

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL



ISSUE 8

THE
SCOTTISH
CONFESSION

BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 8 (aka cybermen take over well known exhibition centre) is being produced against all odds for Intersection, the 1995 Glasgow Worldcon, by a manic Christina Lake who is either a martyr for fandom or mad (or quite possible both)

But what about issues 7 and 8, you may ask? (Or 5 & 6 too if you're American). Well, let's be up front about this. I love doing fanzines, but I hate distributing them. I started compiling a mailing list before the the fanzine went bimonthly, but somehow it never got finished. So instead of simply stuffing issues into envelopes, sticking on labels and trundling them down to the post office, I resorted to ticking names on scraps of paper, searching through my whole fanzine collection for that elusive address, and leaving fanzines in unposted piles while I did something more interesting. It's a classic case of a job where a bit of organisation in advance would have paid dividends in time saved later. But I'm not a librarian for nothing - they pay me to be organised at work, so I'm damned if I can bear to do it at home too. All this is a feeble way of saying that if you missed an issue, then it's not because I don't like you, or don't rate your work, or don't realise that you're entitled to practically every issue ever in perpetuity, it's just that I'm hopelessly inefficient.

All offers to run my mailing list, source labels, supply second hand addresses or sort out my life, gratefully received.

As for the Americans, Australians etc. That's not been inefficiency. That's been deliberate policy. This fanzine is relatively local in its outlook, ephemeral, rapid, too young to make the big trip across the water etc etc. I thought I'd do a compilation for international consumption, well, soon, maybe when Tim Goodrick has finished his Miss Lee letters (for more on why that just might not work, see the current installment), or when we had published so many mega-brilliant articles that it would be big enough to compete with its American counterparts (cf Size isn't everything, also in current issue) A compilation for the Worldcon sounded like a particularly good idea, but the practicalities of doing a new issue, editing a fanthology and helping run the evening fan programme have scuppered that one for present. Maybe next year. Instead overseas fans start here - DISCOVER how to write a Dr Who novel; THRILL to how cute those British indie labels can be; SQUEAK with excitement at how Helen Steele failed to eat Steve Brewster's hamster... and don't forget to write.

Balloons 8 comes from the Bristol SF Group, c/o 12 Hatherley Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 8QA, and is available for pleas, time-saving devices, spare copies of the letter 'M' and books on sustainable development.

The Bristol SF group meets most Thursdays from 8.30 pm onwards at The Brewery Tap pub on Colston St (except when it's hot when we can be found in the garden of the Seahorse opposite)

MAKING THE MOST OF THE WORLDCON

by Steve Brewster

I'm looking forward to Intersection like I've looked forward to no convention before. I'm getting a pre-convention buzz. For all my sniping over the past few years about how Intersection has been spoiling friendships and sapping energy from more worthwhile projects, I'm sure that it's going to be a big success. If it turns out to be a really big success, I might even be convinced that it was worth the effort.

I'm still sure British fandom isn't big enough to run a Worldcon. (This suggestion usually elicits a response along the lines of well-it-is-really-so-long-as-everyone-does-their-bit, which rather concedes the point: if you really do hope to grab everybody, you're going to be disappointed.) It has proved very difficult to escape the clutches of Intersection; there's been a lot of rather tawdry emotional blackmail (if Everyone Has To Do Their Bit, then anyone who tries to stay well clear is marked by default as selfish - how often have you been asked 'What are you doing for Intersection?' in the same hollow tones that the nuns at school used when they asked you what you were giving up for Lent?) Often the curious feeling emerges that British fandom, somewhere along the line, entered into a kind of customer-supplier relationship with American fandom, with all of us trying desperately to impress the Europe-bound veterans of countless previous Worldcons with our quasi-exotic Scottish concoction. Tied up with this is the niggling feeling that ultimately the purpose of the Scottish Convention was to prove that we could do it: this would partly explain why much of the time it's all felt like a Hollywood putting-on-a-show musical, complete with last-reel encouragements to slackers ('C'mon, you can't let us down now, we've got hundreds of people counting on us, we can do it!')

But the sociology of the Worldcon should really be left to those who know more about it than me. I'm quietly proud of the way I've managed to minimise my involvement to the extent that I'll actually have time to wander around and meet people there. I intend to miss almost all of the programme items, except for the ones I'm on I suppose, and to concentrate on representing British fandom accurately by drinking too much. Most of the American fen I've come across on the Internet sound like frighteningly clean-living, alcohol-free, pink-lunged specimens of humankind and I hope that at least some of them become perverted to the beer-lubricated, Silk Cut-fuelled, coughing and swearing UK norm of fandom by those of us careful to set an example. (I also hope some of the loonier right-wing fen that Joseph Nicholas keeps taking the piss out of turn up - anyone got a Che G. t-shirt I can borrow?)

It's sometimes said that a convention is just the sum total of the people who are there; in that sense, this once-in-a-decade culture clash is going to be a big surprise to us on the British contingent who've never seen more than three American fen at the same time. I'm going to Intersection with a very definite personal idea of what a convention should be like, and I'm going to impose that idea on Intersection and damn the consequences. Screw the WSFS business meetings and Hugos, I'm out to actually meet and talk to people who I may not meet again for a long time. It's the only way to pull a multi-thousand-person Worldcon back down where it belongs, to the human scale of interacting individuals. See you there.

by Tim Goodrick

Once more, I return you to the strange world of Miss Lee, as glimpsed through the distorted windows that were the letters she left at the door of my flat. My advice to anyone who may have missed previous installments and feels somewhat confused when they try to make sense of what follows is to think yourself lucky. Your confusion cannot compare to what I experienced as I lived through years of receiving these letters. Miss Lee lived below me in a house split up into four flats. The ground floor was rented out to various people and the basement flat was owned by Ron, more of whose escapades may figure in later episodes. Because of the absence of the owner of the ground floor flat, I had been saddled with running the management company. This meant trying to get money out of people for the seemingly never-ending repairs to the roof. I also had to chair an AGM, which Miss Lee had attended recently (for the first time in 5 years).

First Floor Flat

Tuesday 27th May

Dear Mr. Goodrick,

Remember it is this saturday 31st May that the builder is coming. I will send him up to your flat to look at ceiling __ I have been feeling very sick and worried since a few days ago when going to my white cupboard I noticed that a black marocain garment had been taken. This was originally a long black evening dress belonging to my mother & bought in Bayswater London, years and years before the war. Imagine the time I spent unpicking it & then making it up for myself. Any young girl especially young, should not wish to use or wear anything belonging to an elderly person __ The dress was bought over 60 years ago. My Father Mother & myself often stayed around Bayswater district when on holiday. I would appreciate it if this dress could be returned to me, as whoever has received it would have to make alterations __ It probably was taken on Wednesday 7th when I was at the meeting in your flat or some time just after that. There is a saying that says Anything ill got has ever bad success. Anyway a normal healthy person should not like to have a dress that belonged to one who has passed on. I am sure that you understand how I feel about this __ If for instance a tie that your Father had given you was stolen from you - I am sure that you would think that it was an evil thing to do. I have spent quite a lot of money on this flat & lost on the previous one, so I have to be a bit careful. Your flat would be more valuable (because of 4 rooms.) than mine but anyone seeing the condition of the ceiling as it is now would not wish to give the price that you paid for it. Regarding the black garment lets hope it will turn up - I had removed it from one wardrobe to another lets pray that it will turn up, and so the evil will be turned to good. I expect even thieves and burglars have a good side to them.

In haste From Yours sincerely

Miss Lee.

I know, you think that it's sad, this poor old woman losing her treasured possessions. Well, wrap your compassion up with your other liberal sentiments and go and live in Flat Hell for a few months and see what it does to you. At first you'll ignore the needle sharp prick or her not-so-veiled accusations and try to reason with her. Surely, you tell her, she has just misplaced the item. But it never ends. Every day some master criminal bypasses the four deadlocks and a chain that secure her door and runs off with some priceless booty - a blanket, a piece of soap, a hat-pin or the infamous yellow rubber gloves. Why he chooses the items is a mystery (and, yes, all you pc people out there, her thieves are always male). And it's always an 'Inside Job' usually done by your non-existent lodger. And when you send her the letter, produced on your computer, which repeats "I HAVEN'T GOT A LODGER" four hundred times, you know that someone has pulled out your bathplug and you are spiralling down the wastepipe of life towards the sewers of insanity.

Of course, I have been completely unaffected by the whole experience.

*First Floor Flat
May 28th '86*

Dear Mr. Goodrick,

*The builders rang up yesterday to say that they are coming this Saturday and will be arriving quite early _ 8 am. It would be a good thing really if it rained at some part of the day, & then perhaps it could be traced where the trouble is. You will be sorry to know that my rezine shopping bag has been stolen __ this in the last few days __ It is a pity as my home help uses it & now she will know that a thief is around. Why does not this person give himself up or find something better to do __
In haste from Miss Lee.*

Christina asked me recently how many more installments of these letters there would be. I didn't have the heart to remind her that I had originally planned to write them up as a book. It would have paralleled Mrs. Thatcher's years in power up to the point where the Tory dream turned into the inevitable nightmare, heralded by the collapse of the housing market. I sold my flat a few months before the bubble burst and made a tidy profit out of the panic that seemed to have set in during the Summer of '88. I also made a few thousand pounds when the company I work for, Rolls-Royce Aero Engines, was privatised. I might have felt a little guilty about grabbing money in this way, but it is very hard to say no to a bundle of notes thrust into your hand. On a moral level I knew it was this sort of thing that was creating the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor in Britain but I also felt that if I didn't take the money it wouldn't make any difference to anyone but me.

In the book I would have used Miss Lee's 'stolen' items as metaphors for the losses Britain was suffering under Maggie's policies which seemed only to encourage selfishness, greed and short term profit taking. Whole industries vanished and our National Health service became more sick than its patients. I'm sure the whole thing would have been unreadable. Another thing that I didn't tell Christina was that I'm only a third of the way through the letters.

When I agreed to write up the letters in a series of articles I changed my plan somewhat, but there was still going to be a lot of waffle between the letters. Some of it would be necessary explanation and some of it would comment on other events in the flats. I shall attempt to curtail the colouring a

little, or these articles may well stretch on for another six issues or more. However, Ron will definitely make a guest appearance at some point but the distressed father on the roof of a nearby building, the garage the size of a house that seemed to come into existence overnight and the rat masquerading as a hedgehog will all have to be excised.

But enough of how I plan to shorten these articles and on with the letters. The saga of Miss Lee's magazines begins innocuously enough but, like any villain in a horror movie, keeps rising up long after you think it's been laid to rest.

22nd July

Dear Mr. Goodrick

I'm wondering if I dropped some of my mail on the stairs 2 magazines -- One my monthly magazine Good News or Plain Truth __ and the other one a magazine on the Royal Wedding. I'm sure if someone you know picked them up _ they would be returned especially as they were all unopened.

Yours sincerely

Miss Lee

Now, as promised last time, the rubber gloves.

1st Floor Flat
7th August '86

Dear Mr. Goodrick

Yesterday I took a new pair of yellow rubber gloves (costing 46p) from my shopping bag & placed them in my bedroom ready to use __ but when I went to the place where I had put them they were not there__ Perhaps it's the same thief coming in, who a few days ago took a couple of magazines __ I am wondering if you know who is playing these tricks? I hope that you hear from the builder soon. In haste

Yours sincerely

Miss Lee

Perhaps I should be offering a prize for the most imaginative suggestion as to what Miss Lee was about to do with the rubber gloves in the bedroom. But, no, I'm sure that there must be some mundane explanation. However, she did have a cat.....

The other thread running through this batch of letters, which those of you who are paying attention will have noticed, is the builders who were Never Quite Arriving.

First Floor Flat

Written on -----> Thursday 14th August

Dear Mr. Goodrick

Please be sure to let me know when the builder is coming __ He should be coming soon? I am sorry to say that it seems a thief has been in yet again & taken my dust cap, which I put on

when dusting over doors etc __ I will let you know if it turns up. I left it in the cupboard in the bathroom. I do hope that my knives and forks are returned especially the fish knives and forks__ I have had all my things over 25 years but most over 40 because they belonged to my parents. I hope that you will not be troubled with thieves. They cause great trouble.

With kind regards From Miss Lee

For anyone who missed the relevant episode, the fish knives and forks were kept in a hat box and, of course, vanished.

Tuesday

August 26th '86

First Floor Flat

Dear Mr. Goodrick

The builder is coming Saturday early A.M. __ It seems he is working in Portsmouth & only comes to Bristol weekends. I 'phoned you yesterday at 10.30 AM __ but although I heard footsteps above nobody answered the telephone!! As I went out on Saturday I perceived 3 local newspapers either __ Observer, Herald or Bristol Journal. On my return I did not collect owing to having many parcels to hold __ There were 3 in the hall one for each of these flats __ I have not been out since since __ but if you have one, and have finished with it __ Could you please leave it outside my front door. I am flat hunting & sometimes flats are advertised in these local papers.

Of course there may be one left for me in the hall

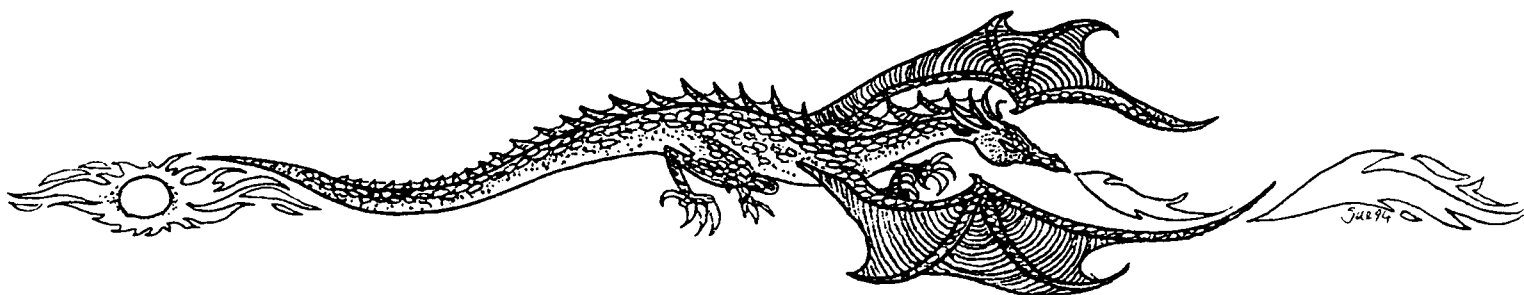
With kind regards

Yours sincerely

Miss Lee

You may think it would have been quicker to walk down a couple of flights of stairs to pick up a paper, rather than writing a letter, going up a flight of stairs to deliver it and then awaiting the outcome. You're not Miss Lee. The letter, like all the others, is an accurate transcription - 'since since' is what she wrote.

Next time, hold tightly to my hand as I lead you through the surreal world of Miss Lee. We will discover what she keeps under her mattress and what she hopes the god-fearing will do with a Valpona fly killer





Simon Lake records:

FAREWELL FROM THE GLASS ARCADE

Sarah Records remains one of Bristol's best kept secrets. About to clock up it's one hundredth release, this fiercely independent label has survived successfully without resorting to cynical marketing ploys or selling its soul to the London based music industry. In resolutely steering it's own course it has ruffled a few feathers (including the music press who have made a point of giving the label virtually no coverage) and yet won the hearts of many others. Its fans remain fanatically devoted to its cottage industry charm while even the less committed have to admire its obstinacy in remaining remote from the capitalist music business machinations.

The sleeve notes to their 'Shadow Factory' compilation sum the label's philosophy up neatly:

'...no unreleased out-takes or bonus mix cons, just an honest old-fashioned something we're proud of, a statement of faith in all sorts of futures'

Sadly Sarah Records hundredth release will also be their last. Perhaps their faith in the future has gone, perhaps they simply want to move on to something new. When John Peel interviewed them during the recent Sound City festival they hinted they had something special planned for the hundredth release, but certainly gave no indication that it might be their last.

Sarah Records began back in 1987 with the release of a 7" by The Sea Urchins called 'Pristine Christine'. The record (a fragile but largely unremarkable little pop song) now commands a huge second-hand price among collectors. That record was followed by several of a similar vintage as Sarah records resurrected the profile of that great punk icon, the 7" single. For bands unwilling to think in terms of multi-million pound advances and five album contracts it was a godsend.

It's not hard to guess which market Sarah Records appealed to. Titles like 'I'm In Love With A Girl Who Doesn't Know I Exist' and 'When Will Your Friends All Disappear?' typify the bedsit angst that fuelled much of their output. Fans of the label were often obsessive. Fey acoustic guitars and introspective lyrics were in, practically everything else was out. When leading Sarah band The Field Mice actually had the audacity to use sequencers on one of their records there was naturally an outcry. (The indie equivalent of Dylan going electric, perhaps?)

In the end I suspect the owners of Sarah grew tired of the luddite nature of their audience. They can't really escape the blame themselves though, for after a period in the early nineties when it seemed their output was becoming more varied, they sadly reverted to signing bedsit bands again. There was never a danger of Sarah going techno, but perhaps they could have taken a lead from the more experimental output of fellow indie label Too Pure.

Of course Too Pure had the luxury of discovering PJ Harvey to boost their credibility (and bank balance). Sarah had no real stars and no big hits - only their small, but devoted fanbase. The Wake could boast Bobby Gillespie (Primal Scream's lead singer) as a former member, but that was about as far as it went. The label was never parochial though. Bands from as far afield as Australia (Even As We Speak) and the US (East River Pipe) gave the label an international flavour.

Sarah Records further nurtured their cult status through their personalised and lovingly crafted packaging. 7" singles inevitably came with special fold out sleeves. Various famous Bristol landmarks were pictured as covers for compilation LPs (even a shot of balloons over Bristol for 'Glass Arcade!'). The fiftieth release was actually a game - a spoof version of Monopoly that happily sent up both the music industry and Sarah's own anorak clad obsessives.

It's hard to imagine anyone wanting to own all one hundred of the records Sarah put out (although it's the kind of label that attracts those kind people), but equally there can be few collections that wouldn't be enhanced by such fine records as The Field Mice's sublime 'Missing The Moon' or The Wake's bitter-sweet 'Make It Loud' LP.

So what was Sarah Records really about? A final quote from the 'Shadow Factory' manifesto says it all.

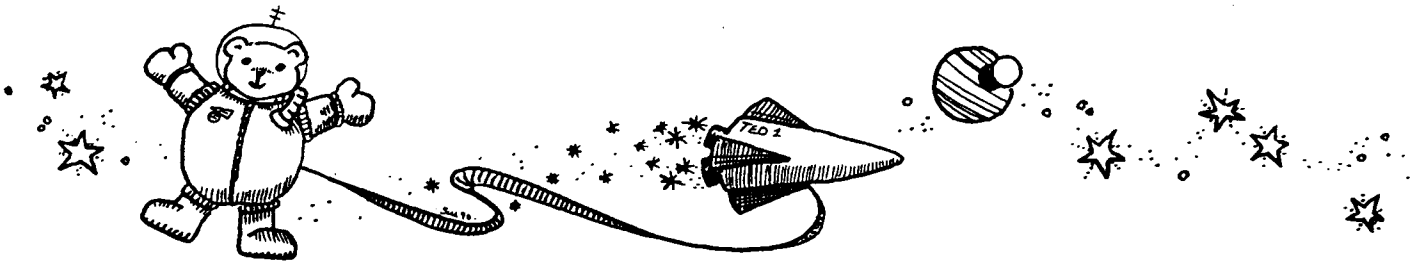
'Pop music as a spontaneous, loveable thing, created and bought in an onrush of NEED without needing to save up for weeks or meekly accept sad, drab stigmatising 99p only tack'

Hopefully some day all labels will be run this way.

Selected Discography

Salvation - St. Christopher (7")
Nothing Ever Happens - Even As We Speak (7")
Give Me Some Peppermint Freedom - The Orchids (7")
Goodbye California - East River Pipe (10")
Missing The Moon - The Field Mice (12")
Make It Loud - The Wake (mini lp)
For Keeps - The Field Mice (lp)

(Alternatively, Sarah Records have released a number of compilations that offer a good introduction to the label. Check the bargain bins of your local Our Price for maximum savings.)



Why Are American Fanzines so BIG?

Christina Lake fearlessly investigates

You out there, experiencing American fandom en masse for the first time, or sitting on the train in a post-Worldcon stupor, if you've got over the size of American fans themselves, are now perhaps wondering, like me, why the hell ARE American fanzines so big. I mean, for us, something like *Attitude* is a good read, *Balloons Over Bristol* is par for the course, and really, secretly, we much prefer Ansible-length as at least we can feel confident about reaching the end of without too much effort. So what is it about America that impels their prime-movers to disgorge 100 page epics on to the unsuspecting world?

It's not just their size that bothers me. American fanzines have been large for as long as I can remember - issues of *Lan's Lantern* used to thump through my letter-box at ungodly hours and *Holier Than Thou* lurked mammoth-like in my to-be-read pile. No, it's the fact that these fanzines come from my corner of fandom. In the past, the American fanzines that I wanted to interact with were smaller, more personal affairs like Jeanne Gommoll's *Whimsey* or Robert Lichtman's *Trap Door*. Maybe I'm just misremembering the past, but even such titles as *Mainstream* and *Izzard* it seems to me were not quite as substantial as the genzine of today. Now when I look at my American fanzine collection its products are as distinguished by their girth as the stereotype of the American fan mentioned above. *Mimosas* vie with *Stets* and *Ideas* for pride of place, while the latest crop of doorstops, *Habbakuk* and *Blat!* turn in at 77 and 93 pages respectively on the most recent issues.

What is it that makes American fans strive so persistently towards bulk in their fanactivity (or aggregated bulk if you consider Andy Hooper's fortnightly *Apparatchik*)? Why must they make their fanzines so long that you have to take a week's holiday to read them with any continuity, so large that it looks like they had to sell half the space for ads, and so heavy that you develop muscles reading them on the way to work? I can only believe that it's in the psyche. Big is better in America - big cars, big buildings, big films, big genzines... If you want to make an impression with your genzine, then I guess it has to be big. Hugo award winners are usually large. Look at *Lans Lantern* and *Mimosa*. Substance may not guarantee quality but at least it's measurable, reassuring. People can feel that they are getting value for money. Look at the lack of British fanzine nominees on the Hugo ballot, even in a British worldcon year. (Apart from the admittedly slimline *Ansible*, but that's all right because it's perennial favourite *Langford*.) Our genzines, even those of such longevity and wide distribution as *Empties*, are simply not large enough to merit the award.

And, maybe distribution is the other key to the size of the American model of fanzine. If you want to make an impact, you must distribute far and wide, and in America that can mean an awful lot of people. Then there's the bulk mailing permit to consider. I don't know how the system works, but I guess if you aspire to a permit then you need to mail out a set number of copies to justify it, whether or not you care about the people receiving it. So, the more people the fanzine goes to, the larger the response, and, consequently, the larger the letter column (45 of Habbakuk's 77 pages are devoted to letters in the 4th issue)

Is this making any sense yet? I'm not sure it is to me. But I'm willing to give it a try. Let's look more closely at Blat!, possibly the most highly rated genzine in British fandom today, and at Habbakuk, on the Hugo ballot for the first time, and consider how these innocent fannish projects (Habbakuk started life in this its third incarnation as a small personalzine) came to such grandiose dimensions. (The issues under discussion are dated Winter and Fall '94 respectively, so may not be the latest of their line, but are the most current to make it across the Atlantic to Bristol.)

Blat! 4, edited by Dan Steffan and Ted White is an impressive looking production with a Dan Steffan cover and a large confident logo. To say that this fanzine is well-regarded would be an understatement. In my fandom at least, Blat! is highly rated and highly praised (take the letter column - Dave Hicks : Blat! is bloody superb and like Mimosa and Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk convinces me I chose the right time to get back into fandom; Joseph Nicholas : "Best fanzine being published today" (or words to that effect) said Rob Hansen as he handed me our copy at the June Wellington meeting). I suppose I had been going along with this sort of judgement too, by default. When the first Blat! came out in 1993 and I read it on the floor of Nigel Rowe and Karen Babich's attic, I was very impressed, though not just by the zine, but the upbeat nature of its message : Fanzine fandom went to a Worldcon (in this case, Magicon in Orlando) and had a great time. It was one of the first steps back towards the culture of enthusiasm that by and large we have today. The intervening issues I enjoyed, taking for granted, pace the comments quoted above, that this was a great fanzine, and that anything I might not connect with was my own problem. But by no. 4 the good vibes were beginning to wear off, and I found myself about halfway through the issue wondering quite what it was all about.

To be fair, the issue starts comprehensibly enough, with Ted White's Uffish Thots Teditorial. Running to 14 sides, this is more like a personal zine than a conventional editorial. Or, to reflect the spirit of it more accurately, it is more like seven or eight editorial strung together in one fanzine. The BSFA magazine Matrix used to have a column for people to get up on their soapboxes and sound off about anything that bugged them. Well, Ted's intro would have filled about eight of them straight off. Now it is entirely to his credit that Ted cares enough about so many issues that he can write thought-provoking, if not downright controversial material on them. What's slightly less to his credit, in my book at least, is that so many of them seem to be picking over the past, looking at, for example, the mores of the Milford Mafia of the 60s, or the politicking of New York fandom in the late fifties with a view, one feels, to setting the record straight and putting over Ted's side of some old argument. Now, it has to be said that it's a strength of Ted's writing that you always know what his side of the argument is, and it's a strong element in fostering engagement with his work. Ted's writing never bores me, even where I disagree with him, or even if as in these cases I have not the least idea what the rights and wrongs of the original situation might be. But over the

course of 14 pages devoted mainly, though not entirely, to the process of setting the record straight on various issues, I do come out feeling talked at and just a little bit inclined to cynicism about it all. Surely there can't be that many cases where Ted is right and the world is wrong?

Whatever, I can read this stuff, polemic, carping, controversial, they are all grist to the mill of fandom as I know it. It's over the next pages where I begin to doubt, quite seriously, that I will ever understand American fandom. This is all the more strange since the article in question was written by a British fan, Rob Hansen, and the genre itself originated, in this instance, in the Irish fandom of the '50s. I am talking, of course, of my bete noir, fanfictional allegory inspired by the Enchanted Duplicator. I just cannot read this stuff. I tried very hard for the purpose of reviewing this article, and read, I would say, about three quarters of it. When I first read Blat! I rapidly made the decision that twelve pages of fan fiction was simply not for me. (Which was where the rot began to set in. Having skipped such a large article in prime position, if you like (first after the editorial), I am in severe danger of putting down the fanzine, and never picking it up again.)

So what is my problem with Rob Hansen's fiction you may be wondering? Am I just a philistine who fails to appreciate this fine artform, or is it all a load of obsolete claptrap. Well, for an unbiased view I guess you will just have to read it for yourself. I quite liked the fanspace cyberpunk metaphor at the beginning, and the lesson of tolerance of the whole, but could have done without the ten pages of Enchanted Duplicator speak in the middle, written in an allegorical style that combines excessive reverence for fannish traditions and characters with some terrible puns (eg characters like Zerocks and Dorothy May Trixton, aka Dot-May Trix), not to mention the token appearance of Jofanne and the Apazons. To be honest, I would far rather have read the polemical article about fandom that Rob abandoned in order to write this.

But back to the narrative of my first, uneasy reading of the fanzine. On skipping Rob, as I said, disenchantment set in. I tried to read the next piece "Children of the Night" by Walter Miles. This is apparently a stream of consciousness distillation of Disclave party nights and as such is probably wonderful if you've ever been to one and know the people, but even recognising some of the names, it did not pull me in. There was no context, no narrative, nothing to hold on to. I read the paragraphs but in the end was none the wiser.

So, I guess it was lucky for me and my involvement with this particular issue that next up in the running order was "Don't start me talking" by Andy Hooper, about a day trip to Mount Rainier with some German fans. This is solid writing in the classic fan travel mode with no stylistic pretensions but a good grasp of dialogue, characterisation and how to make the most of a story. Even without the added nostalgia value of remembering my own trip to Seattle, this would have won back my allegiance.

But what do I find straight after Andy's article? Oh, no, not more fanfiction! "Blodgett recollected" by Gordon Eklund. Needless to say I didn't read it. At least not then, though I did come back to it for this review and found, much to my surprise, that unlike the Enchanted Duplicator stuff, this form of fanfiction was perfectly readable, if somewhat perplexing. It purported to be about sixties fan Harvey Blodgett, Gordon's alter ego who always seemed to be one step ahead of him and one or several degrees more seedy. The perplexity comes from my own ignorance. Apart from its billing as fanfiction, the excessive manner of his death ("He'd been murdered. Somebody'd stabbed him in the left arm, right thigh, face and stomach and he'd basically bled to death as he lay naked on

the floor of his bathroom") and the name Harvey Blodgett itself, it's perfectly easy to read this as a true account. And as true history, it would have been a bittersweet story of two friends drifting apart, and as such meaningful. But as fiction, I simply don't know how to take it. Is Blodgett meant to be a composite of various fans whom people will recognise? An alternative Eklund who might have taken this path? An extended piece of humour? A character that Eklund had been writing fan fiction about for years? I just don't know, and it hardly helps that the whole thing is prefaced by alleged appeals from real people that I actually know, like Robert Lichtman, asking to know the fate of Blodgett. All I can conclude in the end is that my first instinct was right. I would have been better off not reading the piece.

Well, having skipped the Eklund on the first pass, that was just about it for me and Blat! 4 for some time. I leafed through to the letters, read what interested me, dipped into Dan's "Danotations" and put the fanzine back on my pile of big American fanzines. In the process, I missed out on a good article by Barnaby Rapoport on the work of some of his favourite music and film critics, and a rather patchy memorial to Robert Bloch that is not nearly as moving as the deeply felt pieces on the less famous Catherine Jackson in the previous issue, but which confirms my growing impression of the fanzine's mission to pay tribute to fandom's past.

Being largely illiterate at art commentary, I'll leave out any comments on Grant Canfield's Narcolepture portfolio, and go on to the letters. Here, at least, I have to say that Blat! earns its reputation. I am not a very diligent reader of letter columns, but one thing that will keep me going is a strong editorial presence. I'm sure there's a lot of wisdom and experience in Robert Lichtman's approach in Trap Door where, if I remember correctly, the letters run with virtually no comment from the editor, leaving it up to the readers or the other letter writers to react to the statements, but personally this method does nothing for me. I much prefer a letter column where the editor wades in with a response straight off. And who better to do it than Ted White and Dan Steffan? I also like the way they've resolved the problem of co-editorship on a letter column not by taking it in turns to edit (as Lilian Edwards and I used to do) but by one or both writing a response according to which of them has anything to say, distinguishing their respective comments by initials at the end. The mix of voices helps too, Ted's combative style leavened by Dan's quieter, though often just as forceful response, makes for an interesting read and a sense of well-informed commentary on a wide range of issues.

Then, as a prize for those who make it through that far (and I wonder how many obdurately linear readers like myself there are out there who don't?) is Dan Steffan's Bullshit Artist Danotation. Dan is generally a pleasure to read, and while this column says little that is earthshattering (apart from promising a monthly Dan Steffan fanzine from January 1995 - what happened to that, I wonder?), it does manage to talk about the success of Blat! without sounding too patronising and the Blat! archives without inducing instant somnolence (don't get me wrong - the publishing of great unpublished fanzines of the past is a very worthy project, but not one that fills me, here, in 1995 Britain, with any great enthusiasm.)

So, what of Blat! and me for the future? Do I consign it to my too large to bother with pile? Not at all. I hope I will continue to get it, and I will certainly continue to read Ted and Dan with interest, and will no doubt relate to the more contemporary portions of their subject matter. But I feel that I am not completely of the culture this fanzine is aimed at. I am not American and I do not have a deep reverence for the fandom of the 50s and 60s. Blat! touches part of my world, but in the end it is not my world, so for me

it will never be the best fanzine around or the pattern for my fan activity. If, as Robert Silverberg suggests in the letter column, "the past is a bigger place than the future for such folk as you and I", that's fine, but if that past does not draw people in, unless they were there, then this fanzine is going, ultimately to become the province of those who share that past, and for me, who doesn't, that's a shame.

Habbakuk, my other example of American paginary excess, is also firmly rooted in the past. But it is not so much the past where Elder Fans walked the earth and twiltone paper grew on bushes, more the past of ordinary people who just hung out together and did the sort of weird things you do when you leave college and share a house together. Bill Donaho, when he writes about the Dive or the Nunnery does not give the impression that he is trying to set the record straight or push any agenda about those times, more that he is trying to convey how it was back then to an audience of people who did not know. In Habbakuk Chapter 3, Verse 4, Donaho takes a step back from his adult life experiences and looks at how things were when he was "Growing up in Texas". This article deals specifically with the sexual mores of the time, illustrated by Bill's memories and his interpretation, in the light of experience, of what was going on between the people around him. This is not one to read in the company of prudish relatives (or even when you're at the hairdressers, as I did), as the text is fairly explicit in places, but the overview of male relationships, attitudes to women and acceptable and unacceptable sexual practices makes fascinating reading, all contextualized by insights into the culture and assumptions of East Texas in the 1940s. If you're interested in oral history (no pun intended) this eyewitness account of how it was then will leave you both entertained and enlightened.

But what of the rest of the fanzine? Bill Donaho has developed quite a successful formula. Ted White reviews the fanzines while Debbie Notkin deals with the books. Debbie's column, entitled "The Other Ten Per Cent" tends to make less impact with me than the fanzine reviews. Even applying Sturgeon's law, that leaves a hell of a lot of books to consider, and since Debbie's column only looks at say three or four a quarter, they tend to feel rather plucked at random from the morass. Add to that that at least 50% of them probably won't make it to this country (or not till I've forgotten I ever read the review) and it's easy to understand why I find this column only of passing interest.

With Ted White's reviews, of course, it is irrelevant whether you have seen the fanzine in question or are ever likely to. The discourse is all. In this issue, Ted takes on Fosfax with what looks like exemplary fairness (at least by comparison with some of Joseph Nicholas's run-ins), speaks well of Dave Hicks Moriarty's Revenge and saves his best invective for Chuck Connor, less one feels for the shortcomings of Thingamabob as for what he insists on interpreting as a death threat from Chuck (well, maybe it was, but generally if someone says the equivalent of fuck off and die in print it just means they don't like your style, not that they literally want you dead.)

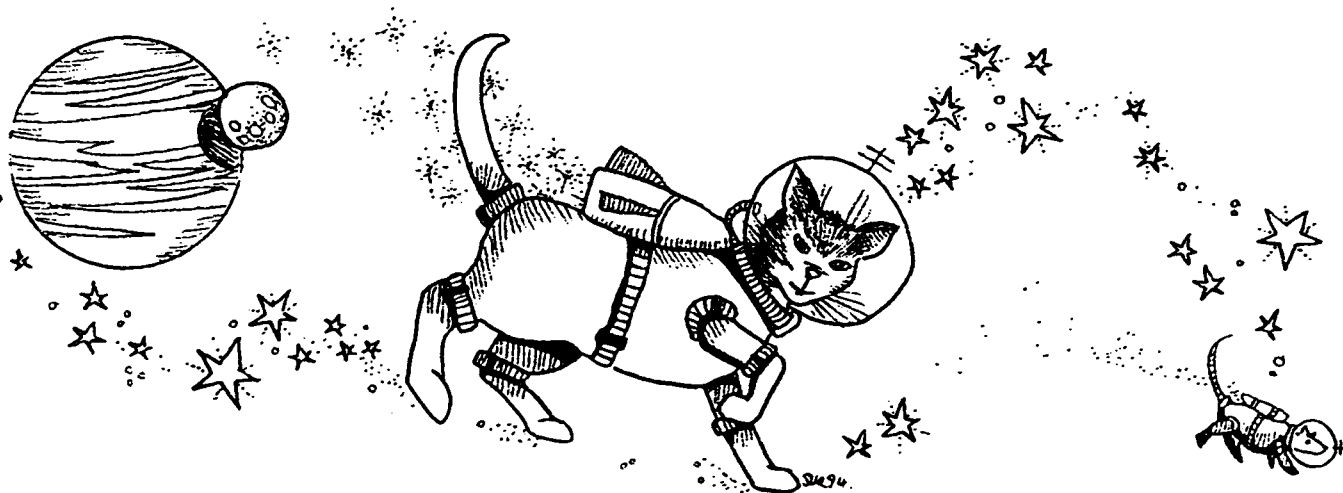
Back in the nostalgia vein, and very much in Habbakuk's house style is T. Bruce Yerke's "Which shall it be?", an evocation of the LA science fiction scene in the late 30s/early 40s. Again, despite featuring such luminaries as Forrie Ackerman, Ray Bradbury and Heinlein, this is more cultural history than fannish hagiography. It deals with the impact of the war on the young idealist that Yerke was then, and the ideas and impressions that shaped him during those years. Personal and yet historically significant, it is very much in the style of dealing with the past that has made Habbakuk so successful.

Finally, though, we come to the other 60% of the fanzine, or the letters, and this

is where the fanzine loses it for me. Clearly Bill Donaho has a lot of correspondents, but I wonder if it's the best use of our time or his, to print them in such profusion (perhaps I'll answer that one when *Balloons Over Bristol* has more than ten letters to deal with!). There needs to be some strong arguments to lead one through 40 pages of letters and though there is a certain amount of voyeuristic interest in watching people argue the toss over the character of Abi Frost as TAFF delegate, I've known her too long to feel totally comfortable with this vein of speculation and dissection. As to the rest, there just aren't enough hooks to draw me through. I'm sure there's some good stuff in there, buried amidst the verbiage, but you'd need an index to find it. Bill does interact with his letter writers, but less frequently and less incisively than Dan and Ted. The letters meander quite happily from topic to topic, but the only circumstances where I would bother to meander with them right to the end would be a long lazy afternoon where the weather's too hot to contemplate more connected reading.

Well, as they say, inside every fat fanzine there is a thin fanzine trying to get out. If Bill wants to help *Habbakuk* it shouldn't be so tough. Just seal up his mailbox and keep sending out those stories of old Texas.

Well, apart from raising the new question - why are American fanzines so enamored of the past? - what, if anything, do these two fanzines tell us about the American taste for the huge? Not much, I fear. Perhaps just that reasons for gigantism are likely to be as diverse as their editor's bank balance after mailing out a mega issue to Europe. My feelings, on closer examination, are that *Habbakuk* just grew, out of exuberance and inability to cut the letter column, while *Blat!* was conscious of a mission - a mission to act as a pattern for faneditors everywhere, and to be that focal point fanzine, as discussed variously in issues of *Apparatchik* and *Blat!* itself, that gathers around it the fandom of its day and inspires to activity. Is it working? Well, it could be. Fandom today is looking livelier than usual. Lets just hope that the spirit of emulation does not inspire too many 100 page epics though or I may have to give up American fandom in favour of something less time consuming, like reading the local telephone directory.



Paul Hinder presents :

HOW TO MAKE NUMBER 546789047/a

DR WHO NOVELS

MATERIALS NEEDED: Pen, Paper, Word Processor, Waste Paper Basket (large), TV/video (or your mum's), Tea, Milk, Chocolate Cake. Stronger stimulants as required. A friend in the business helps.

PROCEDURE:

1. Take the pen and write 'Dr Who Novel' all over several of the discs from your word processor. This is a way of telling yourself that you really mean it.
2. Have a cup of tea (you're going to need it). Ring the friend in the business and receive offers of videos, books, a plot synopsis he isn't using any more, address of publishers, name of person to send it to, name and address of his mate who's on the Net and can get the guidelines straight from - etc, etc. (If no friend in the business, you may have to join the Dr Who fan club to get these essentials, though some can be found in Writers' and Artists' Yearbook).
3. Have another cup of tea. Type plot synopsis into word processor. Stare at it and realize it doesn't make any sense. Panic.
4. Ring friend in the business (or other writer). Panic at length over the phone, tell them you'd rather be an accountant than do this for a living. Have another cup of tea, and some chocolate cake.
5. Watch videos, read books (this may take several days, lots of cups of tea, chocolate and stronger stimulants if available).
6. Try plot synopsis again. No better than the first time. All the books are better than yours. All the videos (even Horns of Nimon) are better than yours. Panic. Try ringing friend. Friend is out. Try ringing anyone. Everyone is out. More panic. Discover it's 2 a.m. LARGE, STRONG, cup of tea.
7. Brainstorming session with friend in the business or fellow writer. Ends 4 a.m. Plot begins to make sense...
- 8...until the following morning. Panic. Tea. Stronger stimulants if available.
9. Desperate struggle to write a scene. Scene is good. No-one else thinks scene is good. Friend in the business thinks scene is crap. Begin to make use of waste paper basket.
10. Repeat stages 6-9 until plot feels chewy, but still malleable, and scenes have an even consistency (this may take up to three months)
11. Send the whole package (usually by now about three chapters and a synopsis of similar length) to the publishers, with a covering letter telling them who you are.

12. Have it rejected.
13. Repeat steps 1-12 as required, or until you die of old age.
14. If by any chance one of your efforts is accepted, leap for joy, touch the ceiling, feel that God/the Universe is ON YOUR SIDE AT LAST.
15. Sit down. Have a cup of tea. Realize that now you actually have to WRITE THIS THING - in rather less than four months. Panic.
16. Write a chapter. Not the same as the chapter you wrote. Characters all wrong, doesn't make any sense.
17. Write it again. It still doesn't make any sense. Time is ticking away.
18. Repeat steps 16-17 until you die of a heart attack or other stress-related illness OR...
19. ...decide that your magnum opus is just going to have to be bloody well less than perfect, this crap has to be delivered by April so you'll just have to get on with it whether it feels right or not.
20. Prepare 1 chapter (as per steps 17-19) per week until book is complete. Refuse to be distracted by Christmas, nervous breakdown, death of grandmother, invasion of planet by aliens, etc. Allow yourself to be distracted (for hours and hours and hours) by vital matters such as whether to put comma in last sentence of chapter 5.
- 21 Send it to the publishers. Once again God/the Universe is on your side. IT'S FINISHED! You can go for a walk in peace, you can look at the little birdies tweeting, the little flowers opening to the sun... (you did remember to print that last amendment to chapter 7, didn't you...? And the epilogue that you were typing with half an hour to go before the post, did you put it in the envelope or did you leave it on the floor? ... oh well, too late now).
22. (after an interval) Read the proofs. Realize it's not such a bad book after all. Cup of tea and nice, big slice of chocolate cake as a reward to yourself.
23. (after another interval) Read the reviews. Wish you hadn't. Panic. Panic. Panic. Wish you'd decided to be an accountant instead.

But it's too late now, you're already half way through the the THIRD one of the buggers...

+++++

Paul Hinder has had two Dr Who novels published under the pen name of Paul Leonard - Venusian Lullaby and Dancing the Code



Yes, why not have a letter column again? A few missives have built up here at Balloon control, so I'd better quote from them before they go missing or disappear beneath the chaos that is perceptibly taking over my house and my life. Since Balloons 7 has barely made its debut in the cruel world of fangnoscenti, it is hardly surprising that the only loc to arrive on it is from the ever diligent Bridget Hardcastle, but there seems to be a bit of build-up on material on music in general, so I'll run that all together, but first lets begin with some response to my article on charity in Balloons 6. Apologies in advance for any lacunae in the 'm' department, my keyboard seems to have gone off this letter ever since I poured water over it (well, it was hot...) So, if you come across any words that don't make sense, try inserting an 'm' and see if it helps!

But, in to bold, and back to charity. Whereas I did my white liberal guilt thing, and anguished over my less than generous behaviour, our first correspondent took a much more pragmatic approach.

Ken Lake "I put the envelope in the post" is what I usually tell people who call back for contributions to charities. Or "I'm perfectly happy to believe your accreditation card, but I don't recognise the charity." Or "I gave at the office." Or (in re The Big Issue) "Got one in my bag, thanks." Or "I'm on the way to the loo - in a HURRY!" (with anguished expression).

((Of course, have you ever considered it might just be simpler to buy the damn thing?))

An elderly eccentric Danish friend was stopped by a flagseller on what used to be called the Tramway Centre in Bristol: "My dear young lady, I'm afraid I don't really understand - you want me to give you a SHILLING? For a little piece of paper on a PIN?" Turns to me. "Is this your University Rag Week joke?" Then he gave her a ten-shilling note and took the whole tray. We had a bit of Bover about that, too.

Once on the New York subway, carrying \$50,000 in cash in a Marks & Spencer carrier-bag with a copy of "Screw" on top of it (I'd just collected the cash from the Royal Bank of Scotland off Wall Street; "Screw" was my idea of misdirection), I was approached by a very threatening pandhandler. I smiled sweetly, pulled my empty trouser pockets out, held my open hands wide and shook my head. He gave me a dollar.

And a friend, a charming and relatively wealthy albeit bohemianly dressed lady in her early sixties, was sitting on the steps of Barclays in Brighton waiting for me to cash a cheque when, in swift succession, four tourists each dropped a 20p piece into her lap. (1A Stephen Court, Ecclesbourne Road, Thornton Heath, CR7 7BP)

But Ken was not the only one to have problems with beggars...

Steve Jeffery Beggars and panhandlers. There seem to be more and more of them, or maybe I'm noticing them more. I don't think I really noticed how many there were until we went to Dublin for Trincon, and seemed to be accosted almost every 20 yards in the main street. "The price of a cuppa". Yeah, sure you want a cup of tea - the guy's barely standing he's so paralytic. He bums a cigarette and staggers off, swearing about 'fookin tight English basturds'.

I'm less sure about the young women sitting in doorways holding up snotty children for my sympathy and loose change. If they're genuine, I should feel for them and help, but it smacks of using children for professional begging, and that does annoy me. I've heard it told that you can make £80 a day on the streets or subways of London. It's too much of a gauntlet; some may be genuine, others - which we know from Oxford - can keep a small habit going on the takings. And that is something I don't have any intention of funding on hand outs.

It sounds cynical - it probably is - but the big charities spend a sizeable proportion on administration and overheads, and the loose change in the subway, if it's not sneered at, may just as easily go on booze and dope. Whatever, I don't like the feeling that I'm a target being preyed on whenever I go into cities - whether it's Oxford, London, Dublin or Philadelphia (that has just as high a population of panhandlers, but they're usually not so aggressive or insistent about it. It may be because it also has a higher population of cops on the street)

As for formal charities, some of them are already concerned about the impact of the Lottery. Donations have dropped off - despite Major's blandishments about the possibility - as people see a portion of their few quid a week going to worthy causes anyway. What is intriguing is why the first donations have taken so long to come through only recently from when the Lottery started up in November. Am I being unduly cynical in pondering the interest that might be accrued on several hundred million pounds? (44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon OX5 2XA)

Not at all. But perhaps we are all being a bit cynical about the character of the people on the street. Pat Silver actually takes the trouble to look beyond the "Can you spare me some change" caption.

Pat Silver I was interested in your thoughts on giving as I have come to know some of the Bristol street people over the last few months. I don't have much cash to spare, but I do have some spare time and I sometimes sit down and chat for a

while. More than one has remarked to me that it meant an awful lot to them to have someone treat them as human beings and not just obstacles to progress. The other thing I do is give books to several whom I know enjoy reading. This recently led to an amusing incident when I was walking through the Broadmead roundabout underpass with someone from work. She was quite startled when one of the threatening young men with dogs (or is that young men with threatening dogs?) came trotting across to say thank you and he was enjoying the book which Leila had passed on to him. Poor Dorothy doesn't know what to make of me at all!

That's one of the sad things about the rising numbers of people on the streets - it ends up dehumanising both sides so that the only communication between the two worlds occurs as a monetary transaction.

Pat too has a few reservations about those that demand money with menaces :

No, I won't give in to coercion either, and I had a similar experience to yours on the London Underground whilst queuing to buy my ticket from a machine. I retorted by shouting loudly "How dare you threaten me!" I figure it is a bit like the occasional bottom-pincher that one encounters in an office. The quickest way to stop the problem is not to try to hide it but rather shout very loudly "Get your hands off me you pervert!" or alternatively wait for the appropriate opportunity and pinch back - hard.
(111 Weston Road Long Ashton Bristol BS18 9AE)

It turns out that I was not the only one to undergo the Iranian guilt trip treatment. Be warned, this woman has cloned herself and is advancing steadily along the M4 corridor towards London.

Dave Langford I've just been reminded of your agonizing fanzine account of coming away humiliated after fine charitable intentions. I was stopped by a small beswathed Iranian lady outside Blackwell's in Reading ... thought she wanted directions and slowly gathered through her almost impenetrable (well, to me) accent that she was dedicating her life to rescuing children left orphaned by state-sanctioned unpleasantness in Iran. Vast ring-binder with photographs of tortured extremities, endorsements of her work on universities' notepaper, official ID badge, etc. This all seems to go on forever. Cowed, Langford reaches for small change -- is forestalled by official credit card donation form -- reckons the Barclaycard account can just about stand fifteen quid without actually bursting -- scribbles dutifully on paper -- but This Is Not Enough. Wrathful Iranian finger points to official scale of donations, beginning at £40, which is the minimum required to achieve something or other for one miserable kid. Escape feeling not only £15 poorer but also a total bastard....

He adds as a postscript :

After e-mailing you I realized Ms Iran's counterpart in fiction : the King/Queen of the Beggars in Terry's Discworld books, the dignity of whose position requires that they ask passers-by for a fifty-room mansion for the night, or a banquet to serve 500....
(94 London Road, Reading, Berks RG1 5AU)

Which takes us on to our token sf reference for the issue.

Steve Jeffery Regarding William Bains' letters about a handy 'guide to books' book, I have a copy of something called the M. H. Zool's Good Reading Guide to SF (Bloomsbury). It is exactly what William proposes, in that it lists books and authors and themes, with a sidebar at the end of each section which points you to other books along the same theme. It's a lot more limited than the Encyclopedia of SF, or even Dave Pringle's Ultimate Guide to SF (Grafton) which does much the same thing, but it's much cheaper and easier to carry around.

In the meantime the indefatigable Bridget Hardcastle (how many adjectives for Bridget can I come up with in one issue?) invented her own :

Bridget Hardcastle I started a 'Guide to SF' (as William Bains mentions) for the Imperial College SF club; lots of Terry Pratchett, David Eddings and Star Trek novels get taken out of the library but not much else. I worked on sheets to pin up around the library saying "If you like Terry Pratchett, why not try... Douglas Adams, Robert Rankin, Robert Asprin etc". By far the longest list I produced was "If you like dodgy sex, why not try..." Fifty authors! And I'm not even that well-read! No one took any notice of them and after someone tidied them up I never saw them again. (13 Lindfield Gardens, Hampstead, London NW3 6PX)

Sounds like a useful list to print in a fanzine some day.

Joseph Nicholas wrote to correct a serious error in his own letter to issue 6:

Joseph Nicholas The statement that FTT 17 would be the first issue of the fanzine to be distributed at a convention is not true! We have in fact distributed issues of FTT at no less than two previous conventions -- the 1990 Corflu in New York, and the 1990 Worldcon in Den Haag. Thus do I refute myself -- although at the same time it may be possible to rescue the veracity of the statement by insertion of the adjective "British" before the noun "convention"...

Well, I'm glad we've got that straight.

I enjoyed Simon Lake's brief look at Bristol's contribution to rock music history, and noted in particular his mention of The Flatmates, who I recall had a rather nice single "Shimmer", out in 1988 or 1989. (I've still got my copy.) Indeed, I remember footnoting them on a postcard to you about something else, asking why the lead singer dissented from the prevailing fashion of having guitar bands fronted by women with (dyed or natural) blonde hair, like Transvision Vamp's Wendy James or The Primitives' Tracy Tracy, by being a brunette. (Perhaps this failure to conform to the then-required indy hair colour was responsible for their lack of success.) But what happened to the Flatmates after that single? Did they ever release another record? Did they break up and drift back into the mundane lives from which they'd emerged, or did the members turn up later in other bands? And if not, why not?

Well, I've just consulted Bristol SF group member Tony Walsh on this since his

stepdaughter used to be in the band. Apparently they broke up after Shimmer, but various members are still around in the music business. Debbie Haynes, the unfashionably brunette singer is involved with Bristol group Cake. Their drummer Rocker Woods livens up his career as a dentist by playing keyboards for Spectrosonic. The guitarist Martin Whitehead runs Subway Records and Blaster! records and is studying music law. And Sara Fletcher, their bass player is an arts research assistant in the Cotswolds.

Oh, and, er Portishead are, um, I don't know how to say this really, but... Portishead are fucking boring. "Trip hop", is this sort of music supposed to be called? Sounds more like "Zzz zzz" to me. Give me thrashing guitar chords, three-minute songs, sparky-voiced female lead singers... yes, it must be time to play the Elastica CD again!

(15 Jansons Road South Tottenham London N15 4JU)

Personally, I find Portishead quite addictive (but love the Elastica record too!) Still on the subject of music, Alison Freebairn sent in some belated comments on Simon's list of best albums of 1994:

Alison Freebairn Live music? Too many gigs to list, you'll be glad to hear, but the 1994 highlights were Manic Street Preachers, Strangelove, Thrum, Laika, Telstar Ponies, Luna and Long Fin Killie. As far as unsigned bands are concerned, the cream of the crop were The Moondials, The Delgados and Limbslice. Of course, I'm only talking about Glasgow here, but the mere mention of the Bierkeller and Fleece and Firkin made me quiver with nostalgia. I spent a lot of time with friends in Thornbury during my school holidays from 1986-1988, and went to some good gigs at these venues. In fact, I was at the Bierkeller to see The Bolshoi in October 1987, and was stunned to see Morrissey walk in with some friends and sit at the next table, casual as you like. We were, of course, far too cool to hassle him. Damn. Anyway, Simon Lake's reviews were excellent. My own choice for the top five albums of 1994 would be an agonising one, but I'll give it a go. 'The Holy Bible' - Manic Street Preachers (without a doubt); 'Napolitos' - Grenadine; 'Mellow Gold' - Beck; G Love and Special Sauce's eponymous LP, and 'Time For the Rest of Your Life' by Strangelove.

Simon wins a sherbert fountain for not mentioning Oasis, Blur or Pulp anywhere in his article. The Pulp LP was good; the other bands are so derivative that they have little merit as far as I'm concerned. Portishead made a cracking album, but Grenadine used similar ideas without ripping off John Barry. 1995 has been quite productive already, with Gorky's Zygotic Myncci, Liquorice, 18 Wheeler, Therapy?, Radiohead and Sidi Bou Said putting out some wonderful sounds.

(Police House Kilmalcolm Renfrewshire PA13 4LG)

God, it's obviously time I went out to buy some more music. Meanwhile, Bridget seems to be having a bit of trouble with Oasis, Blur and Pulp too :

Bridget Hardcastle Popular music is something I've not paid attention to for a few years - I'm still not sure I know the difference between Pulp, Suede and Blur (various BAPAns have helped me out with this, though as they all have different opinions as to which of the three groups is the crap one it hasn't helped that much. Someone asked if I was perhaps confusing them with Oasis)

A few of the pieces meant nothing much to me (maybe because I've never heard of the groups mentioned) but a couple brought back vivid memories of my gigging days in sunny Manchester. Well, it wasn't sunny while the gigs were on 'cos it was night then, but y'know what I mean.

I like gigs, I like dancing, I like being at the front. What I don't like is being collided with by nutters waving lit cigarettes and broken glasses. Ah, gig dancing - bobbing up and down while pushing your arms forward, in the buffer zone between the bouncing nutters and the people standing quietly. A sweat-free way of pogoing is to put your hands on the shoulders of the person in front of you and get carried along. Doc Marten boots were de rigeur for more reasons than fashion (sandals, indeed!)

Once I went to a gig where the audience was so small I not only got to see the band (Half Man Half Biscuit) but I even got to see their feet! There's usually little point in going to a gig to see a band if you're only 5'4". When I went to see The Wedding Present the people in front of me were so tall they blocked my view of the entire wall! But I did come away from a Frank Sidebottom concert with Little Frank's actual legs (ah, there's a story).

Ooh, I' getting quite enthusiastic about music now - all I need is some recent releases...

Don't we all! But to cut back to Bridget's loc on the penultimate Balloons

Perhaps if Pam designates Peter-Fred as Party-Fred he will once more open the doors to Party House.

More likely he'd flee the country. Or reinvent himself as a stereogram...

Steve Jeffrey I must be one of the few who can see these Magic Eye 3D images. I've even got a couple of programs on the computer to generate them. It's a very strange sensation when the normally flat screen feels like it's pulled back about six inches and you seem to be seeing halfway towards the back of it. The problem is about the only coherent images from dot stereograms are relatively uninteresting blobs - a blob shaped like a whale or a rabbit or a bird, but still a rather featureless blob. Any fine detail gets completely lost. I suspect the most interesting patterns are those that are generated mathematically - abstract curves and forms that have an appeal in themselves rather than as poor representations of something else.

Or Balloons? I'm beginning to wonder if Steve, practically the mainstay of this letter didn't receive issue 4 with its stereogram cover.

Dave Harwood Noting comments on your earlier 3D cover, I was astonished to discover that I could actually decipher it (took about four months, mind) - I'd never been able to 'read' them before. The 'Now Monthly' on the back cover was a bit optimistic, however.

Immensely. Now about to be carted off to the loony bin would have been more accurate. But now bimonthly somehow didn't have the same ring about it. Dave also made some general comments on issue 6 :

I found myself empathising very closely with your charity piece, which I found more affective than any article I can remember in a long while, perhaps purely because it expressed so well my own feelings/ experiences/ confusion. Miss Lee remains inconsequential but continues to charm nonetheless. And I liked the piece on Bristol's music scene, even though much of it was alien to me (I do have an album by Maximum Joy, and a couple of tracks by Mark Stewart and Maffia).
(20 Maldon Road, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS2 5AZ)

On the subject of Miss Lee :

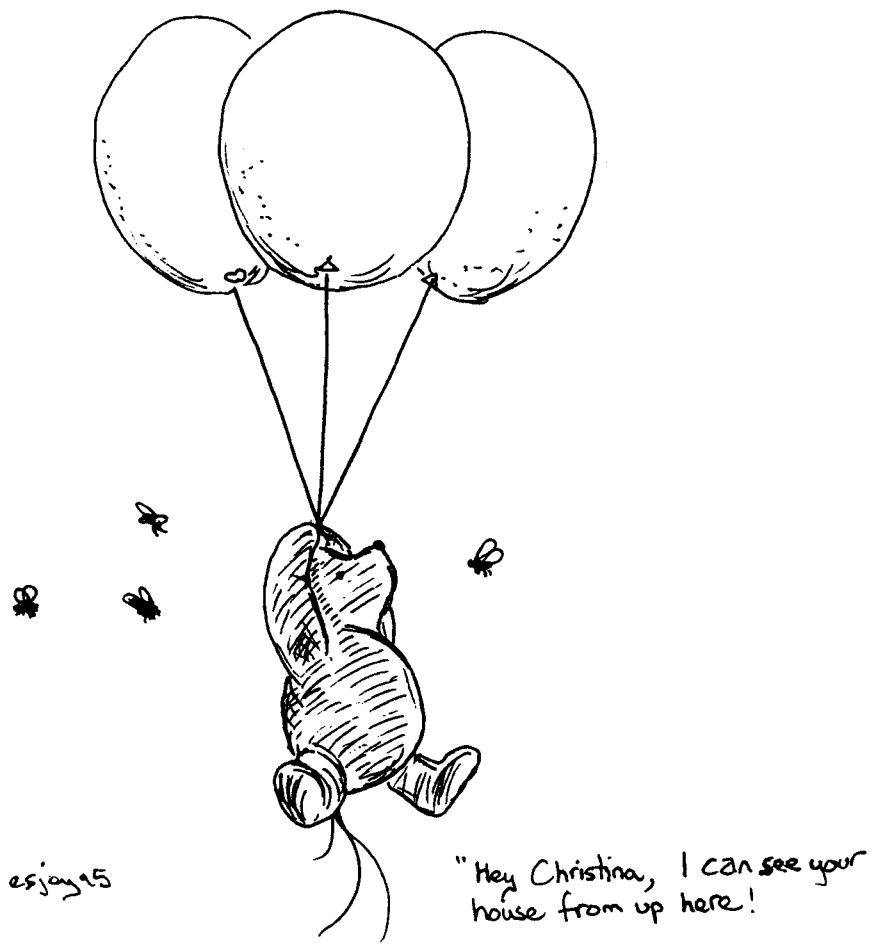
Chris Murphy The Miss Lee letters struck me as less amusing than sad. How did this unhappy woman reach a state where nagging Tim Goodrick by mail was her only social outlet? There is something about living in flats that tends to bring out the worst in people.
(7 Mullion Drive, Timperley, Nr Altrincham, Cheshire WA15 6SL)

Steve Jeffery Miss Lee's letters get weirder and weirder. Just to show he's not making this up, Tim included one of her handwritten letters. Is there a graphologist in the house?

Ken Lake I can't help wondering if Miss Lee in Clifton had a green Esperanto Star on her door. If so, I knew her well. If not, my Ghod, there are two like that.

If she did have that star, I expect Tim Goodrick's lodger stole it!

On that note of muted calumny, we might as well wind up the letter column with the traditional lack of WAHF (if you write to us, we'll quote you. Yes, that's a threat!)



BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 8

Contents

Making the most of the Worldcon - Steve Brewster	2
Halfway up the stairs, Miss Lee letters - Tim Goodrick	3
Farewell from the glass arcade - Simon Lake	7
Why are American fanzines so large? - Christina Lake	9
How to make - Dr Who novels - Paul Hinder	15
Letters - edited Christina Lake	17

Art

Louise - cover
Sue Mason p.6, 7, 9, 14
Steve Jeffery p.17, 23

August 1995
