceiling & not any different Something will have to be done about it soon.*

*The sponge bag was a birthday present from my sister in law \_\_ Also taken a crystal like scent bottle with eau-de-cologne in it & also a cake dish with lid crystal like that I bought myself. You have no idea how ill it makes one feel to know that a thief is coming in and stealing especially if one is not that type oneself and I am not. Please do whatever you can to keep this place safe from thieves*

*In haste \_\_\_\_\_ Miss Lee*

Well. And yet again, well. The cigarette smoke I can explain, or at least partly. I wouldn't allow anyone to smoke in the flat and always sent any friends out onto the stairs with an ashtray whenever they wanted a fag. Most of the rest is as self-explanatory as anything that ever came from the pen of Miss Lee except perhaps the 'oil water mark'. From what I remember 'my accident' was something to do with the bit of roof that protruded from below my bathroom window and was over Miss Lee's kitchen. One of many leaks.

The very next day the never-ending accusations about who left the stair light on continued. This theme was to continue throughout my residence in the flat. On several occasions I tried to confront Miss Lee with the fact that I had observed her leaving the light on after going into her flat, but I had as much success as when I tried to exorcise my phantom lodger.

*29/8/84*

*Mr. Goodrick please kindly turn the light switch off when your friends leave your flat - after all you only have to go down a few steps to do so. Dr Howe always saw his friends off & then turned off the electric himself. It was left on through the night to 6. am this morning Please be reasonable you would not like your light to be left on for such a period of time. Dr. Howe was most careful and considerate about this and I think you should be*

*From  
Miss Lee.*

Between that letter and the next one I actually spoke to Miss Lee on several occasions. Having glimpsed the chaos inside he flat I suggested to her that some of the items she believed she had stolen might just have been misplaced. She didn't seem very impressed with the theory. To her it was much more likely that someone would break into her flat (leaving no sign of how the entry was achieved), steal something like a sponge bag and then leave as mysteriously as they came in.

*Sunday*

*Dear Mr. Goodrick*

*On Friday 26th October (last Friday) I went out in the afternoon & forgot to lock my white cupboard in the lounge in fact I was in a hurry & left the padlock on top of desk next to it \_\_ Yesterday I went to tidy the cupboard & noticed that my mother's silver hat Pin had been taken. She had*

*this over 40 years ago. I was upset. In the last few months my cotton yellow dressing gown has been taken from lounge & before that a pair of old slippers from the airing cupboard in the kitchen. Of course one does sometimes change the place of where things have usually been kept \_\_\_ & they turn up unexpectedly. I have noticed that very occasionally I do hope that this will turn up. I would not think that it would be worth more than £4 or £5 but I wished to keep it as it belonged to my mother. I know that you would like to keep things that belonged to your parents.*

*Have you heard from Mrs. Addison again? It seems as though she will be away till March or April \_\_\_*

*With kind regards*

*In haste*

*Yours sincerely*

*Miss Lee.*

Mrs. Addison, Philippa, never did return to the flat.

The peek into the hatbox, empty of fish knives and forks, will have to wait until next time. Will we also learn in episode three where the Guilty should live if they find it necessary to steal? Can you afford to miss it? Can you bear to wait?

