

# BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL

FUFFERING FOR

OUR FINE

HERE BUT FOR YE GRAFE OF

GHU

GOETH YOU

Nitro-Keg Beer Rockf

Dragonf? Tediouf thingf...



STAR WARS

Babylon 5'f Pretty Fhoddy,  
If You're Honeft.

Dogf Are Better Than Catf

You Rotten Fwinef, You

## No. 12: YE PRANGED FAN

“He had these amazing Tarrott Cards”

WITH GRATITUDE TO  
PETE 'N' DUD.

## BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL 12

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Balloons Over Bristol is the fanzine of the Bristol SF Group, which meets every Thursday at the Brewery Tap, Colston Street, Bristol from about 8.30 pm onwards. Main activities are drinking beer, gin and tonic or cider (though unfortunately the Tap doesn't help in the latter since it has no draught cider), eating, going to the cinema and - very occasionally - discussing SF.

This issue of the fanzine was edited by Christina Lake. Copies of this fanzine are available for trade, letters of comment, artwork or donations towards photocopying costs from :

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The editor of this fanzine supports **Maureen Speller for TAFF** (but Ken probably supports Chris Bell, if he knows what's good for him, and Steve Brewster would no doubt be supporting Bridget Hardcastle if he hadn't buggered off home to Leeds to escape writing up his PhD.)

April 1998

## Here We Go Again *complains Christina Lake*

Sometimes it's hard to give away a fanzine. Two years ago at Eastercon I filled my room with balloons, my fridge with champagne and alienated an ailing Lilian Edwards (who needed peace, quiet and frequent applications (external) of an ice cold coke can to function) in order to launch *Balloons Over Bristol* a few miles down the road in the direction of the Totterdown address of Pete and Sue Binfield. Imagine my pride when their long awaited first issue came out. Look, my baby's grown up! I thought.

But like many a modern day parent, I was to be disappointed. It's one thing to shove the offspring out for a few years at university, or a quick jaunt round the world; another entirely to stop them coming home with a full bag of washing, demands to use the video and a pack of friends with an over-developed interest in free food. Luckily, all I was getting back was a fanzine.

In fact, you could say it was a fair swap. I agreed to take back the fanzine, and Sue Binfield agreed to find me a job at the Environment Agency. Sue kept her part of the bargain so well that sometimes I wonder whether it wasn't secretly revenge for landing her and Pete with the fanzine for a year. It's not that I don't enjoy my job or my new colleagues; it's just that there are certain elements that, as I'm sure Sue would agree, are less than satisfactory. But working with Sue has transformed my understanding of what it means to be true information professional. No-one at library school ever explained about the importance of not wimping out before five in the morning, of keeping up with Sean (one of our colleagues) and other codes of behaviour involving large quantities of alcohol and small quantities of sleep. All I can say is that it was just as well that I was a fan before I became an information professional, otherwise I might have been found lacking.

Sue's standards aren't so high, unfortunately, when it comes to participating in the fanzine. But here are some of the things she promised to do for this issue :

1. Illustrate Tina's pumpkin pie recipe
2. Finish her picture of the Spice Girls on the toilet
3. Write up the tattoo convention she went to
4. Deconstruct the gig flyers handed round in Bristol pubs
5. Write a searing indictment of SF art

See how many of those *you* can spot !

On the other hand, Pete Binfield, with the help of an OCR and liberal use of work time has managed to complete the letter column, despite being on the verge of moving to the Netherlands (lucky sod) for a job with Elsevier. His 30th birthday party in Amsterdam should be something to look forward to. In the meantime, Pete seemed to take a perverse delight in the outcome of his leaving meal with the SF group. "This is brilliant!" he kept saying. "One person outside throwing up! Another with her head on the lap of the man who isn't her husband!" What could he do, but order a bottle of champagne to complete the celebration?

We now have a definite vacancy for Petes in the group. Having lost Peter-Fred a couple of years ago to "higher consciousness" (or was it sex?), we carelessly let Pete Crump escape back to his psychotic girl friend in Yorkshire, and Pete Binfield will doubtless not be attending very regularly from the Netherlands. So, if your name is Pete (or Steve, as we've lost one of those too) and you live in the Bristol area, please come along for our Thursday night sessions. Who knows what effect it might have on your life?

## IN THE DARK

by Tim Goodrick

How do some people manage to fill pages and pages of their fanzines with no apparent effort? And on a fairly regular basis. Well, I'll tell you. Most of it is complete drivel. Wait, wait WAIT! Put down that doll of me that you made after one too many episodes of the Miss Lee letters. And take the pin out of the right shoulder. Ahhh, much better. Listen.

A high percentage of what is written is done so with great style, but the content seems to revolve around What I Did On My Holidays or Did You Hear About The Way X Behaved At Y Con. I suppose, if you are well and truly part of the scene, then a lot of the gossip is interesting and, perhaps, even essential. I tend not to know a lot of the people written about and so get very little out of a lot of the articles. Whilst reading them I can still take pleasure in finding a well turned phrase, a novel style and, sometimes, a few nuggets of interesting or even useful information.

So, I need talk, eh? So far this article seems to have been nothing but waffle. However, there is a point. In this fair and wonderful democracy that is Balloons Over Bristol someone has to tell everyone else what to do and She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed told me to write an article. I said I didn't know what to write about. She said Think of something. I said that there hadn't been many good films around over the last year. And she said Write About That.

So, why is Hollywood like a fanzine writer? They both seem to be able to produce things of Style and Beauty with little or no Content.

The other reason why I'm finding writing this difficult is that I've just seen Titanic today. Seeing it has made me want to write this article but has simultaneously left me feeling too drained to do the job. I still haven't really made up my mind as to whether I've been shamelessly manipulated by Mr. Cameron or truly moved. Was this a thrill ride movie with a cliched love story at its heart or a revelatory view of a disaster whose magnitude could only be grasped by putting you on the spot and forcing you to (almost) experience it. I want to believe the latter but can't shake the appalling vision of going to Universal Studios Theme Park one day and finding that the Titanic Disaster simulator is up and running.

But more of Titanic after a look back over a fairly miserable year of cinema going. It wasn't until the middle of March that I made my first visit to the flicks last year, to see Ransom. It was OK but in 1996 I'd already seen Babe, Braveheart, Seven, Johnny Mnemonic, Jumanji, Sense & Sensibility, Strange Days, Heat and Trainspotting by the same point. Not all of them were great films but only one (Johnny Mnemonic) was bad and only one (Jumanji) was empty.

The English Patient was next and what can I say? It was beautiful to look at but I found it curiously uninvolving. I couldn't sympathise with the characters and found myself a bit bored in parts. I think it was that film more than any other that made me feel that cinema was losing its soul. Although it is a passive medium, film can do much more than entertain. A good film can grab you in the darkness of the cinema and take you on a journey of discovery with its characters. The popcorn rustle disappears and for a few hours you are in another world. This seems to happen less and less nowadays and with The English Patient I was aware of just watching something very beautifully crafted, but I wasn't there.

Of course, I'd seen many films before it where I was just along for the ride - Mission Impossible, Twister, ID4, but I'd expected no more from them. The English Patient arrived at the cinema here in England weighed down by its jangling mass of Oscars. Perhaps my expectations were just too high.

Things reached an all-time low in the Summer with Batman & Robin, the ride film which I fell off. It stank. If you haven't seen this film, don't. The Lost World was another major disappointment. This was Spielberg on autopilot with plot holes big enough to sink Atlantis.

All the films seemed to be mere flashy baubles. Alien Resurrection seemed to be a preview of a computer game and the new Bond film was, well, the new Bond film. I suppose that when you are aiming for an international market then dialogue tends to be the last thing you want in your film. Plot and sense soon follow onto the cutting room floor. There are always exceptions. The yooof version of Romeo and Juliet worked really well and L.A. Confidential poured in more plot than it seemed possible for the film to hold, but hold it fantastically well it did. Still, a good film every six months is hardly enough to keep my cinema appetite thriving.

Some films were very good fun (Men in Black, Mars Attacks), but nothing more. I enjoyed them for what they were, entertainments. The Fifth Element was another film composed almost entirely of Look but wasn't so desperately empty as some of the other offerings last Summer.

I used to think it was money that was ruining things. It seemed that the more expensive your film was the more you had to appeal to the lowest common denominator to try to recoup your costs. But, although this seems to apply to a lot of films, there is one director who has often made 'the most expensive film ever' and yet manages to keep them reasonably intelligent. James Cameron, the director of Terminator, Aliens, The Abyss, Terminator II, True Lies and now Titanic. All his films seem to manage to combine the thrill ride with a strong story and a human heart, albeit at an exorbitant cost.

So, Titanic. A day has now passed since I saw it and I still haven't sorted it out. It was definitely a good film but was it great? The first stumbling block to some might be the point of view from which the story is related. It seems to be Rose's (Kate Winslet's character) but things are shown that she neither saw nor could know about so I have accepted that she is just a bridge to the past as is the Titanic itself in some sequences. The love-across-the-class-divide story isn't very novel but is handled extremely well and avoids the lashings of syrup that lesser directors might have poured on. And the effects, both the in your face and the more subtle ones, are masterful. I could believe in the characters - Rose, who has never really lived and sees her future as living death and Jack (DiCaprio) who lives every moment as though he may see Death's grin the very next. More importantly, I could care about them. See this film. See it at the cinema. See it on the biggest screen you can. It deserves nothing less.

It has been a bad year, then, but I'll continue to go to the cinema because there are still some worthwhile films being made. I can hope that this year will be better and there is the new Star Wars film to look forward to next year (the revised versions shown last year deserve an article to themselves). Perhaps even the Batman franchise will get back on track (rumours of Tim Burton directing Clint Eastwood as an ageing Batman certainly intrigue). And I must admit that I don't read all that many fanzines so some of them may be worthwhile as well. What a cop-out ending!

## Trash, cult or Ikea?

by Christina Lake

When Tim Goodrick talks about fanzines lacking content, I think that part of what he's referring to is the tendency towards insularity and self-referentiality in our sub-culture. We are not writing about science fiction, movies, music or even the government (though maybe I should lend him International Revolutionary Gardener). We are writing about ourselves, our conventions, other fanzines, our friends, what we read on the Internet, where we went on our holidays and who has offended whom in the micro-political landscape of our hobby.

I too have fantasies. When I sit down on a bus and take out a fanzine, I like to pretend that everyone around me will think I'm reading the coolest material imaginable. There's even an extent to which it's true; one or two fellow passengers may idly study my reading material to pass the time. They may even be attracted by the graphics, the coloured paper, the alternative look of my zine. The trouble is, I also know that were I to leave it on the bus, or pass it on at random, a good 75% of fanzines would make no sense at all to the average man or woman on the Clapham Omnibus.

After a certain point in your life, it's very hard to explain to those not involved why you write for fanzines. The word fanzine has a juvenile sound to it. It suggests the immaturity of the not fully formed, who have to be fans of something.

I suppose one reason why I was so keen to stage the drugs and alcohol panel at Corflu UK was to get away from the "sad bastard" image of fans. Rightly or wrongly there is much more street cred about the reformed heroin addict and the busted drug dealer than the anorak fan sitting in his bedroom watching Babylon 5 videos. In some sad, pathetic way this helped validate my involvement.

Increasingly, I want my fanzines to be alternative. One of the panels at Corflu devoted some time to discussing "Ikea fandom" (a label applied to the middle class tendency of some of the Plokta/ Banana Wings material). Why shouldn't this kind of writing be as valid as tales of cider addiction in the suburbs of Leeds or whatever - assuming the writing is good? Yes, if it makes you recognise something about your own life that has never struck you before. Otherwise the writer has to work harder to make the same impression. (Of course, if I habitually lived with cider drinkers, then the reverse might be true. But would I really be jumping up and down with excitement at my first hint that life contained brightly coloured Swedish furniture?)

It seemed strangely pertinent that I should exit the M32 into Bristol after Corflu to find signs posted round the Eastville roundabout reading : "No to Ikea!"

But no-one can say that awards don't make a difference. Can it be a coincidence that having been voted best fan writer in the Faan Awards, I have felt a touching enthusiasm for the fanzines I brought back from the convention with me? I really do want to show my pile of fanzines to my friends and say: "Look at these. Aren't they cool!" I say this even though Corflu appears to have upset the seasonal rhythms of some publications,

forcing them to rush out an issue prematurely. *Bob*, for example, and *Plokta* didn't seem to be up to their usual standard. Ian, of course, has a good excuse for putting out a minimalist issue. Anything too flash and his fellow committee members might have accused him of overstating his case for delegating all at-con work to Lilian Edwards. As for *Plokta*, it was sadly lacking in anything truly funny. Even the best concept of the issue "I'm sorry I haven't a Clute", a potentially fun take on the obscurities of fanzine titles, suffers from the drag effect of combining a 70s TV icon - goddammit - with the standard Clute reference. But I do have to thank Corflu for my defining insight into the *Plokta* phenomenon; I was talking to Victor Gonzalez over dinner and I suddenly realised why it had taken British fandom so long to accept that *Plokta* was good. It was because we just didn't believe that these people we associated with the con-running/ Cambridge/going out for good meals edge of fandom could conceivably be - well - funny.

*Blip 1* also seems to suffer from the rushing into print for Corflu effect. It's slim by comparison with the *Lips* of old, but what the hell - at least it sees Hazel Ashworth back in action again. I suspect I should hate her for intruding on some territory I've staked out for myself (Australia. Masterwork on the subject pending, assuming I ever have time to decipher my notes.) And I would have to hate her not just for writing about Australia, but writing about it well too, with the type of anecdotal detail and sharp insight that I hoped to bring off myself. My only criticism of the impressionistic style is that it leaves a few holes that I would have liked to see filled. For example, did Hazel take that train trip across the Nullarbor? Should I rush my account into print just in case?

Another Leeds fan too long absent from the scene is Simon Ounsley, but he at least has a good, albeit rather depressing excuse. I sometimes think of *Intersection* as having had a somewhat momentous effect on my life, but in no way was it as calamitous as for Simon, who can trace a long-term deterioration in his health to the after-effects of the convention. In *Standing in the Shadows*, Simon chronicles all too vividly his "sparse" life, deprived of most normal interactions with the world by his intolerance for noise and sensitive eyesight. It's a depressing account not entirely saved by Ian Sorensen-like excursions into anecdotal humour. I think Simon's trying very hard to produce a fanzine not entirely dominated by his illness; but as ever, what stands out is the insights gained from the life it forces him to lead.

Completing the Leeds group resurgence was a debut from Debbi Kerr, which so impressed some of the Americans at Corflu that they were already bandying about comparisons with Lesley Reece (or was that just the smoking?). As someone who's been in Apas and writers groups with Debbi for a long time, I know she can write, so the only surprise was that she had finally decided to publish for a larger audience. *Did I say that out loud?* is as relaxed as the title suggests. Musings from the brain of Debbi, vignettes of life in Leeds and an account of a near-disastrous trip to London that makes very disconcerting reading if like me you are just setting out to London yourself with a brain annihilated by the after-effects of a very long convention.

One fanzine that can't be accused of putting out a light-weight issue for Corflu is *Banana Wings*. How do they do it? I mean, how DO they do it? Is it all that displaced energy from not shagging (though I suppose the no-shagging disclaimer doesn't rule out either of them shagging their own partner). A couple of issues into the *Banana Wings* series, I still believed that Claire and Mark would run out of steam. They would write all the stuff that

normal fans ration out over a lifetime of infrequent fanzines, and then sensibly come to the conclusion that their fanzines need not be quite so big, or at least not quite so entirely written by themselves. But no, instead they put out small fanzines between issues to preserve those observations on life that might get lost between one *Banana Wings* and the next. *Banana Wings 9* though shows signs of moving on to claim some of the territory vacated by the demise of *Attitude*. Don't worry, there's still plenty of Claire, and quite a bit of Mark, but there's also more of a genzine emerging out of the mix. Paul Kincaid's fanzine reviews as ever remain one of my favourite parts of *Banana Wings*. This time he analyses just one fanzine - the entire run of *Attitude* - which allows him to bring in plenty of historical context and even stray into convention reviewing (an area ear-marked for attention by his editors an issue or two ago.). But this time alongside Paul there is KIM Campbell sounding almost as scary as she did on the closing panel at Corflu (I think there it had something to do with her shaved head and android-like inflection), proposing a series of small conventions to prepare us for another big British Worldcon. Why do I find this scary? Because it's too much like work. It's like going on training courses and being forced to do role-playing. It's like team-building and those away-days where they shut you in a room and make you think about your aims and objectives. Aaaaaaaaaaargh!! (as Debbi Kerr would say). Then there are two contributors from Australia, Ian Gunn getting fanciful about Wallace and Gromit, and Irwin Hirsh offering us another section of his GUFF trip. I'm so pleased that Irwin's still writing this up - each time I read a section it reminds me of that summer of 1987 and how much I enjoyed Irwin and Wendy's visit. This time, there was the added bonus of Claire and Mark's perspective on Conspiracy. Their amazement at at having been at the same convention, but not then being part of the crowd that they now know so well. I suppose it all goes to prove that you can get some good out of big British Worldcons. And finally to complete the genzine effect there is Maureen Speller writing about *Tiger Tiger* and the *Count of Monte Cristo*, an article which left me with a strong desire to read both books, most especially the Dumas tome. But that might have to wait till my next trip round the world, or at least a long holiday in France.

To my mind, the outside contributors definitely improve *Banana Wings*. Much as I enjoy Claire and Mark's writing, the addition of other voices gives it more content and leavens the mix, so that what emerges is a bit more than weird and wonderful things about life in Croydon. .

But back to Maureen Speller, who continues to consolidate her campaign for TAFF with issues of her own fanzine *Smufkin's Bum*. The latest offering contains the expected references to her cats, but also an insightful piece about previous generations' attitudes towards collecting dinner sets and keeping things for best. Does this count as an Ikea fandom piece or not, I ponder? After all, it *is* about furniture. But given that it's deconstructing rather than anecdotal, and it does mention alcohol (even if no-one ever drank it), then I think it can't be. If I have my doubts about the furniture, then there's none at all about the Alan Garner piece. Here, at last, is the article to convince me to read Strandloper, the new(ish) Alan Garner that's been sitting on my bookshelf looking deeply inaccessible for far too long. Reading this article takes more effort than the average piece in *Plokta* or even *Banana Wings* - possibly because it was originally written for the literary apa, Acnestis, rather than the general fanzine audience. It assumes a serious interest in literature and gets on with its subject matter, rather than attempting to woo its audience - though the introduction does serve to pull you in. You could say it was

intrinsically unfannish, and that Lilian Edwards would never read it on the toilet, but I think one of the strengths of fanzines is that there's always been room for people to write about their obsessions and give you the benefit of their accumulated knowledge in some field that goes beyond the shared humour of conventions and party-going; in fact, Lilian herself did the same when she doffed her family law expert hat and wrote about the Child Support Agency in one of the issues of the *Wrong Leggings*.

Which takes us in not at all contrived fashion - oh no! - to issue 4 of the *Wrong Leggings*, the first since *Intersection* in 1995. What can I say about my erstwhile co-editor? That her fanzines are just as good, if not so frequent, without me? That I still envy her ability to sound effortlessly punchy and stylish in print, even if her vocabulary is not quite as impressive as it used to be (except when she's writing to Mark McCann!!). There's nothing in it that's going to be memorable in years to come, or change your life, but its "Ikea" done at its best. The impression of a very energetic and not at all sad lifestyle which yet contrives to be relentlessly mainstream with its interests in modems, software and having fun down the pub. There is one partially serious bit where Lilian turns her attention to fanzines and admits she likes them better than we would expect, but even that is filled with interpolations about fans she knows, lifestyle and stories about dongles. When she does finally get serious it's to remind us that -improbably - there's more to Ian Sorensen than meets the eye, and to tell us how good Michael Abbott's writing is. I have to agree with her on the latter, though I'm not sure that the example of Michael's writing in this issue of *Wrong Leggings* really bears this out - writing horoscopes for fanzines is perhaps not the easiest way to get laughs, though there were one or two lines that hit the spot. Another thing I liked a lot about *Leggings* was the use of scanned in photos and artwork - particularly successful being Naomi Saunder's legendary beasts.

This round-up should include Tobes, latest candidate for the future of fandom by virtue of being the only fan at Corflu under 30 (apart from Claire Brialey and Marianne Cain) but *The Strange Delusions of a Drunken Fuckwit* Issue 3.5 (I thought you were going to shorten that title Tobes?) doesn't really have much content apart from a couple of bad jokes, a picture of Claudia Christian and the information that nipple piercing is now in vogue among ZZ9 fans (a piece of information which I suppose in itself I should treasure). I think I'll wait till Tobes fills in the blank spaces on the back of his pages before I reach a verdict.

So, saving the best till last, I come to the end of my Corflu haul with Victor Gonzalez' third issue of *Squib*. What we have here is intelligent writing about fandom and what it means. Victor's focus is on online fandom, as personified by the newsgroup RASSF, and the effect of the technology on the shape of its discourse. Partly it is an attempt to understand why this medium is less sympathetic to him than written fandom, partly to second-guess how newcomers might feel about fandom, using his own reactions to RASSF as a guide, and partly to consider where we are all going in future and what will happen when, inevitably, the two media converge. (This description, by the way, leaves out a huge number of metaphors, analysis of the meaning behind the words of D West and Ulrika O'Brien, and gratuitous insults to Jim Trash!) I don't imagine this would be very accessible to anyone who is not a fan; on the other hand, there is no doubting that it has a very high level of content. For anyone interested in beginning to understand fandom, this would be a useful piece to read.

I think where this is taking me, where my bus-reading fantasies come from, where my excitement about the Corflu fanzines derives, is this: when I'm with fans like Victor, like Ted White, like D West and Greg Pickersgill, I believe for a while that fanzines are as valid a cultural artefact as, say, comics, CDs, movies, novels, pieces of art. Obviously fanzines are not produced on the same commercial scale as blockbuster movies or bestselling novels, but an independent comic or a DIY label CD are not going to be so very different in their level of penetration. Fanzines may be obscure, but they have their own cultural existence, and as such analysis of them is as valid a subject as writing about Alan Garner or the latest series of Babylon 5. These feelings are easier to justify when I'm in the US, where there seems to have been a more genuine counter-cultural tradition about fanzines, and where I can hang out with people like Paul Williams and Ted White who have some fame outside our field, or listen to someone like Frank Lunney, telling me about the people who used to contribute to his Hugo-nominated fanzine and what they have gone on to do. It seems a wider world than we have here, where a few fanzines routinely continue to do the same things they always do (my own included), without really impacting on the rest of our culture. In fact, the reverse seems to be true; everyday culture is assimilating our fanzines (hence "Ikea fandom"). But Corflu UK, partly thanks to the engagement and enthusiasm of its American guests and partly just for the sheer diversity of the fanzines produced, has injected back some of the excitement. At least it has for me. But maybe that's just the afterglow of winning an award?

Tell me it's more than that.

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**Checklist of fanzines reviewed** (but stop ego-scanning and go back and read the whole article even if yours isn't there!)

Banana Wings 9	Claire Brialey 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7HA & Mark Plummer, 14 Northway Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 6JE
Blip 1	Hazel Ashworth, 16 Rockville Drive, Emsay, Skipton, N Yorks BD23 6NX
BOB14	Ian Sorensen, 7 Woodside Walk, Hamilton, ML3 7HY
Did I say that out loud?	Debbi Kerr, 38 Bankfield Terrace, Burley, Leeds LS4 2RE
Plokta, Vol 3, No 2	Steve Davies, 52 Westbourne Terrace, Reading, Berks RG30 2RP & Alison Scott, 42 Tower Hamlets Road, Walthamstow, London E17 4RH
Snufkin's Bum 3	Maureen Kincaid Speller, 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ
Squib 3	Victor Gonzalez, 905 N.E. 45th Street, #106, Seattle, WA, 98105, USA
Standing in the Shadows	Simon Ounsley, 25 Park Villa Court, Leeds, LS8 1Eb
The Strange Delusions of a Drunken Fuckwit 3.5	Tobes Valois, Les Pepins, Ruelle A Pierre, St Lawrence, Jersey JE3 1JF
The Wrong Leggings	Lilian Edwards, 39 Viewforth, Edinburgh EH10 4JE

## All In A Good Cause?

by Simon Lake

*'I hate charity. I spend my time being charitable simply because I'm too weak to stand up for justice.'* Jacques Brel

There are some things that can bother you for ages before you can put your finger on what the problem is. It's like an itch waiting to be scratched. Then suddenly a random thought or event can put everything into place. That moment of clarity can be quite liberating.

For me it was one of those early morning quiz shows that endlessly fill the schedules of daytime television. I needed something unchallenging as a background to my breakfast and since the alternative seemed to be either Simon Mayo or Chris Evans on the radio, this seemed the best bet. Anyway I found myself imagining for a moment what it would be like if I was actually appearing as a contestant on one of these shows. That moment when the host introduces you by running through a few casual background details. Your age. Where you live. What job you do.

*What job you do.*

That's when it struck me.

For over five years I'd had a routine office job, processing VAT forms. Currently I was employed on a casual basis as a telephone fundraiser for the overseas development charity Actionaid. It's not hard to gauge an audience's reaction. As an employee of the VAT you'd expect a cool silence and no doubt the odd playful barb from the host. Charity work is different though. That's more likely to get you a spontaneous round of applause. No prompting necessary.

But wait a minute, I thought - shouldn't it be the other way round. Well, maybe that was going too far. Or was it?

It certainly set me thinking.

Perhaps at this point it's worth painting in a few background details. I can spare you the horror of five years spent working for the civil service. Forms were processed. Cheques were verified. Paperwork progressed from A to B. Nothing much changed. It was routine. Monotonous. Just another job.

The telephone work was different though. I applied on a whim. Casual work suits me at the moment because I have outside interests in music and writing that demand a fair portion of my time. A casual job offers a regular wage, but with the flexibility to allow me to concentrate on other things when I need to. I had no telephone experience, but I sensed it was a job I could do easily enough. The work is varied. Actionaid have a large telephone team, set up initially just to contact their own supporters, but now doing client work for an ever growing range of other large and small charities.

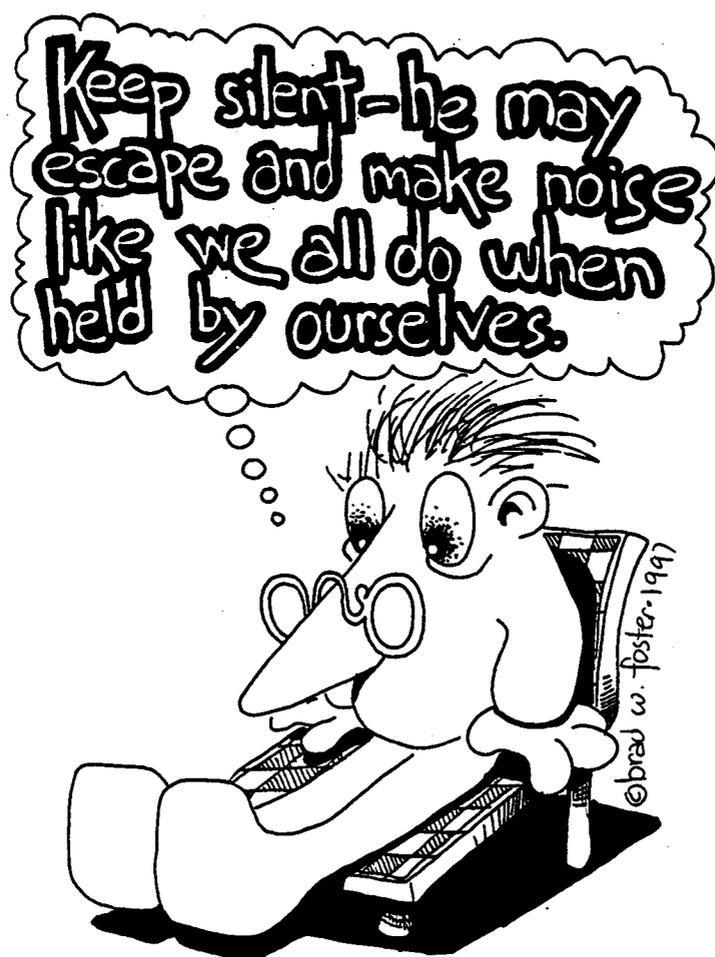
It's a great place to work. Sure the pay's nothing to write home about, but the people that work there are really friendly. The casual nature of the work tends to attract a fair number of students, eager to supplement meagre grants. Then there are people who've given up high profile commercial jobs to something more rewarding. Add to that a fair smattering of musicians, writers, DJs and various other creative types and you have the kind of cross-section you just wouldn't find in an ordinary office environment.

So, what's the problem? Well I guess I've always been suspicious of charities. That feeling that often they're simply an excuse to do work that really the government should be doing. The fact that, like the lottery, they tend to be funded by the poorest people. A fairer tax system might actually make the rich pay their share.

Sure, not all charities are the same. I've been a member of Greenpeace for nearly ten years now. I support them because they *are* pro-active. They don't just pour money into places, they campaign to get things changed. In fact they campaign to the extent that they're not even officially classed as a charity.

It's the same with a number of the charities we've worked for. Campaigns for groups like Amnesty and Radar - who work tirelessly for the rights of the disabled - can be very rewarding. Even among the more established charities there's more advocacy work being done these days, more campaigning. But at heart the majority are still there to paper over huge cracks in government social policy. Offering the poor and disadvantaged things that should be theirs by right.

As I said earlier charities tend to be funded by the poorer parts of society. Pensioners giving a fiver here and there when they can (or sometimes can't) afford it. Office workers giving a few pounds every month from a meagre wage packet. I speak to plenty of friendly people. Sometime you can get caught in long conversations with lonely people who perhaps haven't spoken to anyone for days. But more often now people feel they're being overwhelmed by requests from charities. There's certainly no honour in the work that I can see. It often strikes me as little better than selling double glazing. Still, I enjoy the job. It's the best work environment I've ever found. If I had more of a conscience I'd probably be doing something else. But I've come to the conclusion that I don't really care. I just do the job because it suits me. Which is fine, I suppose. If I thought I was doing something honourable or worthy that would probably be more worrying. Let's face it, putting money in a tin or filling out a standing order form's easy. Getting off your backside and doing something about this crummy excuse for a government takes a bit more effort. In the meantime collecting taxes may not be up there with being a nurse or a fireman, but it seems an honourable enough profession to me.



## Prologue : The Gig

The Pecadilloes, Bristol Fleece & Firkin, Tuesday 30 September 1997

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Review by Nick Walters

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Pecadilloes, it should be spelt, according to my trusty dictionary. It means "petty sin or trifling fault." Perhaps in spelling the word incorrectly the band are milking it for all its ironic worth. I think so. Chatting to them before the gig, they seemed intelligent (certainly enough to spell!) switched-on guys who knew exactly what they were doing. They hate crane flies and spiders, are indifferent to The Fall (we can't all be perfect) and the keyboard player is articulate about his love of 'nineties media SF and has even had a close encounter with a large, flying something. Their influences, they said, were diverse. They did not describe their music, and it must be said that I was not expecting anything more than indie competence. Well, it's nice to have your expectations blown out of the water sometimes, and the Pecadilloes certainly did that.

The mood they conveyed was sci-fi stark, Joy Division-esque, like a moonscape - quite brutal at times, leavened by moments of close harmony and angelic singing. Songs started one way and mutated into something else. Synth riffs and growling bass dominated. The bass player (Elliot Walsh) and the guitarist (Nick Mailing) shared vocals, both tall and skinny and pretty, the bassist sporting a nice line in eye-shadow, tastefully applied, avoiding the Robert Smith "panda eye" effect which can result from over-enthusiastic kohl daubing. They play extremely well, sometimes bending forehead to floor to thrash fuck out of their instruments, other times coaxing quirky noodlings from them. The keys player remained invisible behind the rack of synths set up at the side of the stage. I couldn't see the drummer - only the bass drum, pounding away like Yog-Sothoth's heartbeat.

The music? Bloody hell, how can I describe it? Spiky guitar, quite amazingly deep bass drum, melodic bass runs... difficult, isn't it, to convey live music in mere words! Perhaps the only way to do it is to compare with what is already out there. So: Radiohead meets the Manics, with a bit of Pulp thrown in - but that's not quite right. You have to go a little further back for a valid parallel, and what the Pecadilloes' music it reminded me of was, I am unashamed to say, prog rock. Not the ersatz overblown bollocks of Yes and Genesis - but the true, innovative, wiry, almost punkoid prog of King Crimson. Yes, I know how hated KC are but their critics have probably never heard their really good stuff, which is as far removed from Pink Floyd as the Butthole Surfers are from Boyzone. Anyway, that's what the Pecadilloes reminded me of, with a 90's spin of sinister synths, and grunge overtones to some of the bass-guitar freakouts. What impressed me about this band was the way they were not fettered by the need to be "indie" or "britpop" or fit ANY category. They really soared, creatively and musically, I can't remember any of the song titles, but they're probably all on their "Initial Transmission" EP which came out in October on Fine Art records.

I was impressed - can't you tell? - and I'm rarely impressed by bands I have never seen or even heard of before. The Pecadilloes are an excellent new band who deserve your support.

Go and buy their EP or go and see them live - you won't be disappointed.

## Interview Madness and Other Peccadilloes

by Christina Lake

### **Part 1 Thinking up the questions**

Let's do an interview, I thought. Why? Not because I particularly cared about the band. Not because I think the readers of *Balloons Over Bristol* are desperate for details about the rock n'roll lifestyle. Just in the hope that something bizarre and weird will happen. Isn't that what life's for? Maybe next time it'll be a cosy chat with Steve Baxter about his space operas.

But, then again, The Peadilloes sounded like the right sort of band to talk to. I liked their EP (EP? Yes, they call it that. I thought the word EP went out a couple of decades back. But then again, you can't call a CD four track a 12 inch, can you?) I liked the quotes in our press pack:

"an uncategorisably, irresistibly poppy, twin vocal attack collision of dEUS, Supergrass, Prodigy, James Hall, smoochy soul and Fifties sci-fi soundtracks" - Melody Maker

So, I took Tim's CD walkman and the EP down the Thursday night pub meeting and polled the Bristol SF group for ideas of what to ask this bunch of school leavers from Bedford on the fast track to the rock 'n roll hall of oblivion, via our fanzine. Not that I was convinced that the interview would ever come off. Maybe I'd bottle out. Maybe the band wouldn't show. Maybe I'd be too embarrassed by the questions to say anything.

The inspiration of a few pints and a bit of groovy music didn't amount to much in the end. We had :

Do you have van? (They're from Bedford. Gettit?)

What's your favourite Fall album?

Do you see yourselves as a Ballard or Dick kind of band?

Ween the Mollusc (Not a question, just a recommendation from Martin)

When are you going to split up?

What do you think of incidental music in films?

What's your favourite religion?

Where are you staying?

More synths, less guitars (Again, not a question, but a piece of advice).

Armed with a list so inspiring, I decided I needed a bit more moral support. So, I conned my brother Simon and Nick Waters into coming with me.

### **Part 2 The Interviews**

We meet up half an hour in advance in the pub to plan our strategy. A swift pint of beer, and it all seems to be working. Working too well, in fact. We add a few more questions, then cross the road to the Fleece, a big warehouse of a pub, and one of Bristol's better small music venues. But at six in the evening, it's more like back stage at the school play. Bits of music kit all over the floor, people milling around, fixing things, trying out speakers, carrying in black boxes. "We're looking for Nick and Elliot," I say with beer inspired confidence. "Another one," says a dark-haired chap with a cassette recorder. It turns out he's also there to interview the Peadilloes. "I bet you're more important than me," he adds inaccurately. There are two guys with him, and it takes me a moment to twig that they're not aspiring journalists too, but our Peadilistoes, Nick and Elliot in person.

We all sit down at one of the wooden tables. Nick and Elliot look horribly young. Nick is wearing an absurd woolly hat with a snowman on it. Both are drinking orange juice. So

much for the hints in their press cuttings that they'd be mainlining drugs. The other interviewer, Gareth, produces his fanzine. I scabble round in my bag to do the same, but as I will later discover, I've left it behind on the kitchen table. The boys seem to like Gareth's fanzine - Kitsch - but mainly for the chocolate on the cover. The layout looks predictably punk, a cut-out style aiming for impact and affect. "Shall we do the interview together?" suggests Gareth. "Sure," I say. So, we set Nick's dictaphone down on the table next to Gareth's cassette player and mike, feeling very much like amateurs.

Gareth was probably soon regretting letting us (or specifically) me in on the interview. At the time I had a ball. The beer had done it's job, and I was just cruising on alcohol and adrenaline. But, playing back the tapes, I hear myself there, having a good time, talking and laughing, sounding like one of those cockney presenters they dig up for an afternoon Channel 5 show on popular culture. Convinced I'm as important as the band.

**Gareth:** Are you the first band to spring from Bedford then?

**Nick :** Yeah, I think we are. There's always been plenty of good bands in Bedford. And every band has about one good player and the rest are losers. If all the good musicians got together, there'd be some really good bands in Bedford.

**Gareth:** So why are you the support act on this tour? The music press are always praising you. Probably when your record comes out, you're going to be outstripping Lo Fidelity All Stars.

**Elliot:** It means you can get away with people not turning up. If they're not turning up it's the headline band's fault.

**Christina:** Are you into the rock and roll lifestyle now? How long have you been on the road?

**Elliot:** Only a week so far. But we've been touring since last November. On and off. We've either been in the studio or on the road.

**Christina:** And what does it do to your life? Improves it I hope.

**Elliot:** Shortens it, I think.

**Gareth:** Any particular incidents that have occurred so far?

**Elliot:** Last week, the gigs were really good. We were really pleased with the shows. But everything else, the other fourteen and a half hours we were awake, there were lots of disasters going down. Last week on Saturday we were driving back to Bedford, and we pulled off at the motorway at the service station, and realised our brakes had failed in our bus.

**Christina:** Is it a Bedford van? That was actually one of the questions our group wanted to ask.

**Elliot:** Our driver Donny was hanging on the handbrake, trying to get us to stop. We had to drive all the way back from Newport Pagnell to Bedford with no brakes. And our last tour manager did his best to get himself killed. We were in Manchester. We went back to the bar at the hotel, some bloke came up, starting to talk to us, buying us drink after drink with this golden American Express card. About half four in the morning, he went to the toilet and left his card on the table. We looked at it, and it was a completely different name to what his was. Our manager was so pissed, he was hanging on the balcony, going "I'm going to

fucking kill the bloke!" The four of us had to jump in and save him.

**Christina:** Does the fact that you're drinking orange juice now, mean you go on stage sober, or do you prefer to be out of your head on something?

**Nick:** You may have a better time if you're out of it. But you certainly won't be a better band.

**Christina:** I've just been reading this book about Nick Cave, and one of his concerns was that if he cleaned up on drugs he wouldn't be able to perform any more.

**Nick:** A lot of musicians who've gone through the hell of drug addiction say that when they come out the other side, for a long while, they're certainly not as prolific a writer as they were when they were going through it.

**Christina:** But maybe their performances are a bit more consistent!

**Nick:** Yeah, it's consistency. You can be off your head on the same thing two nights and it's great the first night and crap the next.

**Elliot:** There's no point getting off your face before you go on, you'll just be crap. You might as well wait till afterwards.

**Christina:** Particularly if you're the support band.

**Elliot:** You only have to wait half an hour. Then you can get hammered afterwards.

**Christina:** And you must have a huge adrenaline rush after you played.

**Nick:** It's more you're just knackered really. You sit there and stare at the

floor for twenty minutes. Get your breath back.

**Gareth:** How did your sound come about? It's not the sort of thing that bands tend to go for immediately. You been listening to Sparks records or something?

**Nick:** The people in the band have always been in to different styles of music. When we first got together we had nothing in common musically. Ian was really into dance music, and I got to know him about nine months before he joined the band, and I just suddenly became really interested in that form of music. I'd never really shown much interest in it before. It was another completely different avenue we could go down as a band. We really started the band as an experiment, to play in a band the music we really wanted to make as opposed to following a trend.

**Gareth:** Has every single one of you got a completely different taste?

**Nick:** Not now. We've all grown to like each other's music. But at the time, Ian was into dance, hip hop, club stuff. Elliot was into all these weird American acid bands I'd never heard of. Our drummer was into dub and reggae, and I was into all sorts of stuff I shouldn't be listening to at 19 years old.

**Christina:** Can we ask our Fall question here? What's your favourite Fall album? I have two Fall fans here with me who want to know if you're into The Fall.

**Elliot:** No.

**Nick:** They're one of those bands I heard a couple of records by, and never took much notice. I probably heard the bad records first.

**Christina:** I think the problem is they've done so much. Where to start?

**Nick:** Yeah. If you don't like the first couple of things you hear, you know it's going to be a long search.

**Nick W. :** It's a pity no-one thinks that way about Oasis.

**Gareth:** Do you find you're pretty experimental compared to a lot of bands around?

**Nick:** Yeah

**Gareth:** And does that make it harder to succeed when there's so many bog-standard guitar bands?

**Elliot:** I think it's harder to focus. Early on, we had this problem. We were making this noise, but we didn't know how or why. It took us a long while to understand ourselves as a band, and what bands work, as you can only focus on some of these things when you know exactly what it is you're looking at.

**Gareth:** How did it start off? Crazy, improvised jazz?

**Nick:** First of all we started trying to pigeon hole ourselves. We started thinking, no, we don't sound like these. That bit sounds like this, but this doesn't. In the end, you just learn. We learned that all the bands we're into, that we used as an influence, were one-off bands, didn't sound like anybody else, and we realised suddenly, we were doing the same thing, and that's the pigeon hole we belonged to. All the bands that don't sound like anybody else, but nothing like themselves, and we realised that those bands can't be linked together, that's what linked them together. So once we understood that there were no boundaries or small

bracket round what the band could do, it's very easy then.

**Elliot :** Jeez that's a long answer!

**Christina:** Are either of you interested in science fiction?

**Elliot:** No. But Ian our keyboard player is a massive fan.

**Christina:** Can we have a one on one with Ian then?

(They call over to Ian who's trying to get in a quiet game of pinball).

**Nick:** You'll have to excuse his hat.

**Christina:** What about *your* hat then. What is the significance of the snowmen?

**Nick:** It's about the only thing I've got to keep the cold off. It'll be winter soon.

**Christina:** Bristol's not that cold you know.

**Nick W. :** What are you hiding?

**Christina:** Yes, what's underneath it? (He takes it off.) Oh, not a lot.

**Gareth:** Briefly then describe your sound. Crazy and fucked up?

**Elliot:** Yeah, that'll do. Ah, it's our favourite question, next to what's your favourite colour.

**Christina:** We nearly had that on our list actually. I don't know if we've got any good question.

**Nick W :** Why don't you ask that one.

**Christina:** We have the "Are you going to play Candle in the Wind" question.

We're *hoping* the answer's going to be a no.

**Gareth:** Or do you have any guitar jive cover versions of that?

**Elliot:** Elton John's done enough to ruin it. He doesn't need any help there.

**Nick W.:** Crane flies

**Christina:** Oh crane flies, yeah. What do you think of crane flies?

**Elliot:** Whaaat?

**Christina:** Crane flies. You know, daddy longlegs.

**Elliot:** Fucking annoying.

**Christina:** Would you kill them?

**Elliot:** Yeaheh.

**Nick W.** grabs dictaphone to sum up. "Crane flies fucking annoying. They would kill them."

**Gareth:** What's your fanzine called?

**Christina:** Balloons Over Bristol. It should be renamed Fuck Off Spiders.

**Nick W.:** So, you're not Buddhists then?

**Nick:** No, no.

**Nick W.:** Nor are we. United in our hatred of arachnids and insects.

**Christina:** Actually I quite like them.

**Elliot:** We've got one minute.

**Christina (to Gareth):** You'd better ask your serious question.

**Gareth:** My light-hearted but serious question. How many groupies come into the dressing room after every gig?

**Elliot:** None.

**All :** None!!

**Elliot:** After we've been on stage, you wouldn't come anywhere near us. Sweat pouring everywhere.

**Christina:** Yeah, but that's what groupies are into, isn't it?

**Gareth:** They lick the sweat off your brow, don't they?

**Christina:** See, you're not decadent enough yet. *(To Gareth)* I think I'll interview you next.

**Gareth:** You've got to get your sci-fi special with Ian

**Christina:** I want to ask about your fanzine.

I then do try to interview Gareth, but the tape runs out. He says he sells his zine via adverts in other music zines, and on the net. Naturally it still runs at a loss. Do I wax lyrical about the joys of a trading and feedback culture? Who's to say.

For the interview with Ian we go out into a corridor leading to the dressing rooms as the pub is getting noisy because of the sound checks. We pull up some stools and soak in the ambience of bare stone walls, and peeling posters from year ago gigs.

It doesn't come as too much of a surprise to discover what Ian means by being into science fiction, but it does rather scupper the questions on Ballard on Dick, leaving me casting around as to where I can take this interview (I've

edited out the pauses!) I start, in any case, with the obvious :

**Christina:** What sort of science fiction are you in to?

**Ian:** I'm an X-Files fan. A proper X Files fan. I was in to it from day one when they first showed it in '93. Then it got all popular last year, didn't it?

**Christina:** Yeah. It got very trendy in the sense that absolutely everybody could place X Files as a product.

**Nick W.:** A bit like Oasis.

**Ian :** Yeah. But I'm what I call a proper X Files fan.

**Christina:** So, you're into the "Weird stuff is out there" sort of SF.

**Ian :** I liked the early 80s sort of sci-fi films. Like *Bladerunner*. *Alien*. All of them.

**Christina:** Do you ever read any science fiction books?

**Ian:** I used to. When I was younger. I sometimes read, like, manga stuff. But I like watching films. It's easier. If it's UFO based...

**Christina:** What about *Star Trek*/*Babylon 5* and that type of thing?

**Ian:** No. I don't actually like *Babylon 5* or *Star Trek*. It has to have some kind of relevance. It has to be believable. If it's just downright, you know what I mean, like *Star Trek*, it does nothing for me.

**Christina:** Do you think people feel SF has any relevance to life these days? Or is it just a trendy fashion accessory.

**Ian:** I think it's just trendy at the moment.

**Nick W.:** As we get near the Millennium.

**Ian:** Everyone going round like Nostradamus, saying the world's going to end.

**Christina:** Kind of the paranoid stuff.

**Ian:** I've been into this sort of stuff since I was really young. A film I saw the other year that I thought was really good was *Fire in the Sky*.

**Nick W.:** It's about an alien abduction. Some guy gets abducted, nobody believes him

**Ian:** I actually think that's my mission in life.

**Christina:** What, to be abducted?

**Ian:** Yes. And I've seen a UFO.

**Christina:** Have you?

**Ian:** Yeah. A huge one.

**Christina:** Where?

**Ian:** In my home town, actually.

**Christina:** Youfoes over Bedford. I like it.

**Ian:** There's this place down the road. An RAF base. It might be like the Aurora project. It was about two years ago. I was walking home with my girl friend at the time. Down this road, and it was like huge, big, just hovering. About fifty feet up. And there was this old geezer standing in the road, and I said, "What's that?" "Aw, I don't know," he says. "It's been there about twenty minutes."

*All laugh.*

**Christina:** What's he waiting for? Like it's a bus.

**Ian:** I don't know. But there's the three of us looking up, like at midnight.

**Christina:** Going take me, take me, take me.

**Ian:** It had like these searchlights coming out the front. Really odd. And then, I thought it was like an airship. It was making no noise. I thought it'd be something like that. Until it started moving. As they do.

**Christina:** And then did it just sort of zap out of existence?

**Ian:** It just went. I just walked off, thinking nothing of it.

**Christina:** So it didn't change your life?

**Ian:** No. Because I believed anyway. It wasn't actually surprising to me. My girl friend, she was like waaaaaww!

**Christina:** Fuck me!

**Ian:** Exactly. At which point I would like to say this about aliens, that I think it's extremely naive and gullible of us, and ignorant, as humans, to think we're the only living beings in the universe.

**Christina:** I suppose we're just waiting for some of them to talk to us plainly.

**Ian:** You know Independence Day. If something like that happened, then all the sceptics would go, waaah, sorry, we were wrong.

**Christina:** But what would it do to everybody?

**Ian:** I don't know. I'd love that to happen.

**Christina:** It would be really interesting to live through.

**Nick W.:** *If* you did.

**Christina:** It would depend what kind of aliens they were really.

**Nick W.:** It'd probably be more like Mars Attacks.

**Ian:** Did you read about Steven Hawkings - the wheel chair guy. Did you read what he said about aliens?

**Christina:** What did he say?

**Ian:** He said, like, obviously if aliens were coming millions of light years to us, they'd have to be at a real advanced level. He said it probably wouldn't be as dramatic as in Independence Day. But they would probably come in and fuck us up because, it's sort of nature, isn't it. Like dominant species.

**Christina:** Unless they're so alien they don't really operate by our rules. Which I suppose goes back to the kind of aliens that aren't telling us they're here. There's just little things you don't understand to clue you in.

**Ian:** Yeah.

**Christina:** So, maybe in our life times!

**Ian:** I hope so.

**Christina:** Any more questions, guys? Okay, thanks very much, and we'll look forward to seeing you play tonight.

## Epilogue

Pecadilloes/ Lo-Fidelity Allstars

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Review by Simon Lake

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To be honest I hadn't been feeling that well all day. I had a sore throat and felt a bit rough from not having slept properly the night before. Still, a free gig is a free gig. Or almost free as two of the three of us were on the guest list, care of those lovely people at Revolution. Anyway, I'd tried drinking my way through it, but that just seemed to be making things worse. Perhaps music was the real tonic I needed.

First on were the Pecadilloes and they were great. They opened with two short numbers before really kicking into top gear. Here are a band that play like it really matters. The guitars shriek as if they're about to explode under the pressure. Meanwhile keyboards fill out the sound, sometimes angular in the way Magazine used to use them, sometimes bubbling in an analogue style favoured on dance records, but in this context providing another layer of menace underneath the guitars.

Both the guitarist and bassist sing, with very different vocal styles, emphasising the versatility of the Pecadilloes sound. Often I was reminded of Nirvana in their more intense, lo-fi moments and the sound in general was a neat blend of US grunge and '80s new wave. The only downside in a compelling set was a murky vocal mix which made it impossible to tell what they were singing about. Something scary I'm sure.

There's a moment during the Lo-Fidelity Allstars' penultimate song when I decide I really love this group. The rhythm track's been pounding away for several minutes. A bass line underpins it. There's an insistent lead riff scratching through my head. The whole crowd is dancing. Then they drop in a gorgeous string riff and my heart instantly melts. It's a great moment. (Chris later suggests it went a bit 'Ultravox' at that point which rather dampens my enthusiasm, but still). Overall the Lo-fis seem to have the balance right. No dull brit-pop nonsense here. Centre stage where you might expect the guitarist to be is a guy manipulating breakbeats from a turntable. Behind him a conventional drummer beefs up the rhythmic assault. There's also bass and keyboards to fill out what is at heart a dancey, filmic sound. If I had any reservations, then it's with the singer, perched to the left of the stage with his shades on, his pose every inch that of a wannabe rock star. In places the dubbed-up vocals added colour, but sometimes I wished he'd shut up and let the music have some space.

It was a short set, potent in places. Not a million miles from the sound of the last Primal Scream lp and not a bad place to be.

## TIME FOR BYE-BYES?

Ken Skin, 22.10.1997.

IT'S KISMET. HAVING BEEN INSPIRED TO WRITE THIS A WEEK OR SO AGO, TONIGHT I HEAR A RADIO NEWS ITEM. A MOTHER IS SERIOUSLY CONTEMPLATING NAMING HER BABY DAUGHTER "LAA-LAA". IF SHE DOES - WELL, POOR KID! YES, TELETUBBY MANIA STRIKES AGAIN...

TELETUBBIES. FOUR CUTE LITTLE CRITTERS PLAYING IN THEIR HAPPY, FAR-OFF LAND. THE PREDILECTION OF VERY YOUNG CHILDREN (WHO AT LEAST HAVE A DECENT EXCUSE) AND E'D-UP, OH-SO-FASHIONABLE STUDENTS ALL OVER BRITAIN. TINKY WINKY, DIPSY, LAA-LAA AND PO... OR MORE ACCURATELY, TYRANNY, DIRECTIONLESSNESS, LASSITUDE, AND PERIL.

HYPERBOLIC? MOI? BEFORE I GO ON, CONSIDER THIS, FROM T.H. WHITE'S SUPERB "THE SWORD IN THE STONE":-

"THERE WAS A VOICE...WHICH SEEMED TO BE GIVING DIRECTIONS.... IT WAS A FRUITY VOICE, BUT IT SEEMED TO BE SOMEHOW IMPERSONAL - AS IF ITS CHARM WERE AN ACCOMPLISHMENT THAT HAD BEEN PRACTISED, LIKE A CIRCUS TRICK. IT WAS DEAD."

Now, consider :-

"TIME FOR TELETUBBIES ... TIME FOR TUBBY CUSTARD... TIME FOR TUBBY BYE-BYES!"

FRUITY. IMPERSONAL. DEAD. AND THE TELETUBBIES OBEY - WITHOUT QUESTION. THEY MIGHT BE PLAYING WITH FLUFFY LITTLE BUNNIES, NOT VERY HUNGRY BECAUSE THEY'VE ALREADY HAD SOME TUBBY TOAST, OR SO WIDE-AWAKE IT HURTS, BUT THEY'LL HURRY WITH INANE, UNQUESTIONING HAPPINESS TO COMPLY. GOOD SOLDIERS WHO NEVER QUESTION ORDERS, JUST LIKE THE ANTS IN WHITE'S BOOK, SLAVES TO THEIR CONTROLLING VOICE. IT ISN'T JUST WHITE, EITHER. SEE IF YOU REMEMBER THIS ONE...

"WHERE AM I?" - "IN THE VILLAGE!" A VILLAGE FULL OF HAPPY, SMILING, COMPLIANT ZOMBIES, DRESSED IN BRIGHT, TUBBY-LIKE PRIMARY COLOURS AND PASTEL SHADES. ALL PLAYING EMPTY-SPIRITED GAMES - HUMAN CHESS, "SAILING" ON THE STONE BOAT, SO LIKE THE TUBBIES' AIMLESS DASHING ROUND AND GROUP HUGS - IN SURROUNDINGS OF VAPIDLY PRETTY GRASS, TREES AND FLOWERS. AND WHILE WE'RE ON "THE PRISONER", WHAT ABOUT THE TUBBIES' MYSTERIOUS BABY IN THE SUN? SMILING KNOWINGLY, OCCASIONALLY GOGGLING THOUGHTFULLY, BUT ALWAYS WATCHING ... JUST GIVE HIM A PAIR OF HORN-RIMMED GLASSES, AND HE'D BE THE SPIT OF THAT SINISTER, BALD-HEADED SUPERVISOR, SNUG IN HIS SURVEILLANCE LAIR IN AN IMPREGNABLE PART OF THE VILLAGE. NOT FORGETTING, ONCE MORE, CONDESCENDING, BLAND AND COMMANDING TANNY VOICES. TELETUBBIES AND VILLAGERS: ALLOWED EVERYTHING EXCEPT FREEDOM. SWAP PO'S SCOOTER FOR A PENNY-FARTHING, AND THERE YOU HAVE IT. MAYBE IT'S TIME FOR A NEW TUBBY: PLAIN BLACK WITH WHITE PIPING, A PERMANENT SCOWL, A QUESTION-MARK SHAPED ANTENNA AND A SILLY NAME - "SIXA" OR "PADDYWACK", PERHAPS.

BUT THERE'S STILL MORE. I'VE TOUCHED, INDIRECTLY, ON TUBBIES AS HIVE-MIND: AN UNQUESTIONING, UNREACHABLE GESTALT. WHICH MEANS THEY HAVE AT LEAST ONE OTHER CLOSE PARALLEL IN GENRE FICTION.

THEY CROSSED SPACE TO CONQUER HUMANITY - TO MAKE US JUST LIKE THEM. BLANK, IMPERSONAL FACES WITH FIXED, RICTUS-LIKE FEATURES. ANTENNAE-LIKE PROJECTIONS JUTTING FROM THEIR HEADS. CREATURES OF IMMENSE POWER, BUT NOW ABLE ONLY TO PRODUCE MERE SEMBLANCES OF DIMLY-REMEMBERED EMOTION. ONCE JUST LIKE US, BUT NOW SOULLESS, TRAGIC, BUT TERRIFYING MONSTERS. CYBERMEN.

AS "DOCTOR WHO" SHOWED US, THEY HATCHED SCHEME AFTER SCHEME TO STEAL OUR CHERISHED INDIVIDUALITY: AND AGAIN AND AGAIN, THEY FAILED. BUT CYBERMEN ARE NOTHING IF NOT INTELLIGENT. THEY LEARN FROM THEIR MISTAKES.

SO, AFTER COUNTLESS FAILED ATTEMPTS AT CONQUEST - VIA INVASION, TIME-TRAVEL, WEATHER CONTROL, YOU NAME IT - THEY'VE FINALLY HIT ON THE SUBTLE APPROACH. INFILTRATE HUMAN SOCIETY, AND TO FURTHER INCREASE THE ODDS IN YOUR FAVOUR, INFILTRATE IT AS SOMETHING LOVEABLE. SOMETHING NICE. PRESENT YOURSELF WITH A

PALATABLE SUGAR COATING, SO THAT YOUNG CHILDREN (THE NEXT GENERATION, STILL VULNERABLE IN THEIR INNOCENCE), AND INTELLIGENT (PRESUMABLY) BUT ADDLED STUDENTS (THE BRAINS TO BUILD THE TOOLS FOR THAT NEXT GENERATION) WON'T HEAR A WORD AGAINST YOU, AND WATCH YOU RELIGIOUSLY EVERY MORNING.

THE TELETUBBIES ARE CYBERMEN. THEY'RE EVEN PART-MACHINE, FOR CRYING OUT LOUD (DON'T TELL ME YOU'VE GOT A VIDEO SCREEN BUILT INTO YOUR ABDOMEN). FOR NOW, THEY'RE PRETENDING FRIENDSHIP, BUT THE COUNTDOWN'S STARTED. TEN YEARS, MAYBE TWENTY... AND TELETUBBIES'LL GAIN HEIGHT. LOSE POT BELLIES. BECOME SQUARER-BUILT, STRONGER, HARsher. THEY'LL ALL RESPRAY THEMSELVES THAT SHINY, SILVER COLOUR THAT THE MOST RECENT NEW TUBBY SPORTS, AND ... WE WILL BE LIKE THEM. AND WE'LL BE SO COMPLACENT BY THEN, WE PROBABLY WON'T NOTICE - LET ALONE CARE.

HOWEVER, THERE IS HOPE. IF WE CAN ONLY FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE ... INFILTRATE THE "TELETUBBIES" PRODUCTION TEAM... WELL, IMAGINE THE CLOSING SCENE OF THE FINAL EPISODE:-

NARRATOR: GOODNESS ME, THAT IS A BIG HOLE THE TELETUBBIES ARE DIGGING... LOOK! THEY'VE FOUND SOMETHING!

TELETUBBIES: TUBBY TREASURE! TUBBY TREASURE!

(THEY ALL CLIMB INTO THE BIG HOLE THEY'VE DUG FOR THE NEXT CROP OF TUBBY TOMATOES, CROUCH DOWN EAGERLY, AND COME FACE-TO-FACE WITH A BIG HEAP OF ... GOLD...)

TELETUBBIES: ARGH! EEEK! UGH! (ETC... THEY ALL COLLAPSE AND DIE, SPURTING GREEN ICK.)

NARRATOR: OOPS! TIME FOR ... TUBBY-BYE-BYES!

SO REMEMBER, BOYS AND GIRLS, PROTECT YOUR INDIVIDUALITY: GUARD AND CHERISH FREEDOM; AND IF I CATCH YOU CHANGING YOUR NAME BY DEED - FOLL TO "TINKY WINKY", I'LL SHASH YERTEETH IN.

YOU KNOW IT MAKES SENSE.



## The Letters Pages

Edited by Pete Binfield

Well, Christina 'asked' me to do the letters page. Protestations that I was about to leave the country, for ever, and was far far too busy fell on deaf ears and all of a sudden I realised how much I really wanted to do it. The power of persuasion is alive and well I can tell you.

I'm afraid I really am too busy to devote too much time to the letters and so instead of splitting them up thematically I simply reproduce them with suitably sarcastic comments littered throughout.

From: Christina Lake, 12 Hatherley Road, Bishopston, Bristol, BS7 8QA

Dear Pete,

Here's the long promised loc (letter of comment; have you worked that one out yet?) *{yes - Ed}* on your editorial in the last issue. The story of your involvement in fandom is familiar; in fact, not unlike my own experiences. I first encountered fandom via the Warwick University SF Club, and certainly spent my first couple of years in fandom hanging out with a mixture of my ex-university friends and the people I met during my post-grad year in Glasgow. I didn't quite run a con, but easily could have done, if I'd stayed in Glasgow for more than a year. Anyone who turned up regularly at the weekly FOKT (Friends of Kilgore Trout) meetings tended to get co-opted on to the committee for Faircon, Albacon, or whichever con was currently in process. English fans did go to the Scottish cons (though mainly only if they were Eastercons) but the vast majority of the attendees were local people, who turned up with their friends, and never went to any other conventions. The Trout regulars were aware of a wider fandom outside their Scottish home. The cynical older generation of the group, embodied by Sandy Brown and Jimmy Robertson, put out bizarre fanzines in the persona of the Red Army Choir, but I'm not sure if I scored a copy at the time. Our main source of fanzines was the "Fake" Bob Shaw, who tended to lure people back to his flat after the meetings to watch videos of shuttle launches, and incidentally let us read any copies of fanzines left lying around the place. Fanzines were all right, as far as the group were concerned, providing they weren't "fannish fanzines". These were the abhorrent product of a cliquy in-group of people down in England and not to be trusted.

Well, the years went by and I started to do my own fanzine. I don't know if that's the essential difference between my experience and yours, or the fact that the next place I landed up in was Orpington, which was too close to London for a local group. So I started going up to London for the Tun (as it then was) or BSFA meetings, and inevitably met a greater cross-section of the various cliques of fandom than you would elsewhere (I became a Surrey Limpwrist, crashed at John and Eve Harvey's, joined an offshoot of a Cambridge fantasy discussion group, met all my female friends for a monthly piss-up on the spurious excuse that we'd started an all-women apa, and eventually even went to parties at the Pickersgills) I still hung out with my friends from Warwick and Glasgow at conventions, but increasingly became part of that once dreaded fannish fandom. At this point, I could burble on about continuity and tradition, but I suspect that I would only bore you *{too late - Ed}*. Fanzine fandom may be just another clique, but it is a very self-aware clique and so once you become part of it, your involvement becomes more political. You're not just 15 fans in one room trying to have the best fun possible with your mates. You're more likely to be the last fifteen at the bar, playing off each other, seeking that transcendent moment when everything seems funny, saving up lines for the con report or saying the sort of thing that might get you quoted by someone else, or just wanting to convince yourselves that you're having a better time than anyone else at the convention (this is what's known as desperate fun. In fact, you and your fifteen friends in the room party are probably having a much better time than we are in the bar, but you don't count because no-one else knows who the fuck you are, and you don't leave behind any mythology.) *{except of course, the myth that a*

*mythology is being created somewhere else, for us, by Fanzine writers furiously recording everything we do in the background - Ed}.*

But the point, if there is one, is that the fanzine sub-clique stands some chance of providing the continuity and connections that subsequent generations of university groups lack. You may say that it didn't do much to help you and Sue find out that a Bristol SF group existed, but that's partly because the Bristol SF group is very similar to the groups you describe. It's not a fannish group. On two occasions we've gone en masse to smallish conventions, and it's been terrific because we become a presence, hold good parties, and have a great time together. But mostly we just meet down the pub and those of us who do go to conventions regularly, tend to get absorbed into our greater peer groups, and disappear as an entity. All the same, we have managed to accrue members at conventions. One Eastercon we found Richard Hewison attempting to spell Bristol at the registration desk; another time at Novacon Steve Brewster did his best to avoid going out to dinner with us. Displays at Conspiracy brought us Dave Moor, shortly followed by Tim Goodrick, and of course, in the course of time, the incomparable Dalva. Pete Crump found us via the Internet. You found us via Neal Tringham (who to this day I still don't know. So it shows what fannish networking can do).

And how did I find the group? Through a notice in the local SF bookshop. Which of course is what you tried when you arrived. I was lucky. The group had been started only a couple of months before Peter-Fred and I arrived in Bristol, and the poster was still up. The first few meetings we went to were quite lively, full of local people, plus one person Jim, with a fair knowledge of the wider world of fandom (more comics fandom than mainstream, but with some crossover connections to my friends in Glasgow.) As the weeks went by, the attendance inevitably dwindled, till we were left with a hard core of Ian and Lorna (who clearly thought of it as their group), Jim, student Alan Gilbert (who remained for years our nominal university liaison) and long-haired hippy about town Justin. Over the years, I couldn't say the number of plans we've had to attract new members. We wrote to Venue and Robin Askew was going to come down the group to do an article. We did new posters for the SF shop. We set ourselves up as a real committee, with a programme. We did newsletters. We nearly ran a convention. We went down the Star Trek group looking for recruits *{obviously getting desperate at this point - Ed}*. We added ourselves to the library database of local groups. We put up posters round a one-day convention at the university. All in vain. The only people to turn up at the group and keep on turning up, were people already connected to fandom in some way, generally those trained up by university groups. Maybe we should put a poster in with the recruitment literature of the local hi-tech firms, or mail-shot universities for the addresses of departing members of their SF groups. I guess you and Sue could design a poster for the SF shop. But for the future, I reckon, the best move would be to set up a web page for the group. Until then, we'll have to rely on the fannish (in the widest sense) grapevine to let us know about new arrivals to Bristol, and hope that they're in to parties, barbecues, drinking, movies, weird music, and of course, writing for their local fanzine.

From: Janet Stevenson, Roan, Roweltown, Carlisle, CA6 6LX, 8th Sept 1997

Many thanks for Balloons over Bristol 11, dated 24th March 1997, received today with appended "Apologies to all those who receive this issue a month after it was produced" (?) to considerable confusion as I cannot imaging why Steve Brewster should want to send me a message of the "Doo Wah Diddy Diddy Dum Diddy Doo!" variety. Is it a competition? *{yes- Ed}* Do I have to guess the reason? *{yes- Ed}*

I find very few "hooks" in this issue but let's see what I can manage.

I like the imagery at the start of the editorial: "Writing this fanzine has finished it (the half baked theory about fandom) off with a nice brown glazed op and gravy" - Can't we have a vegetarian version, or a green one?

All these people with e-mails - I had a letter from a friend in Guildford today requesting my e-mail address? Hardly anybody I know has one so it is not worth getting one. *{Well, if you're not on, you're not in I'm afraid - Ed}*

Christina's comment about 4th July - "To everybody else it was a welcome day off work: to me it was a day when the postman didn't call" - struck a chord. Our postman did not call on Saturday. I presumed that nobody loved me but it turned out that he and his colleagues had been given the day off (with pay - a kind of unofficial Bank Holiday) at the last minute. Today I was just about snowed under with mail when he eventually turned up - late.

Seeking the sense of wonder in Boston and then almost being taken aback when it is found, strange.

I like the idea of Christina having an American alter ego and her distinction between "real life" and her "year out". Our ex-neighbour, Annette, worked, in London, for an Australian firm *{presumably on her punctuation - Ed}*. If you worked there for years they would give you a one-off paid sabbatical to go and find yourself for a year or go and look for yourself or go and look for America or whatever.

We had a couple of Australian cyclists staying with us once, bonding on mutual incomprehension of the American way of life.

I like the computer generated cow cartoons.

The sub text to the Miss Lee letters, the comments, caused amusement. Good idea to place them there. *{My finest hour - Ed}*

"The lost Janet Stevenson letter" causes personal confusion - am I lost as well? If I got two locs in BoverV 11 then should I really send two locs for 12? *{If he's him and she's her, and you're him, then am I still me? Who's eating this chicken? - Ed}*

Update on the dogs. Our neighbours continue to have one big and one fairly big dog. Vic has now married anew so Obie and Jake, who have by now learned to ignore us, are landed with "little sister" Bonny, who barks, probably to remind herself of her own existence. Our typical greeting runs, "Hello Jake! Hello Obie" Shut up Bonny!"

I have now acquired green A4 paper *{True - Ed}* - DON'T LOSE IT! *{Hmm - Ed}*

From: Ken Lake, 46 Chestnut Avenue, Buckhurst Hill, Essex, IG9 6EW (kenlake226@aol.com), Sept 5th, 1997

Dear in loco parentis BoverB *{this is patently untrue, I am not in a train I am at my desk - Ed}*

Commiserations to Christina for encountering the worst of the pleasant city of Boston and for surviving it without vomiting. If most of the US (intriguing name, meaning "useless" in Britspeak) wasn't so hideous it'd be SAD.

Mind, I specifically exclude Boston (without the annual xenophobic demonstration), the vieux Carre of New Orleans, the streets of midtown Manhattan (and a few outlying areas like Brighton Beach and the Cloisters), the squares of Savannah GA, the old town of Charleston SC (but not the "black" gentleman who stabbed me on a bus), and the area around Lafayette LA (well, the Cajun food and music anyway); parts of San Francisco CA might sneak in too. Here endeth the digest of my five-month US tour: nothing came close to the joys of Quebec, to reach which (by train from New York on Amtrak Pass) I had to endure the lunacy of Canadian Customs officials.

Readercon? We owe Christina a debt of gratitude for suffering on our behalf the disorganisation, noise filled bar, ice cold restaurant, lousy service - my how it brings back memories. Wine? A US millionaire friend hesitantly suggested it in a pleasant Manhattan Italian restaurant: I ended up with a small glass of Chablis while he and his wife daintily sipped ice-clogged Coca-Cola, regarding me as some wierd alien. Unicorns are more real than everyday life in America.

The cod movie script fills a few pages: a pity as I was enjoying Christina (and it's pleut). Farewell Miss Lee, welcome Janet Stevenson (well, her p30 footnote, anyway); the parody letter makes a suitable ending to a sad tale. Nextish "My New Neighbours And How They Kill Cows At A Glance"? I Caught the garden-chair balloonists's tale in The Times: luvly! Oh, and thanks for the medical tips: I'd never have known.

I like the thematic loccol - I get my name in print five times, *{I'm afraid you're out of luck, I'm too busy this time, but: Ken Lake, Ken Lake, Ken Lake, Ken Lake, Ken Lake}* albeit with an outdated address: since April 1997 I've been comfortably ensconced with Gillian (Taylor, now Lake) and her near-4-year-old daughter Victoria in the Essex fringe. Everyone should be so lucky!

From: **William Bains, 101 Beechwood Ave, Melbourn, Royston, Herts, SG8 6BW,**  
william@wbains.u-net.com, 11th Sept 1997

Dear Pete and Sue,

You sent me a Balloons over Bristol a few weeks/months/years ago, didn't you? BoverB 11, it says here. I have been looking at it in my 'In' tray for a long time, thinking 'when the rush is over I'll get round to Loccing that'. This is why I get fanzines about once every 6 months, not once every 6 days like half your readers seem to.

Anyway, thanks. Probably by now Christina is back, but if she is wise she will 'forget' to take back the editorial reins and so you will still be the people to talk to. Write to. E-mail. Whatever.

Actually, I hate the idea of electronic fanac. I like to browse fanzine in stolen moments on trains, in queues, in conferences. I like printing the Loc out. (I liked typing them, clackety-clack, in the old days. I still have my Silver Reed in the garage, with a functional ribbon in it. But electronics is so much faster.) There is a physical pleasure in paper that electronics comes no-where near. No doubt techno-weenies and Americans disagree (although Mimosa is still reassuringly chunky cellulose, with a world-wide web appendage). To the shredder with them. *{funnily enough William's loc was far too long for me to bother retyping so I ran it through the scanner and OCR'd it (optical character recognition) into a file - so much more satisfying than retyping and with occasional amusing consequences - Ed}*

I saw a book recently which explained why the paperless office has resulted in more paper than ever before. It also addressed such problems as why, when automation makes work ever easier, we work ever longer hours, why the more antibiotics we introduce the more infectious diseases we get, and other anomalies of technology. Personally, I am convinced that God did not mean the Universe to contain intelligence, and is out to get us. But I digress.

Your theory about fandom is of course correct, and is mirrored in many other societies and theories thereof 'The invisible college' is a respectable sociological term for a network of people (originally academicians) who are not in one physical place but are linked by their contacts and their common modes of thought and communication. Such is fandom. People can be part of several different fandoms at once, and one of the most confusing things that can happen to you is to meet someone in one fandom and find that you share another with them. Thus I might go into a meeting where I am being a banker, and find myself face-to-face with someone who I know, and who knows me, from a

convention, or the local pub. This happens to me so often now that I just smile at anyone whose face I vaguely recognise and say 'hello', and try to work out why I recognise them later.

Music - the tastes of all your contributors in music seem so much at odds with mine that I cannot think of anything to say to them. It is like the radio DJs. The DJ on Q103 (Cambridge mainstream commercial station) recently had a 'bring your worst records in and smash them' slot on his show.

'Now, this one ... this one I am truly embarrassed to even mention. It is ... "I forget. Fugee by the Squeegies or Squeegie by the Fugees or whatever. "Just listen to this" He played the opening few bars, and then turned it off in disgust and smashed it over his microphone. It sounded just like half the other dross played on the radio to me. Formulaic, unimaginative, not very nice, but so what? I just don't get it.

I like the later romantic classical composers, anything from Berlioz to Vaughan Williams (especially the more meditative Vaughan Williams), and am developing a taste for earlier chamber and lute/guitar music. The similarities to the Squeegies/Fugees/ Bungles is minimal. (event heir definition of the notes is different. Did you know that 'A' today defined as 440 cycles, was about 410 in Shakespeare's day? Not many people know that.)

And I think Miss Lee has gone from transitorily amusing (first one) to sick (Instalments 2 thru 6) to frankly tedious.

So that writes off most of BoverB 11. Christina's experience of 4th of July was amazing. When we were in the US 4th of July did not seem to feature as such a huge occasion, but perhaps that was because we were in the liberal, international culture of Stanford and they felt a bit more restrained. We had a barbecue, of course, and days off and so on. But no fireworks. Halloween was a big deal - legalised begging by minors, which I hate - and thanksgiving, when foreigners like us were invited round to people's home to enjoy an enormous meal of what the early colonists would have eaten if they had had a Safeways to go to. That was great - like Christmas, but without the hassle of getting presents or having unwanted aunts littering the room.

It must be marvellous to be somewhere, especially somewhere foreign, with nothing specific to do, like jobs to go to or children to entertain or luggage to pack up to go home again. Long, long time since that happened to me or Jane. A long time. My word, what a.... . The last time we got even near, I suppose, was when we moved to Bath - I was a University lecturer, and so could take whatever hours I wanted off, we had no children, we could do things like go to the local SF group in Bristol of an evening just because we felt like it. But even then going to the next continent for a year just because we felt like it was out. Shame, really. (We did go to the US for 2 years, but we had a real job.)

The strangest experience we had in the US, returning to the 4th of July theme, was trying to convince the Americans to hold a Guy Fawkes party. 'Let me get this straight.' they said. 'You guys want to *celebrate a failed attempt* by this guy Guy to blow up your houses of parliament? And name it after someone who was not all that important in the plot' And you celebrate it by burning him in effigy, setting off fireworks and eating burnt sausages.' We nodded vigorously. 'And you want to do this 5 days after Halloween, and just before Thanksgiving.' We explained that Halloween was not 'real big back home', and we did not have Thanksgiving, because no-one knows when the Normans or Caesar's invading army first ate on British soil, or what they ate when they did so. 'And you want fireworks.' Nod. 'And you do this back home in November?' More nods. We explain that it is very cold, very dark, everyone gets frozen feet in their Wellingtons, burn-marks *{the OCR translated this as bum-marks! - Ed}* on one side of their face from the bonfire and that is the point. There is a long, long pause. 'OK, let's see what we can do.'

In the end we were not allowed fireworks, because California fire ordinances forbade it without mountains of permits to contain the flames, nor a big bonfire, and we had it in the afternoon because the healthy, clean-living Americans were not going to wait until 9pm to eat {OCR = cat ! - Ed}, and we did not do sausages because steak is cheaper. I think we managed to immolate a miniature Guy on the barbecue.

It is a good thing we did not try to introduce them to maypoles or morris dancing.

We saw some really odd Morris dancers at the Ely flower festival. Once every 10 years Ely decks the cathedral out with flowers, and holds a fair there, and it is good excuse to get the tourists in and fleece them. There is Morris dancing, and folk songs are committed, and outrageously priced nick-knacks are sold as 'craft'. There were several teams of Morris men. A traditional troupe did some traditional Morris stuff, whirling and clacking to the accordion. (What did they use before accordions?) Then there was a women's Morris troupe, a violation of the ethnic roots of the dance if ever I heard of one. Then there was the punk Morris group, dressed in black, dark red and purple with Voodoo-style battered top hats, who really went at the sticks like they meant it and accompanied by wild whoops and yells. The only difference between them and rugby supporters were a) no scarves and b) they performed in lines. Come to think of it - imagine a rugby line-up in black top-hats, to music.

I think I really ought to leave it there, otherwise this will only get to you in time for BoverB 15. *{show little you knew - Ed}*.

From: Joseph Nicholas, 15 Jansons Road, South Tottenham, London N15 MU, 12 September 1997

Dear Pete & Sue

Many thanks for Balloons Over Bristol 11, received this morning. Having extracted the fanzine from the envelope, I binned the latter before I realised how many months ago this issue was nominally produced; thus I cannot compare the date on the contents page with the date of the postmark and ascertain how long it may or may not have been in transit. But have this loc, nevertheless.

(I note that you discovered what a "loc" was during production of this issue; in case anyone hasn't told you, "wahf" is an acronym for "we also heard from", being the list at the end of all those whose letters were deemed not interesting enough to be worth quoting from.) *{thanks, I worked that one out too, eventually - Ed}*

Having said which, though, this will be a fairly short loc *{It still gets the OCR though I'm afraid - Ed}*. I always enjoyed Tim Goodrick's Miss Lee letters, although I recognise that after a time they all began to seem very similar and this is what doubtless annoyed many other readers. I enjoyed Christina's two travel pieces -- or one-and-a-half travel pieces -- but then I always enjoy Christina's writing and in fact I think she's one of the great unrecognised British fanwriting talents. Why has she never won a Nova? Why has she never won a Hugo? Why is she not life president of the universe?

But the piece I really enjoyed was D. Hunter Bell's *Jules et Jim* film script -- so much so that I laughed until I cried. Having seen the original film (but not the allegedly dire Hollywood English language remake -- they probably changed the ending, just as they did when they remade the original version of *The Vanishing*), and having some familiarity with the French nouvelle vague cinema, only made it more funny. In fact, I don't think I've laughed so much at any piece of fanwriting since the previous issue's send-up of Dr Who. I sometimes think I ought to feel jealous of such writers, because I can't do that sort of humour myself, but getting annoyed at someone for that reason alone strikes me as rather a waste of time. Life's too short, etc. etc.. (When you get to my age, kids .... )

Finally (I said this would be short), I note that you've included a download from the Internet about the Darwin Award given to the accidental balloonist who floated over Los Angeles in a garden lounge suspended from several helium balloons. This is the most elaborate version of the story I've seen to date, but you should have been following recent correspondence on this subject in *New Scientist* because I have to tell you that despite its elaborate detail and worked-out narrative, not a word of it is true. *{Write to the Times, not me - Ed}* Neither, probably, is the reference to a previous Darwin Award to a man who strapped himself to a rocket, since it seems little more than a variation on the apocryphal tale of the Arizona motorist who fixed a JATO (jet-assisted take-off) bottle to his car to see how fast he could go but failed to realise that at several hundred miles per hour even the gentlest of curves becomes non-negotiable, and who is identified afterwards by the twin strips of burnt rubber leading off the road into the desert, and a small cube of heavily impacted wreckage at the foot of a vertical cliff a couple of miles away.

But that's the problem with the Internet: it's a virtually bottomless pit of uncheckable and unstoppable misinformation. Personally, I wouldn't believe anything downloaded from it unless I could check the original source for myself or it came from someone I trusted absolutely. Because everything else, frankly, is just somebody's half-baked thesis on UFO abductions, written with the aid of a grant from the University of Cowpat, Missouri.

From: **Walter Willis, 9 Alexandra Rd., Donaghadee, N.Ireland BT210QD**, 13th September, 1997

Dear Pete and Sue,

Thanks very much for sending me BOB #11. I thought it was quite refreshing, and unlike most of the fanzines I get *{OCR = pet - Ed}*.

I liked your editorial. All of your reminiscences of other fan groups were quite fascinating. I sympathise with your puzzlement about fandom. Even at this distance I still remember some of my own perplexity about fandom. I remember coming to the tentative conclusion that it was another world in which I could start all over again. The result was that I over-compensated for what I regarded as my excessive compliance with the wishes of others and was rather more assertive than I would normally have been. In time I evened out again, though not without appreciation of the gentle and forbearing way in which fandom had dealt with me.

Happy Birthday America was fascinating reading. It was interesting to see her reaction to everyday life in America, but it left me wondering, what 'crusties' are.

Christina's Readercon Report was excellent, so far as it went, and I hope you get the rest of it.

I'm afraid Simon Lake's article is rather wasted on me since I've lost touch with developments in music since the onset of my high frequency, deafness.

La Vache, Cest Morte was an interesting idea, but didn't seem to get far enough off the ground.

The Miss Lee Letters was the most interesting part of the whole fanzine, I thought. They seem genuine, in which case they paint a vivid picture of someone losing their mind in a way which might affect any of us. They are rather frightening.

Best, and thanks again for a most interestingly readable fanzine *{you win our reader of the week competition, thanks - Ed}*.

## The Christina Bit

Dave Langford submitted the following, from Yvonne Rousseau, an extract of a letter concerning Christina's visit to Australia. It is reproduced verbatim:

Yvonne Rousseau, PO Box 3086, Rundle Mall, Adelaide SA 5000. Australia  
13 May 1997

Dear Dave.

The arrival of these guests reminds me that I have never yet reported on the excellence of having Christina Lake staying with us from the 8th until the 12th of February this year. She took this opportunity to demonstrate amazing Resilience (in addition to being agreeable, attractive, entertaining, charming, intelligent, considerate and outstandingly Good Company {*Steady. Steady. - Ed*}) when a combination of floods and excessive heat in the North halted a couple of trains she had intended taking. Thus, instead of travelling in a sleeping berth on the Ghan from Alice Springs to Adelaide, Christina came the whole way by bus: and instead of afterwards taking her intended train (the Indian Pacific) from Adelaide to Sydney, she took a bus-to-Bendigo-connecting-with-train-to-Melbourne, and was therefore able to help celebrate Bruce Gillespie's fiftieth birthday.

On Christina's first evening here we took her to the well-known-to-you-by-reputation White Russian Volga Restaurant (where she met such famed fans as Michael Tolley, Dianne De Bellis, Peter McNamara, Jeff Harris and the already-known-to-her Roman Orszanski). The next evening we gathered at the more fannishly-priced Noodles Restaurant in Gouger (pronounced in a comparatively oo-er rather than violently-out-with-your-eyes manner) Street where she met, in addition, Dylan Peukert Orszanski and Sue Peukert and Zoran Bekric and Adam Jenkins and Ruth Jenkins and (briefly) Brian Forte. John and I went with her to Glenelg Beach by day and I (with Adam and Ruth and Roman but not John) accompanied her to Warrawong Sanctuary by night - there to walk about in bushland among pademelons and brush-tailed bettongs and long-nosed potoroos as well as kangaroos and wallabies. (We also observed black swans: but the platypuses and the bandicoots stayed out of sight that evening, and for some reason we weren't introduced to the quolls). Afterwards, we adjourned for coffee to Adelaide's East End of whose trendiness Christina had been receiving enthusiastic reports. In addition, Christina visited the Penang restaurant, where Adelaide fans meet regularly, and saw the movie Crash with some of those fans and the movie Children of the Revolution {OCR = *ChLI (!) - Ed*} with me; she was interviewed 'live' by Roman Orszanski on 5DDD Radio (known as '3D Radio'), about the Bath Environmental Centre's library (digression concerning her interview by Grant Stone in Perth: when Robert Lichtman in his letter to Apparatchik 77, 18 April 1997, writes that 'Christina probably means Graham, not Grant, Stone when she writes of Swancon', he demonstrates knowledge of more elderly NSW Australian fandom, but not of famous modern Perth fandom), she ate with me and Roman at night {OCR = *nil-, tit - Ed*} in The Parade, Norwood - with John and me in the daytime not only at home but also at a free public barbecue site in the Torrens Linear Park - and she had lunch with Allan and Lesley Bray and Zoran Bekric at the Brays' house (after which the Brays took her on a tour of the Adelaide Hills). Christina took (moreover) a lone stroll around North Adelaide and watched part of an interstate (Sheffield Shield) cricket match.

She also persuaded me (by demonstrating obstinate faith) to successfully apply the method of Mr Earbrass in The Listing Attic ('His mind's eye sees them quoted on the bottom third of a right-hand page in a (possibly) olive-bound book he read at least five years ago) in order to come up with two descriptions of horrible Algerian wine in Britain. I'd mentioned casually my impression that Algerian wine was notorious in Britain for badness and cheapness, whereupon Christina claimed never to have heard of any such thing as Algerian wine, and asked me to find her a reference. The first such reference I eventually retrieved is from Barry Humphries, More Please: An Autobiography, Viking, London, 1992. In London, at the beginning of the 1960s, Barry Humphries remembers (p. 193):

'Occasionally we held dinner parties at which I provided Algerian wine from Del Monico's in Soho costing 4s. 9d. a bottle. Special guests like the painter Sidney Nolan, the dancer Lynn Seymour and John Dexter, a young theatre director, were all offered this noxious beverage which could not be sipped without a violent shudder. In the end I took to mulling it with lemon. cloves and brown sugar, spiked with cheap brandy, and people rather liked it, especially those who did not mind having black teeth for several days {OCR = clays - Ed} afterwards.'

The other reference is in a novel: Penelope Lively. Next to Nature, Art, Heinemann, London, 1982. In 1974, the Framleigh Creative Study Centre (nearly in Warwickshire) is having a farewell party for people who have just taken a course there and a 29-year old American poet attached to the centre is buying party drinks at the off-licence in Woodbury (p. 171):

'Greg inspects bins stuffed with bottles, raucously priced, and picks out some Spanish and some Algerian and some nice cheap stuff that has no label. "These don't have a label." he says to the guy behind the cash-register, who indicates a wire tray: "You want a label? Plenty of labels in there." Greg, intrigued, forages and selects Chateau Something 1969. The guy slaps the labels on the bottles and the bottles into a box, wrong end up in some cases so as to get them all in.'

Perhaps because he is as unBritish as Barry Humphries, Greg decides to combine these Algerian and other wines in a wine cup (served in a vast china soup tureen) (p. 172):

'Humming to himself, Greg chucks in the contents of six bottles of plonk followed by half a bottle of brandy and various spices he has found at the back of one of the kitchen shelves. He adds, in a burst of generosity, the remains of his personal bottle of scotch and some gin he has observed earlier in Toby's study. Paula's cooking sherry is a creative afterthought. along, with a squeeze from a withered lemon found on the windowsill.'

The final touch is some fresh mint and thyme from the garden. Blackened teeth are not mentioned, but Greg notices (p174) that the mixture 'is having an interesting effect. Jean Simpson is trying the rumba now, and Sam, who has been so self-effacing, has become noisy and assertive.'

My unsatisfactory memory tells me, however, that approximately three other references lurk in battered paperbacks with browning brittle pages and close dark printing...

All of the feats described above were achieved by Christina between arriving in Adelaide on the morning of Saturday the 8th of February and leaving on the morning of Wednesday the 12th, and (as you will have gathered from her transport difficulties) in the face of a rather exaggerated display of Australian weather. Moreover, she reported in a convincing manner, when I was seeing her off on the bus, that she had Really Enjoyed her visit to Adelaide - a visit which has been the high point of my own Social Year.

Definitely DNQ. except where discreet hint seems necessary:

And this, dear reader, is where our copy of Yvonne's letter to Dave Langford comes to a premature, and as Dave put it tantalising, halt although he does point out that he has since traced disparaging remarks about Algerian wine in Kingsley Amis's and John Mortimer's writings.

In an attempt to actually do something myself for this issue I performed a search of THE ENTIRE INTERNET (well, AltaVista anyway) for the phrase "Algerian wine" - It came up with only 13 references, the brief 2 lines of blurb you get for each link make very interesting reading as follows:

1. Sir Perry, Chapter One

An Indescribably Pleasant Flight. It was a warm, early June day in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Handsome, wavy black-haired Sir Peregrine Partridge, age 46, ..

2. No Title

Interview with Jared Taylor. Courtesy of Allerlei. "Race is the great American dilemma. This has always been so, and is likely to remain so," says Jared...

3. Wine Spectator | Unfiltered, Unfined

Please Sign In | Comments | Index. Vive Le Vin Nature! By Per-Henrik Mansson, senior editor. Recently I fetched from my bone-shivering underground cellar..

4. Ampelography references by author

Ampelography references by author. Ahmedullah, M. (1983) Pollen morphology of selected Vitis cultivars, Journal of the American Society for Horticultural..

5. No Title

SPEECH BY THE FOREIGN SECRETARY, MR DOUGLAS HURD, TO INSTITUT FRANCAIS DES RELATIONS INTERNATIONALES, PARIS, THURSDAY, 12 JANUARY 1995 '1996 AND BEYOND:...

6. Wreck

Wrecks. Here are just a few of the wrecks that lie around the coast of Guernsey. There are lots of different types of wrecks to be found around our coast..

7. Expo 67 - Arab Pavilions

Arab Pavilions. The Arab Pavilions complex featured pavilions of Algeria, Kuwait and the United Arab Republic (Egypt). United Arab Republic. Inside the...

8. Ampelography references by year

Ampelography references by year. Bassi, D. and Silvestroni, O. (1995), Cultivar identification and numerical taxonomy in grape and fruit crops, in...

9. No Title

Christmas at M's. Bond walked up the gravel drive of M's regency manor-house on the edge of Windsor Forest. He swung the clapper of the brassship's-bell...

10. No Title

There was a forty year old prostitute who had saved up a couple of million dollars and decided it was time to get married. What she wanted though was a...

11. STRAWBS HOME PAGE - LYRICS

STRAWBS : Deep Cuts Oyster 2391 234 1976. Page © Copyright 1997 Dick Greener Lyrics © copyright the stated music publishers, and reproduced with...

12. Salon | Taste

What goes with pork loins on Valentine's Day? Each Wednesday, Salon's chefs dutifully answer e-mail from readers with cleavers.

13. wine

Le Vin, Vino, Wine, and the Vine! "Jamais homme noble ne hait le bon vin" - Francois Rabelais. (tr. Never has a noble man hated good wine) (The midevil...

I checked out the more interesting links as follows:

Number 5: Mr Hurd had this to say about Algerian Wine: "We believe that the best single form of help for our neighbours to the south - as for those to the East - is to open up our markets. We should allow them to prosper by selling our citizens Moroccan oranges, Algerian wine, Egyptian new potatoes. This is their best route to long-term prosperity and stability." (!!!)

Number 9: An excerpt from Ian Fleming's *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*: "Bond was aching for a drink. He got a small glass of very old Marsala and most of a bottle of very bad Algerian wine. M treated his two glasses as if they had been Chateau Lafitte."

Number 10: Now this looked interesting but it merely turned out to be the first part of a page of 'humorous' anecdotes. The Algerian wine comes into an anecdote about Brendan Behan, Irish playwright (1923-1964) in which the following is recounted: "Behan was originally a housepainter by trade, and while in Paris was asked to paint a sign on the window of a cafe to attract English tourists. He painted:

Come in, you Anglo-Saxon swine  
And drink of my Algerian Wine.  
'Twill turn your eyeballs black and blue,  
And damn well good enough for you.

After receiving payment for the job, Behan fled before the cafe proprietor had time to have the rhyme translated."

Number 12 whilst initially appearing rather interesting turned out to be a boring food page. One of the questions, however, is just too good to be true. It asks:

"Dear TasteTalk:

I've invited seven couples for a Valentine's dinner party. I have two large boneless pork loins for the entree, but would appreciate any suggestions you might have for the rest of the meal. I especially like to prepare things you can make ahead of time so I can enjoy my guests. Thanks for your help.

-- Lynne" !!!!

CHARLES + EDITH  
NOID  
(A PAIR-OF-NOIDS)

