

# pLOKTA

Volume 4 Number 3 • Aussiecon or Bust • Makes you go blind

## **SPOT THE ECLIPSE COMPETITION**

**There is a total eclipse of the sun hidden somewhere in this picture. Place an X where you think the centre of the eclipse should be.**

**Here is a picture of a total eclipse to help you:**





This is issue 15 of *Plokta*, edited by Steve Davies and Alison Scott (paper version) and Mike Scott (web version). It is available for letter of comment (one copy is fine, we pass them over to each other), trade (3 copies if possible, please), contribution, editorial whim, or chrome-plated metal rocket-ships.

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The cabal also includes Giulia "You must be feeling hungry" De Cesare, Sue "Chained to the sketch pad" Mason, George "Hiss" the cat, Marianne "Want a wee wee, Daddy" Cain and Steven "It's Mummy's turn" Cain.

"Two of my feet  
have fallen off"

YO-BABE! WANT ME TO RUB  
SOME SUNTAN LOTION  
ON YOUR BACK? HUH? HUH?



(WHEN SLIME LIVES NEXT DOOR!)

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Well, you didn't listen, and Ploktaroth ate the sun. But since you were good and got *Plokta* its Hugo nomination, he's put it back. For the time being.

"I'll open another bottle of the Swedish Government, before it goes off"



*A Plokta cabal editorial conference*  
L-R Alison; Sue (on Giulia's right); Giulia; Steve; Marianne; Mike; Steven



## Editorial

AUSTRALIA or bust. The master copies of this *Plokta* will be personally couriered to the Antipodes, and lovingly hand-carved by teams of Aboriginal laser printers. Steve and Giulia will then pass among the natives at Aussiecon strewing fanzines about like pearls before Strine.

Meanwhile, Steven and Alison are trying to move from their tiny cottage to a house suitable for holding *Plokta* editorial meetings. The new house should be large enough to accommodate their books, fanzines and superfluous technology. Oh yes, and there might be room to fit in their daughter somewhere, too. We'll have a new address by next issue—but we'll be forwarding anything that comes to 42 Tower Hamlets Road.

Proving that we know a good idea when we see one, we have decided to launch a little fannish convention. <plokta.con> is the *Plokta* convention, being held over the Spring Bank Holiday weekend next year (26-29 May 2000) somewhere in the south of England. We'll tell you our hotel in the next issue, but we're already delighted to be able to announce that our Guest of Honour will be **Ken MacLeod**. Ken is the author of *The Star Fraction*, *The Stone Canal*, *The Cassini Division* and *The Sky Road*, four linked novels exploring various political philosophies against the background of a detailed and convincing future history. We should be taking memberships from next issue, and updates on the con will appear in *Plokta* rather than separate progress reports.

We hope <plokta.con> will have about 100-150 members. Like Seccon, we will have a single stream programme, with both SF and fannish items and lengthy gaps suitable for the partaking of large meals. But we also want to capture some of the light-hearted feeling that was such a success at Year of the Wombat, though preferably without the pump-action water pistols. And we want the con to have the sort of fannish ambience of the Miscons—not to mention the real ale. We thought the fanzine room at Attitude was splendid, and we hope to have a repro room available for you to produce one-shots during the convention. The plan is that the superfluous technology in this room will spend at least part of the convention hooked up to the Internet, and Dr Plokta is already working on setting up the vat of hecto jelly as a network printer.

We've always hankered after cover-mounting a fannish CD-ROM on *Plokta*. We hope to produce this marvel as part of the programme book (ie, relevant issue of *Plokta*), and mail it to *Plokta* readers who aren't at the con. Please let us have suggestions, or offers of material, for the contents. Ideally, we'd like to hook up with another convention or

fannish organisation, because otherwise we'll be buried in a massive heap of the smallest economical CD print run. All good uses for silver platters welcome.

Before we suppressed him, Dr Plokta insisted that we remind you of our other fannish projects. Our website for fannish news, **The Plokta News Network**, is regularly updated with news, gossip and baseless innuendo. Check out the site at [www.plokta.com/pnn/](http://www.plokta.com/pnn/) on 4 September for near-instantaneous news of the Hugo results, assuming that Steve can get the satellite phone working. Alternatively, help **Team Plokta** search for aliens at [setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu](mailto:setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu). Search for "team plokta" and help us get into the top hundred alien-finding clubs.

Dr P's latest venture is the expanded **Dr Plokta's Guide to Science Fiction**, now made virtual flesh at [www.sfreader.com](http://www.sfreader.com). At present we're beta-testing, and there's not much content yet. But the aim will be to give you information about the SF and fantasy you may be thinking about reading. **SFReader.com** isn't trying to comprehensively list all SF and fantasy. Instead it aims to be quirky, biased and subjective about the stuff we like. And the stuff you like—again, we're looking for literate articles and reviews from your old fanzines to help provide the content for this site. In the unlikely event that it ever turns a profit, there will be some form of profit-sharing.

You will see from the cover that some of the cabal were privileged to witness a total eclipse of the sun. Admittedly Steven and Alison only saw it through a layer of rather thick cloud. But in much of the UK, the eclipse was a non-event. Luckily, Bracknell had the forethought to import a beach for the summer. At a stroke, this unprepossessing new town fifty miles from the sea was transformed into a delightful tropical paradise, as you can see below.



*We've got the sand, but someone's forgotten the sea, and the dragon Ploktaaroth seems to have eaten the sun.*

## BOLLOCKS

### Punctuation Crisis Worsens

The world shortage of full stops is causing increasing problems for fanzine production, and editors are having to rifle through their files looking for unused ones intended for previous issues, as new ones are now virtually unobtainable.

In order to alleviate this situation, *Plokta* is introducing rationing. Locs to *Plokta* should in future contain no more than 6 (six) ellipses. We realise this may cause some of you (such as Messrs Sullivan and SMS) considerable hardship, but we hope you'll agree that it would be far worse if we ran out of full stops for use in such important locations as the end of paragraphs, and that we shouldn't be throwing them away three at a time in the middle of sentences in the letter column

"Extending the local area network into the living room has made a big difference to our quality of life"

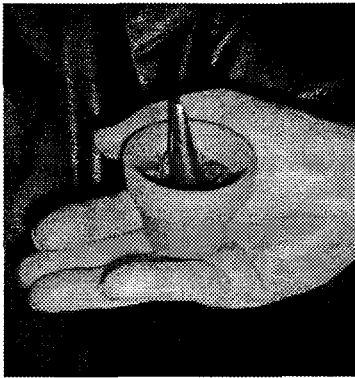
### Superfluous Firepower

Wal-Mart is apparently taking over UK supermarket chain Asda. We're looking forward to seeing Asda stores nationwide acquiring the racks of guns for which Wal-Mart is famous, and Tesco responding to the competition with own-brand tactical nuclear weapons.

"Needs an interlin, Vern"

### House Selling Tales #1

The phone rings. It's the estate agent. "I've got some people here, interested in the house." Lovely, I thought. "They want to know if the back garden is included with the house." I am not sure if I have heard correctly. "They want to know if the back garden is included?" I ask, uncertainly. "Yes. Does it come with the house?" I pause. "No, we like it so much we were planning to take it with us."

**BOLLOCKS****Grow Your Own**

Apparently Steve traded  
a cow for it

Dr Plokta's latest horticultural venture, rocket-ship grafting, can be seen above, following a daring midnight raid on Peter Weston's greenhouses. If you water regularly and keep it in a warm place then it should produce a full-sized Fanzine Hugo by 2073.

**Seccontinued**

The Hertfordpark Hotel was getting into the spirit of things by the end of Seccon. The menu holder on the reception desk as we checked out contained the following:

**Menu****Future Convention  
Science Fiction**

**Cream of Genetically Modified  
Tomato Soup**  
Finished with Herb Croutons

**Forced Smoked Goose**  
With Test Tube Baby Sweetcorn



**Mass Farmed Trout Fillet**  
On Radiated Seasonal  
Dutch Leaves

**Gravity-Free Grown  
Vegetables Stir Fry**  
MIR Style

**Cloned Soya Milk Fed Lamb**  
On Sauté Rocket Leaves



**Illuminated Chernobyl Fruit Pie**

**Deep Fried Mars Bars**

**Stranger In A Strange Land**

I'M A FOREIGNER. I've been here for ten years but I'm still a foreigner. And I never feel it more than when trying to cope with England's foreign accents. Sorry, regional accents. I've just spent a couple of days in Cornwall, for work. "Therr be trobble at t' database, Miss Demelzerr. Oi be getting' integerr divoid boi zero errorrr..."

I travelled by train. There's less chance of getting lost that way, and they let me go first class, and I can catch up on my reading. I brought *The Stone Canal*, (blatant plug) and three disks of smut (thanks, Sue). I found I was getting through the book faster than expected, due to reading it during dinners as well as on the journey out. There's nothing like a pretentious restaurant that prides itself on silver service to prolong a meal, and you can't really sit there with a laptop.

So, anyway, I was starting to worry about not having enough to read on the four-hour return journey. I could read the smut, and I was doing that in the evenings in my room, but on a previous occasion I had nearly made myself sick trying to work on the laptop on the train. After about two hours I had a throbbing headache, a heaving gut and a flat battery, and it hadn't even been smut that time but actual work, so I didn't want to rely on the computer. The free copy of the *Telegraph* wouldn't last long either. I had to buy another book.

There weren't many shops near the hotel but I eventually found a small newsagent. They only had magazines, mostly the sort you buy for the pictures, not the words. I asked the nice lady if there were any bookshops nearby. Well, no, she said, not round here. But there's always Alster.

Alster? I said. Is it far to walk?

Oh, about twenty minutes, go up the hill to the roundabout and turn left.

I looked at my watch. Won't they be closed by then?

No, they're open till ten. Or there's Tesco, they're open late too.

Alster, I repeated uncertainly.

Alster, she replied firmly. Left at the roundabout. Twenty minutes.

So I set off, trudging up the hill. Alster. Don't remember any signs to Alster. Maybe that wasn't how it was spelt. I used to get terribly confused by someone who said he came from Ulster, until I saw it written down: Alcester. But I didn't think that was in Cornwall.

And did I really need a book, anyway? I have lots of books. I just don't have them here.

The thought of a four hour train journey with nothing but the *Telegraph* to read drove me on. And, anyway, it might be a really nice little bookshop, who knows what you might find, I told myself as I panted up the hill.

Alster Ulster Olster Alcester Towster Aoughlster as in Dun Laoghaire, I thought, as I trudged along, I love English place names. Still, I'm sure I'll recognise it when I see it.

I was getting desperate for a pee. This had better be a damn good bookshop.

Up the hill. Left at the roundabout. The sign on the roundabout said Truro. Down the hill. It's easily been twenty minutes. Nothing ahead but a long road full of houses. Then I saw it, on my left.

Asda.

Oh, bollocks, I thought.

Then again, at least they'll have toilets in there.

And I bought a book, too.

—Giulia De Cesare



Steve is prepared for the trip to the Australian outback



# I Cuss, You Cuss, We All Cuss...

...FOR ASPARAGUS. Line shamelessly stolen from a Gary Larson cartoon called something like, "Marketing ventures that never got off the ground." And speaking of marketing, have you noticed how much more pervasive the marketing of asparagus has become lately? I mean, can you remember any joyful gathering of the asparagus harvest during your childhood? Hymns being sung in church like "Asparagus Is Icumen In?" Maidens skipping back from the fields with baskets—I'm sure you get the picture. But only a picture, not an actual memory.

None of this was a part of my childhood, but that may be because I spent it at 312 Lenah Valley Road, Hobart, Tasmania, a land where fossilised asparagus was noticeably not found in the excavation of aboriginal middens, which is all that passes for archaeology down there. It could also be because asparagus did not form a part of the regional cooking of Via Del Commune, Casalnuovo Monterotaro, Provincia di Foggia, which is what my mother learned at her mother's knee and later, mostly through the intervention of the Second World War, ended up feeding to us at 312 Lenah Valley Road, Hobart, Tasmania.

Asparagus might have been a mainstay of the regional cooking of the next street over from Via Del Commune, but we'll have none of those fancy foreign ways over here, thank you very much.

And speaking of fancy foreign ways, I bet that those of you who grew up in places with exotic names like Scunthorpe or Chipping Dogsbollox don't recall happy scenes from your childhood of statues being bedecked with garlands of asparagus come the harvest, or maidens skipping back from the fields with baskets—but you get the picture.

Hype notwithstanding, Steve and I quite like asparagus anyway, so when we moved to our current house in Westbourne Terrace, we planted some. A modest little bed, about a square yard, which we work hard to defend from ravenous snails, megalomaniac weeds and cats with full bladders.

I still wouldn't have thought any more of the recent spate of asparagus-pushing if I had not had to spend a few days in Holland.

I am currently seated in my eyrie on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of the Novotel, Brainpark, Rotterdam. Not noticeably superstitious, the Dutch, I'll give them that.

Surrounded by a décor that would have made Austin Benson, Fan Of Mystery, feel right at home, I look out at a view reminiscent of California, right down to the smog, but with more water. Rotterdam is flat, being built on what probably used to be jolly good fishing grounds, and new, mostly through the intervention of the Second World War. And currently in the grip of asparagus mania.

Back in England, the hapless natives are merely subjected to campaigns of unrelenting politeness by the likes of Waitrose and Sainsbury's, genteelly suggesting that asparagus is actually rather good at this time of year, when it's in season and all that, and wouldn't it be jolly nice to give these exciting new recipe ideas a bit of a whirl, what?



Not so, the Dutch. Not noticeably subtle, the Dutch. On every side I am assailed by images, nay, actual samples of asparagus of truly dildonic proportions. It was on offer at every meal, and featured in every course. It took me a while to work out what these strangely textured, Vaseline-coloured things were. They are obviously grown in the dark, where they spend their lives in stygian gloom, sprouting vestigial eye stalks that grow huge in a desperate attempt to gather in what light there may be. During processing the eyes are removed, giving them the above-mentioned strange appearance and the asparagus is

immediately tinned. The Dutch don't believe it's food if it hasn't spent some time in a tin.

Mind you, this observation could be due to the nature of my visit, which was to the headquarters of a mysterious and shadowy giant of the processed meal industry. Wherever you find food served in little rectangular plastic dishes, chances are it was created in the high tech, cavernous, underground laboratories of my hosts, who shall remain nameless. We're not having another Z\*n\*c\* incident here, thank you.

Anyway, my culinary experiences were restricted to a certain staff canteen, KLM and Novotel, which may not have been truly representative of Dutch cuisine—I never saw any rijstafel, for instance. But I bet Holland doesn't have a long tradition of maidens skipping over the fjords, or whatever, all gaily bedecked with ribbons as they bring in the asparagus harvest, either.

But there's no denying the recent asparagus evangelism. A colleague of Steve's reported a similar phenomenon in Germany. It's just that what is being foisted onto people by these international corporations bears so little resemblance to real asparagus. And, in the light of a mysterious visitor we recently received, it makes me... uneasy.

One fine Saturday a few weeks ago, 52 Westbourne Terrace suffered a plague of rabbit. This rabbit must have weighed ten pounds, it was nearly as big as George. It sat in our asparagus patch, rather, it sat on our asparagus patch, twitched its dear little nose, preened its large floppy ears... and ate. Steve and I watched in disbelief from an upstairs window, paralysed by the overwhelming cuteness of it. Before we could shake off the strange lethargy induced by this apparition, a couple of cats with full bladders appeared. Obviously immune to its lapine charms, they briskly saw it off the premises.

Was this an isolated incident? Or was it part of a world-wide plan to destroy domestic asparagus crops and make us dependent on strange, genetically-modified, glow-in-the-dark pseudo-asparagus?

Only time will tell.

But in the meantime... watch the veg.

—Giulia De Cesare



**BOLLOCKS**

**House Selling Tales #2:**

As part of settling into his new job, Steven is having idle chitchat with the bloke at the next desk. It soon becomes clear that they're both in the process of buying houses. Steven explains that we're moving, from a charming, ramshackle cottage in an advanced state of disrepair to a large, totally refurbished house near Church Path. It turns out that the chap has seen a house on Church Path. On the whole, he knows Walthamstow quite well. In fact, he's going to see a cottage on Tower Hamlets Road that very night.

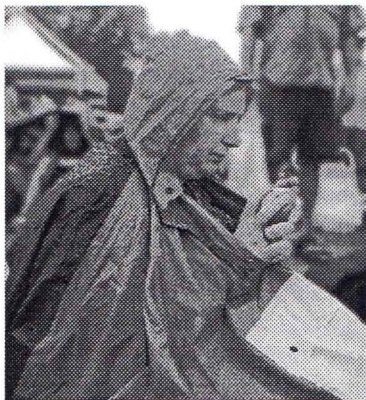
"I'd do a website but you can't get the wood"

**Worth A Try Dept.**

Following advice from Mike's brother, who has a friend with a six year-old for whom this tactic has worked to date, Alison is trying to convince Marianne that ice-cream vans play a tune to show when they've run out of ice-cream and don't have any more to sell to importunate toddlers.

**The Wicked Witch of the Wells**

Those of you who are wondering whether Pam Wells has gafiated will be interested in this picture of her, spotted recently at the Cambridge Folk Festival.



"Would you like a big bite of the nice shiny red side of this apple, Marianne?"

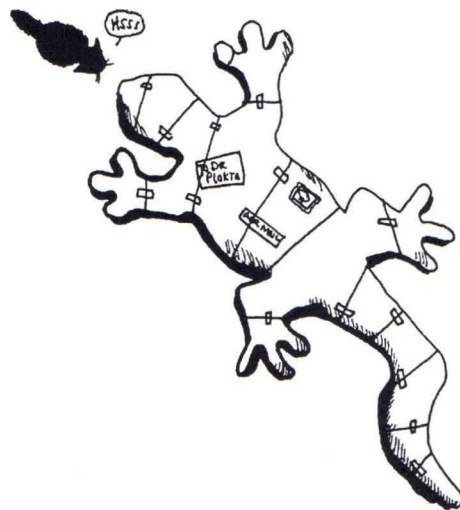
**Dr Plokta and His Infeasibly Large Herpes**

WE'VE BEEN meeting some bizarre pets recently. Dr Plokta invited the cabal to visit him at his remote Fortress of Solitude in the North. ("I'm not entirely sure you can have a semi-detached Fortress of Solitude", pointed out Captain Pedantic). We discovered he keeps the fortress protected with an attack gecko.

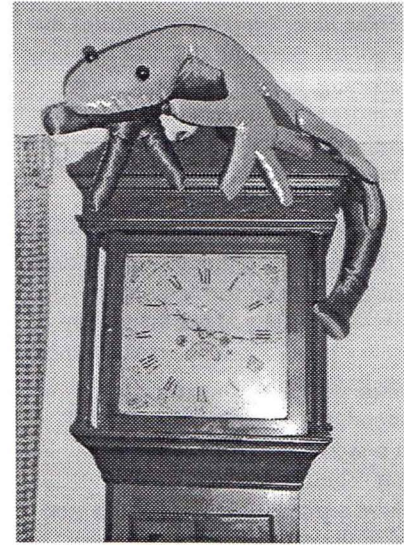


Postage due on this one, mate

"It just arrived in the post," explained Dr Plokta, as we sat around watching the gecko, which was sunning himself on the top of Dr Plokta's alarm clock. "I was sitting here minding my own business, when the postman arrived with a large, gecko-shaped parcel with some holes punched in the top."



We admired the enormous gecko, which is about four foot long. Dr P didn't quite seem the type to keep exotic pets, though. What he needed was a local Herpetological Society.



Speaking of which, the other week Steven and I were wandering around Cambridge in the rain with Austin and Caro. They suggested we should spend the evening visiting the Cambridge Herpetological Society. [Note the cool segue—Ed.] "Why on earth would we want to do that?" we wondered. "Well, they're bringing along a lot of snakes. Including a 15 foot Burmese Python," explained Austin. We thought that it would be quite fun for Marianne to meet some snakes first hand. So off we went, paying our 50p to get in.



**BOLLOCKS**

**Slice My Truffle, Baby**

At Wincon V, we were sitting in a group with Chris Bell, Roger Burton-West and Diana Wynne Jones, and looking at a catalogue of kitchen gadgets. Now, there was a time when kitchen gadgets were all multi-function ("It slices! It dices! It sits you down, makes a nice cup of tea and solves all your embarrassing personal problems!").

Not any longer. The makers of these kitchen gadgets suddenly realised that they could sell you separate slicers, dicers and personal gossip columnists or whatever. This way you wouldn't have to buy a slicer when all you wanted was a dicer... and they would make much more money. Which means you now get catalogues full of truffle shavers (can also be used for chocolate! or parmesan!), chestnut roasters (can't conceivably be used for anything else at all!) and the like.

One of the sillier ideas was a set of ingredient bowls. You know on TV cookery shows, they have all the bits in separate bowls so it looks good for the camera and so you don't get some famous chef frantically dashing around the studio looking under the lighting desk for the truffle shavings while his soufflé bites the dust? Well now you can look good for the camera in your own home.

Assuming that you regularly have a four-person TV crew watch you while you cook supper....

What's really worrying is the idea that there may be people out there who actually think that you're supposed to cook like that. Of course, these are

probably the same people who base their lives and behaviour on TV soap operas.

by pet pythons, normally as a result of SFEs—Stupid Feeding Errors.

Pythons are not the brightest of creatures, aren't remotely tame, have rotten eyesight, and will go for anything that moves when they're hungry, even if it's far bigger than they could ever actually eat. Pythons have never heard that you shouldn't eat things bigger than your head. We were told a cautionary tale of a chap who needed both hands to open the vivarium so that he could feed his python. To do this, he held the tasty rabbit under his chin. Not a smart move.

Caro was fascinated by the snakes, but it would be difficult for her to have one as a pet. A key rule of snake-keeping is that you should avoid smelling of rodents when handling snakes. Caro looks after mice for a living—so as far as snakes are concerned, she has a perpetual faint odour of lunch.

After telling us all these horror stories, they got Sophie out to show us. She had been asleep, wrapped up duvet in a

in a large cardboard box under a table. Fifteen foot really is a very substantial amount of snake.

Three hefty men lifted her out of her duvet. She was about seven inches across, and had an actual toon-style lump in the middle showing where her latest rabbit had got to. Her owner assured us that she wasn't remotely hungry at the moment, having eaten only a few days previously. But I still kept looking nervously at Marianne, who had reacted to the opportunity to meet snakes close up by falling asleep on the floor. Did she look tasty? Might Sophie fancy a Podsicle? Was she grumpy when she woke up in the morning?

While everyone was watching Sophie, one of the little Hognoses apparently made a bid for freedom. At any rate, there were three of them at the beginning of the evening and only two at the end.

We're expecting it to turn up on Dr. Plokta's alarm clock any day now.

—Alison Scott

Some of the small snakes were quite friendly. Most of them weren't venomous, though I did pick up a venomous snake for the first time.

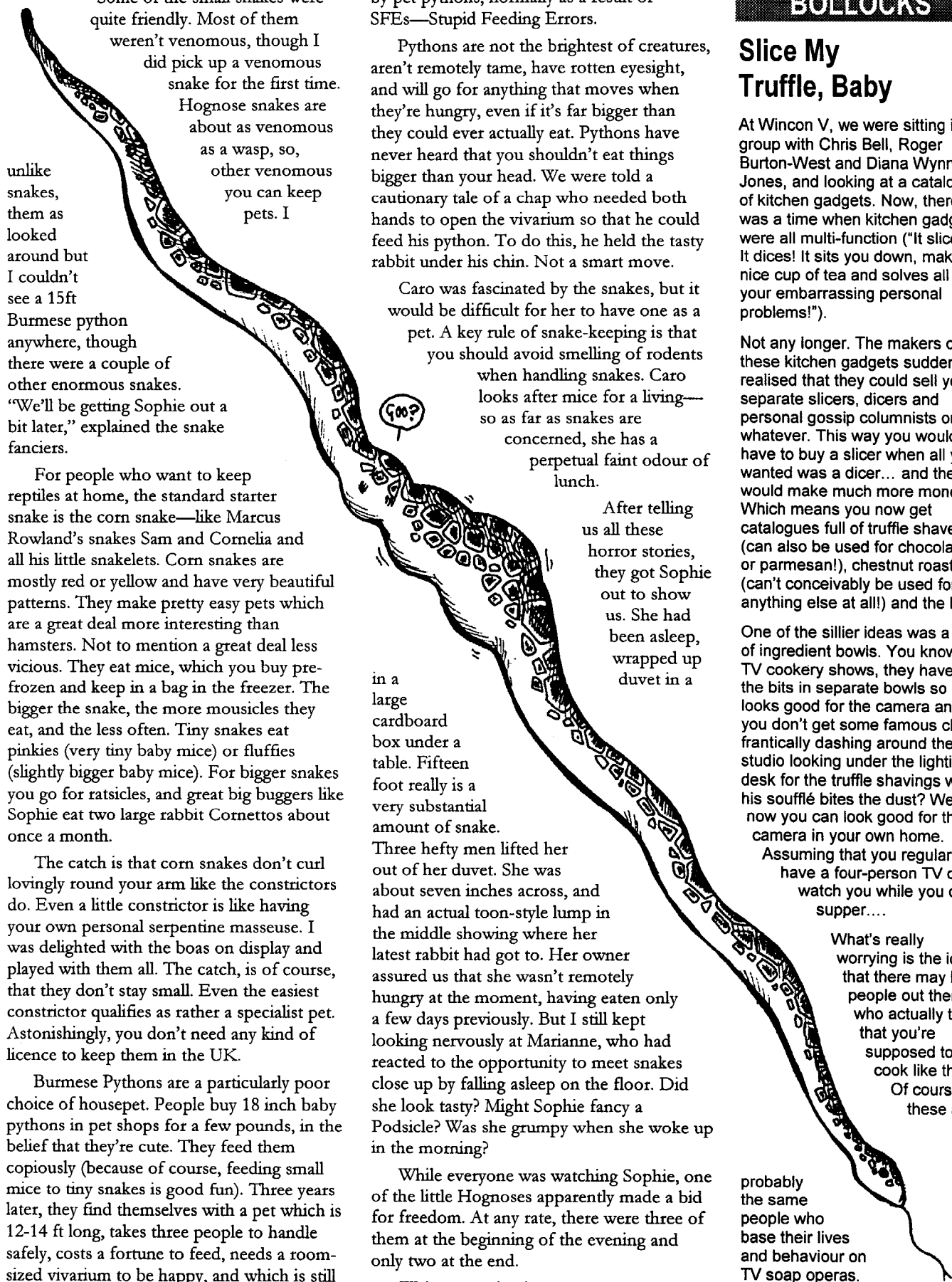
Hognose snakes are about as venomous as a wasp, so, other venomous you can keep pets. I

unlike snakes, them as looked around but I couldn't see a 15ft Burmese python anywhere, though there were a couple of other enormous snakes. "We'll be getting Sophie out a bit later," explained the snake fanciers.

For people who want to keep reptiles at home, the standard starter snake is the corn snake—like Marcus Rowland's snakes Sam and Cornelia and all his little snakelets. Corn snakes are mostly red or yellow and have very beautiful patterns. They make pretty easy pets which are a great deal more interesting than hamsters. Not to mention a great deal less vicious. They eat mice, which you buy pre-frozen and keep in a bag in the freezer. The bigger the snake, the more mousicles they eat, and the less often. Tiny snakes eat pinkies (very tiny baby mice) or fluffies (slightly bigger baby mice). For bigger snakes you go for ratsicles, and great big buggers like Sophie eat two large rabbit Cornettos about once a month.

The catch is that corn snakes don't curl lovingly round your arm like the constrictors do. Even a little constrictor is like having your own personal serpentine masseuse. I was delighted with the boas on display and played with them all. The catch, is of course, that they don't stay small. Even the easiest constrictor qualifies as rather a specialist pet. Astonishingly, you don't need any kind of licence to keep them in the UK.

Burmese Pythons are a particularly poor choice of housepet. People buy 18 inch baby pythons in pet shops for a few pounds, in the belief that they're cute. They feed them copiously (because of course, feeding small mice to tiny snakes is good fun). Three years later, they find themselves with a pet which is 12-14 ft long, takes three people to handle safely, costs a fortune to feed, needs a room-sized vivarium to be happy, and which is still growing. Pet shops won't take these beasts back, of course, and nor will zoos. Luckily, they're usually reasonably placid. Though not always, and they normally get agitated at feeding time. A few people a year are killed





## BOLLOCKS

### Hogwarts and All

If anyone out there knows an Al Dumbledore, we recently acquired something that may be of interest to him. George brought in a frog clutching an Ofsted briefcase containing a report. We excerpt a few quotes below.

*"Complete non-compliance with the requirements of the National Curriculum."*

*"Practical lessons were lively and well-attended, however serious doubt exists about the school's commitment to health and safety. Experiments with likely adverse effects (such as, for instance, the metamorphosis of visitors to the classroom into amphibians) should be performed only by the teacher and inside a fume cupboard."*



*"The severe dangers posed by the game of Quidditch are such as to render it essential to ban it forthwith."*

*"We are concerned by the high turnover of staff the school has experienced recently, especially in teachers of the dark arts."*

*"The archaic tradition of placing children in houses, apparently on the whim of a singing hat, could cause appalling damage to the immature psyche and must cease forthwith. Similarly, the award of house points goes against all modern educational practice and must be replaced by a system in which all pupils share equally."*

We imagine Headmaster Dumbledore will be happy to send us the few thousand galleons needed to persuade us not to send copies to the press by the first available owl.

## The P-Plan Diet

THE PLOKTA CABAL are often asked how we can eat so much while retaining our beerglass figures. The secret is the P-Plan diet, which we can now share with you.

After a few weeks of normal eating, unhealthy substances such as fruit, vegetables and vitamins can build up in the system. The solution is a rigorous three-day toxifying diet.

There are several cardinal rules to remember and with these basics in mind the P-Plan diet will work for you too.

1. **Calories Don't Count.** Calories don't count if you are standing up. Or lying down. Remember that calories in liquid form are negligible, as they're mostly water. Be careful not to drink water without alcohol in it. Alcohol-free water causes thousands of deaths every year.
2. **Anything knocked down to half price in Waitrose is calorie free, especially sushi.** Which we all know is very healthy in large quantities. Very expensive food, such as champagne, caviar and paté de fois gras de canard is calorie free.
3. **No green vegetables (unless fried).** Green is the colour of mould and should be avoided at all costs.

It's important to approach the P-Plan diet with a positive attitude. It's not all hard work and feeling deprived. For example, while following the P-Plan diet, you may eat the following foods freely: Beer, chocolate (especially chocolate fondue), tortilla chips, red meat, white meat, brown meat, poultry, game, sausages, pasta, olive oil, butter.

You should also drink extensively as it's especially important when dieting not to let your body dehydrate. Suitable drinks include all of them. Except water (see above) and diet soft drinks (these contain aspartame, which is bad for you).

Never leave the table until you've cleaned your plate, your neighbour's plate, the serving spoon, the serving dish and the tablecloth.

Eating between meals is not recommended, as there shouldn't be any time between meals. If you do find yourself with an odd half hour between lunch and dinner, try keeping your blood sugar up by snacking on healthy, low calorie foods such as crisps, peanuts and deep-fried Mars bars.

### Exercise Plan

We have devised an exercise programme that can be integrated into the P-Plan Diet. An exercise video is available, but we suggest that it should be viewed on a wide-screen TV.

- The pint-glass lift—no wimping out with half-pint glasses.

- The three-fingered reset—Ctrl-Alt-Del your way to fitness.
- The Waitrose walk—up the aisle, down the aisle, repeat until the trolley is full.
- Rotating the spatula in the frying pan will keep your wrists supple.
- The ice-cream run—see if you can get to the van before *Greensleeves* finishes.



*Freely allowable foods on the P-Plan diet*

### Readers' Questions

As long as I keep my cherry tomato intake under control, does it matter how many calories I eat? (Sue Mason)

*Don't overdo those vitamins. Have you considered deep-frying them? After all, many unhealthy foods can be converted to the P-Plan diet by the judicious addition of olive oil, double cream and/or butter.*

I eat lunch with my colleagues in the staff canteen where there is a lot of social pressure to get just a salad. How can this fit in with the P-Plan diet? (Giulia de Cesare)

*Salads are mostly empty in terms of calorific and nutritional values. Keep a little bag of croutons to sprinkle on top—we suggest crispy fried bacon lardons or toasted pine nuts.*

### Helpful Hints

- Slathering everything with mayonnaise will help your food to stick to the fork.
- Butter is better for frying.
- Don't waste money on pathetic little devices like truffle shavers. Just add it (both sorts) in great chunks.
- Drink more beer. You know it makes sense.

Put things into perspective: think about all the pictures of historical characters you ever saw. Thin meant poverty and deprivation. Big was good. So—what would you rather trust? Thousands of years of recorded history or a mere seventy-year fad?

With the P-Plan diet, you don't have to cook separate meals for other members of the family. The P-Plan diet is suitable for all ages and species, and Marianne and George are thriving on it.



# Lokta Plokta



**Avedon Carol**  
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 London E6 1AP

Well, I think you ought to win the Hugo, because you've definitely got the spirit of the thing down cold. (Would this mean that *you* get the middle-of-the-night phone call from Martin Hoare?)

I'm certainly impressed with that cover, complete with homage not just to pulp covers but to *Gor* covers (that one is Frazetta, I think?) and, unfortunately, to Jim Lee as well. (I don't care how much tit you have to work with, they just don't go that high. At least Frank and Boris know where knockers are located.)

I have so little faith in the language skills of sign-painters and shop-keepers now that I honestly believe the "Ears pierced while you wait" signs, which are not a myth, are planned and painted with an entirely straight face by people to whom it doesn't even occur that that's the only way to do it. (Locally, we have a tyre place that offers "Punctures while you wait," for which I doubt they get many takers.)

Anyway, my mother was appalled, too, on learning that her daughters wanted to get their ears pierced. She informed us that we'd look like Puerto Rican whores. I confess, this seemed an even better reason to do it and we made clear to her that she couldn't stop us, so I guess our

folks decided that it would be a better idea to make sure it was done right, and they took us to the doctor to have it done (and they paid for it). I've never regretted it (although you should always remember to remove long, dangly earrings before going on a protest march), but that's all the permanent body art I have any interest in getting. (And I don't care what anyone says, I *like* fake tattoos.)

I'd be tempted to deliberately violate the "Don't make jokes about Pat McMurray" stricture except that Pat doesn't usually inspire my one form of humour, which is sarcasm. [*Why ever not?—Ed*]

I think this is the first LoC I've written all year. If I had any energy, I would print out Avram's poem on Post-It notes and stick them all over the Underground. (And also the North London Line. Especially the North London Line.)

*Sigh.* One thing you can say for Ken Livingstone: he made the trains run on time.

**Joseph T Major**  
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 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville,  
 KY 40204-2040, USA

*The Cover:* Which says, for the record, "But Mum...!... Science Fiction is Grown-Up Intelligent Literature of Ideas...Honest!" Let us analyze this statement:

*Grown-Up:* The young lady on the cover is definitely grown-up. No denying that.

*Intelligent:* Surviving in such a hostile environment is a sign of clear intelligence. Indeed, the mechanism behind the young lady is an additional construct of intelligent design.

*Ideas:* Certainly she provokes some very grown-up ideas.

I would certainly let the kid read it. After I finished.

*The Phantom Moose:* or, Great Minds Think Alike. The cover of *Mad* portrayed its chronic poster boy Alfred E. Newman

in the Anakin pose, with his shadow being Vader—with, of course, light shining through the hole where his tooth was missing.

*A Beginner's Guide to Self-Mutilation:* Piercing mavens say that you aren't really committed until you get your behind pierced and a barrel hoop inserted.

*Lokta Plokta:* Unless Terry Jeeves wants to go into more detail, I will point out that there were MI branches numbered up to 10 or so. Most of them were minor, but MI10 was in charge of helping British prisoners of war to escape. This was where the compasses in trouser buttons, saws in bootlaces, maps in the endpapers of books, and so on came from.

**Marcus Rowland**  
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 London, W2 5EA

Reading Alan Sullivan's LoC reminds me that I once wrote a Star Wars RPG scenario called "The Nuns of Gavarone"—and sold it twice, in Britain and the USA. I should also admit to writing an RPG set in the world of Edwin Abbott's *Flatland*, with an adventure called "Where Angles Dare."

Re. Terry Jeeves' question re. MI1 to 4; no idea, but MI9 was the department that helped POWs and evaders to get out of occupied territory during WW2, run by Airey Neave. There's a book called *Saturday at MI9*, Neave's account of events, which may list the other departments.

Unfortunately I don't currently own a copy or I'd check.

Sorry I still haven't sent you the article on snakes I promised; the ones I kept from the last batch are now about 2ft long, and Cornelia laid the next generation a couple of weeks ago, but I've been so bogged down with the RPG writing that everything else has

had to go on the back burner. To be honest, it'd probably only consist of variations on the words "Breed snakes if you want yet another way to spend lots of money".

**Mary Kay Kare**  
 kare@sirius.com

We've decided that if *Plokta* is the Home of Superfluous Technology, Jordin's garage is the Home of Obsolete Technology. If you want it, it's probably out there, but only if it's more than 5 years old.

**Caro Wilson**  
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 Cambridge, CB2 3AR

When I was a lass getting your ears done was an act of rebellion done not only because you wanted to wear earrings but mainly because you wanted to piss off your parents. Many is the horror story I heard at school when a girl's father had forced her to take out her new studs or she wouldn't be allowed back into the house.

My mum was absolutely furious when I got mine done at the age of thirteen when she had actually forbidden me to get them pierced until I was sixteen. I strongly suspect that her ire was more to do with the fact that I was supposed to be at home convalescing from having my appendix removed than that I had merely disobeyed orders. All I can say in my defence is that my big sister Claire egged me on and took me into Kingston to do the dirty deed. At least unlike Claire I didn't do it myself with a needle.

Mum was also vaguely horrified because to her, ear piercing was terribly old fashioned, something that her grandma had done. Modern girls didn't do anything so barbaric, no doubt having been put off by the horror stories told by their grandparents. Of course the equipment has improved out of all recognition. Piercing guns are hygienic and



almost completely painless, which is more than can be said for clip-on earrings.

Anne and I both had our ears done last September although that was really Austin's fault. He bought a pair of earrings while on a business trip to Toronto that he thought would be an ideal birthday present for Anne. Not realising that Anne didn't have pierced ears, so for the rest of her birthday present we got her slightly tiddly and took her down to the piercing studio. I should add that Anne had been meaning to do this for ages but had always wimped out, we didn't press gang her or anything. I had been meaning to get another hole for a while so I had mine done first to prove that it didn't hurt.

The other thing I wanted to know was how do you get your ears done without waiting? Is it like shoe repairs and drycleaning. You drop your ears off, they give you a ticket and you come back in a week when they are ready? What happens if you get the wrong person's ears back? And how do you keep your glasses on in the meantime?

**Eric Lindsay**  
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Queensland 4802, Australia

Well, for a cabal you have gotten yourselves into a right old mess with that Hugo nomination, haven't you? How can you expect to be secret masters (or mistresses) of fandom if you aren't secret any more?

I am surprised that you haven't previously mentioned that prime superfluous geek Steven K Roberts. I've been following his strange career for about a decade now, back at the time when it was actually possible to pedal the bike.

Great to hear someone else who walks the length of a great shopping mall without buying anything. We are hundreds of kilometres from a shopping mall, so we tend to check them out carefully when we are in

the area. Last time, after three hours shopping, I'd managed to get a salad sandwich for lunch, and a \$4.95 mat for our doorway (and we had been looking for one in that colour for the past four months). The time before that we couldn't have bought anything, except the bookshop had a sale of computer books, so we each brought home a stack.

**Pamela Boal**  
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Oxon OX12 7EW

It has been one of those years, our boating constantly interrupted by medical alerts, both Derek and myself. Nothing truly major (at least not life threatening once medication was properly adjusted) but enough to keep me from sitting up at the key board or too busy looking after Derek. Everything seemed to be on an even keel and we were planning an extended trip on the boat when Christina Foyle died! How did that affect us? Well, daughter in law Gillian is a civil servant in the Ministry of Overseas Development and was due to go to Mongolia. Son Steven had planned to take a week of his holiday to look after their two boys but he is the manager of Foyles and Christina's funeral was on the very day that Gill was flying off plus the problem of just keeping the place running while the nominal owners and directors sorted themselves out, as Christina was believe me, the Boss! At last the place can move in to the 20<sup>th</sup> C. without losing it's unique appeal. If you have ever given up there because of lack of staff to help you, please know the first thing Steven is doing is employing more staff. Any way that is another matter of course we responded to their plea and went down to London to look after our grandsons. Even the nicest of boys are exhausting as the years pile on, especially in a house not adapted for my disability. I am recovered and we have no appointments for the next six weeks so we are off on the boat in the morning

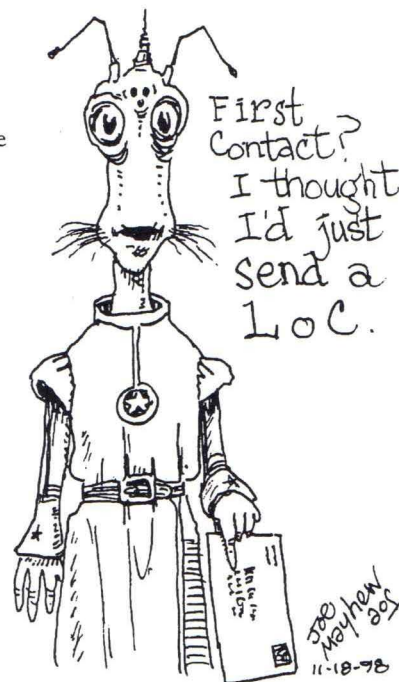
and hope to stay there for the whole of those six weeks.

**Martin Morse Wooster**  
PO Box 8093, Silver Spring,  
Maryland 20907, USA

As for the British Library shelves—why doesn't the Permanent Floating Worldcon Committee buy them? What a treat it would be to have the *very shelves* used by Wells and Shaw be filled each year with fandom's surplus books. What a refuge Fandom's Reading Room would be during dull spots of a Worldcon (such as the masquerade). To take care of storage between Worldcons, the con committee could award a special Hugo to the fan most eager to store the shelves until the next con. Think of the scramble that would take place as fans fight it out to get their own Hugo! (I'm also reminded of the fanatical Missouri collector who spent \$275,000 on bookshelves. He also loved buying all the remainders of authors he admired—up to 4,000 copies—and handing them out to friends as presents.

The Gilroy toucan Guinness ads are some of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's greatest advertisements, so it's odd that Guinness would put that disclaimer on its Web site. I can understand why the phrase "Guinness is Good for You" couldn't be used anymore: in America, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms would ban it as a spurious health claim. But how does the toucan ad you display "contravene current rulings in several markets?" What do the regulators assume—that someone reading the ad would start balancing pints on his nose? Or think that consuming copious quantities of Guinness would result in the growth of a long striped beak?

I realize that there's much about British culture I don't understand. (Do you still call cough drops "throat pastilles?") But I've never heard of a City Farm before. Are these old farms that have been taken over by city governments, or parks where inner-city people can look at ducks and cows? Are they a



recent phenomenon, or where they established in Victorian times? [*The latter, and in the sixties, respectively.*]

Are the photos of stadiums [*Stadia!—Captain P*] you mention football stadiums? It would be even more common to buy such photos in America. But what's more geeky—collecting stadium photos or owning thousands of beer mats?

**Cuyler W "Ned" Brooks Jr**  
4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn  
GA 30047-472, USA

Much thanks for the copy of the June issue—why was it mailed from Zurich? Do you get a better rate that way? I haven't the foggiest notion what "077" of whatever they use for money in Zurich is worth. Their basic unit seems to run at about \$0.66, so if "077" means 0.77 then you mailed something by air mail across the Atlantic for about 50 cents—a good deal, but what did it cost to get to Zurich? [*It goes by courier.*]



I just had a letter from an Argentine fan who says he cannot pub his ish because the Argentine postal service no longer has an overseas surface rate. He would have to pay high airmail rates for all overseas copies. He says Spain—where he sends a lot of copies, as the zine is in Spanish—has done something similar.

**Robert J Newman**  
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Surrey, CR0 1AH

“Live in Croydon once, but leave before you start talking Goat”? I’ve been living in Croydon for 35 years and I haven’t started talking Goat yet. Try turning up at a Croydon SF Group meeting and making a “talking Goat” reference and half the people there won’t know what you’re talking about.

**E B Frohvet**  
4725 Dorsey Hall Drive, Box  
#A-700, Ellicott City, MD 21042  
Marianne is a cutie. If I had been voting in the FAAN awards I would have nominated her for “Best New Fanzine Fan”. However, no one saw fit to send me a ballot. A mere oversight, presumably.

Just out of curiosity, do you actually read my fanzine. I know it’s not the sort of thing you’re interested in, but do you look at it, or just straight into the recycle bin? [*Yes, we just don’t write locs, as we’re too busy writing bollocks.*]

**Joseph Nicholas**  
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Tottenham, London N15 4JU

Many thanks for your latest issue. Can I claim whatever fabulous prize may be available for being the first to spot the deliberate mistake of reversing the picture of Buck Coulson in response to Murray Moore’s letter?

[*Actually, the picture is fine. Murray Moore is reversed.*]

Oh poot, there isn’t a prize. (Besides, I’m probably not the first to have spotted the mistake.)

**John D. Berry**  
jberry@mail.interport.net  
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NY 11215, USA

Sitting here in the sweltering tropical heat of a New York summer, trying to stay in a direct line with the electric fan, listening to the doo-wop tape I picked up last month at a street fair in the West Village, while making vague swipes at the piles of accumulated stuff obscuring all surfaces of the livingroom—god, there’s sweat on everything; no, that’s me—and what do I turn up but the most recent issue of *Plokta*, which arrived not all that long ago. Can’t think of anything more intelligent to do (more sweat! more doo-wop!) than write you at least a little note of comment.

Where would I be without British fanzines? I owe every bit of UK slang I know to a careful perusal of the island kingdom’s fanzines, starting I guess with the youthful Ratfan zines from Roy Kettle and Greg Pickersgill in the early ’70s. Well, yes, I knew what “fuck” meant—though none of the earlier UK fanzines would have enlightened me if I hadn’t. But without having already familiarized myself with the style of the Divine Greg, I would never recognized the slang that formed so much of the language in *Ridley Walker*—much less realized that this “future” language was, apart from the spelling, only about six months ahead of us. (On second thought, strike that about the spelling.)

OK, you’re the beneficiaries of a remark that could have been directed to any of several current fanzines from the UK. But I’m curious: do you have any idea just how the word “sad” came to have its current British slang meaning? It doesn’t have it in the US: “sad” simply means unhappy, and it describes a person’s state of mind, rather than being a comment upon it. In this country, you might describe an anorak-wearing trainspotter’s situation as sad (though note that neither

anoraks nor trainspotting have much currency here, at least until the movie), but you wouldn’t apply the adjective to the person. “Pathetic,” perhaps. “Sadly geeky,” in the context of Steve Davies’ computer-fair adventure. But not sad.

In which, by the way, I loved the apt description of a “blokes’ crêche,” even if—again!—neither word is part of American English, and you put the wrong accent over the “e” in “crêche.” (Well, there is an American crêche, but it has to do with Christmas decorations.) [*Neither our spellchecker nor our French dictionary agree with you.*]

**John Berry**  
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Herts AL10 8JU

My wife and I have just returned from a weekend in Salzburg to celebrate our fiftieth wedding anniversary. Friends suggested it was going to be a second honeymoon—I officially deny this—I strained my back carrying the heavy luggage, honest. The only utterly incongruous aspect was that a short distance from Mozart’s Birthplace was McDonalds. Most of the people crowding round the Birthplace were Japanese, as I suspect they were the only ones who could afford the entrance fee. We also travelled to Berchtesgaden on a rainy day...the only thing that amazed me was that when any of the locals spoke to us it was always in English...they didn’t enquire as to our nationality...I guess it was the rolled umbrella and white linen trilby hat which gave them the clues.

**SMS**  
101 Belfield Lane, Newbold,  
Rochdale

Dear Tamigotchis of the Gods

Herewith: Summatt for *Plokta*. In line with your perfectly understandable and laudable interest in Dolly, and her mysterious Aged Condition: (A condition that all sensible folk knew was impossible and only very sad, unrealistic SF fans

would have thought of it, due to Ray Bradbury stories).

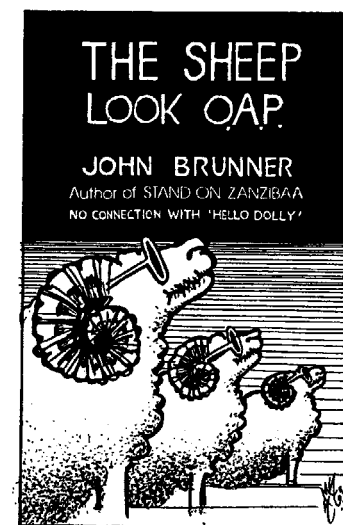
Oil!—this stuff you wrote in the Editorial last *Plokta*. “As a professional artist, SMS has come to have certain expectations about how mags will treat his artwork, wishing to fulfil those expectations, we have been careful to take diabolical liberties without consultation.”—Bollocks! *Real Promags*, when they reverse the image so it fits in with the layout do *not*, repeat: *NOT* reverse the artist’s signature so it’s *still* the right way round! *Real Promags* don’t give a bloody toss!

Still:- Brave try kids!

PS: Eira said:- “LoCs’...? Oh, does that mean letters of comment?! Does that mean they want us to write to them?”

Reassuring, isn’t it?

PPS: I forget *which* Ray Bradbury story it was that involved a cloned kid that was dying of old age....



**Brad W Foster**  
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TX 75016, USA

Go to the very end of “Shopping Habits of the Camirol” to find a comment hook. No matter how hard people try to believe that the more bells and whistles they hang around a product the better it will sell, you still have to offer me a product I want. I too can appreciate the over-the-top presentations, but that

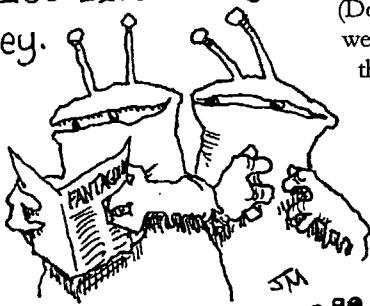


would have no effect on me buying anything. Steve wanted to buy the stuff offered at the computer fair, he didn't want to buy anything at the mall. That's all. I love a fancy bookstore with beautiful shelving and thick carpets and big comfy chairs and perfectly arranged displays...but I'll also dive headlong into a dusty cardboard box of books left outside the store door. It's the books I want, the ambience is just, well, *there*...

**Dr Plokta**  
*Plokta Central, Somewhere beneath Milton Keynes*

Alison, you say at the beginning of the Toucan article that you're "teaching my daughter about the nature of irrevocable loss and grief." Does this mean that if one of her grandparents should die, you're going to get Peter Wareham to buy her an exact duplicate a month later?

This isn't a real  
Earth fanzine: there's  
no Loc from Lloyd  
Penney.



SM  
1-13-99

**Lloyd Penney**  
Yvonne\_Penney@email.  
whirlpool.com  
1706-24 Eva Rd. Etobicoke,  
ON CANADA M9C 2B2

Congratulations on your Hugo nomination, but so determined are you that you're going to lose it...I may have wasted my valuable vote by putting a number 1 beside your title! Hmmp! Hope you get it anyway...the huge concentration of Hugos in and around the Langford household is causing rents in the space-time continuum.

[Unfortunately, Steve and Giulia also live in Reading, within Langford's Schwarzschild radius.]

Thank Ghu piercings haven't gone any further in fandom

than the traditional earlobes (and that's just the guys). In the trendier parts of Toronto some people have pierced themselves to such a degree, the words "Swiss cheese" and "colander" come to mind. One fanzine I received in the mail recently described piercings of the wobbly bits and further beneath...another shiver. I think I know why fans don't pierce themselves like that...with the way we travel, who wants to set off the metal detector at the airport, and then have to explain what caused it?

If the 2Kon folks are heartily sick of toucans, you might want to send them to the Cancun in 2003 Worldcon bid. The toucan is their mascot, too. Meanwhile, the Toronto in 2003 bid is getting maximum mileage out of having a beaver as a mascot...we've actually heard from pre-supporters a couple of lines we hadn't heard

before. Otherwise, all beaver lines are taken and overused. (Doesn't mean to say we don't want to hear them, though...and any new ones will be gratefully received and passed along.) Hey, maybe Marianne's toucan flew off to Cancun....

**Alan Sullivan**  
30 Ash Road, Stratford  
London, E15 1HL

Far too many people don't seem to appreciate literature, ideas, or intelligence, unless it involved pictures of naked women with big breasts (and possibly a chainsaw, a big gun, or similar weapon of destruction)... I am very sick, and very sad, and too damn' old to care about what other people think... I like your "Bollocks" side-bars, by the way—very *Fortean Times*...

*A Beginner's Guide*... (Alison Scott): Well, I can't say I understand the appeal of piercing (having a very, very strong aversion to needles and

the like) but I can kind of understand the self-expression aspect. Naturally your mother was appalled. That's what mothers are for. Take comfort from the fact that you can still appal her, even though you are no longer a teenager... I'm a great believer in the indulgence of whims. Sadly, I never seem to have the money to indulge as often as I would like. Such is life....

"...And I Would Like To Spank..." (Alison Scott): Strookable clothing seems to be very popular in fannish circles. I must remember to check out a few of these Goth places that do such things.

*Shopping Habits Of The Camiroi* (Steve Davies): Shopping malls like computer fairs? Nah, it'd never happen. For a start off, it would mean shops trying to sell things cheaper than you can buy them elsewhere (very unlikely, considering that the all supermarkets seem to have agreed to have only a few pence variation in price between companies). They'd also have to have all their wares on display, and allow the customers to examine the goods, rather than having to content themselves with examining the uninformative (and in many cases, misleading) packaging. They'd never do it. Well, almost certainly never, unless they figured they could charge the customers over and above, for the "enhanced retail experience"....

*Letters*...: I can understand all of those Abbott-alikes, with the possible exception of Eric Idle (usually seen clean shaven, except in *Life of Brian*, as far as I can remember) and the definite exception of Tobes Valois. Tobes is unique and unmistakable (perhaps a future issue of *Plokta* could feature a Tobes cover—or if they're feeling really brave, a Tobes centrefold)...

*Vijay Pulls It Off* (Alison Scott): I refuse to make the obvious comment. Lead me not into temptation—I'm getting there quite fast enough, by my own means as it is... By the way, when is Ian Sorensen

producing the musical revue of this title in the manner of the dubious school girl related show *Daisy Pulls It Off*...? The black tights with white trainers question? The answer's no, surely (Don't do old Zucker Brothers gags. Especially as my name's not Shirley—Ed).

[Actually, this alleged editorial comment was part of Alan's loc, and not written by—Ed]

*Everybody's Free*... (Steven Cain): I'm not sure Tobes knows how to do that particular American dance....

*Mind The Gap* (Alison Scott & Avram Grumer): Oh yes, indeed. When it comes to the tubes/subways of this planet, there is a certain feeling if unreality inherent in the whole thing. Not so much *Mind The Gap* as *Mind The Tube System According To Garp*. Or even *Mind The Gump*.

**Jackie Duckhawk**  
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CB1 4PB

Hi, and thanks very much for *Plokta*, which was a very cheerful thing to receive while stuck in hospital (again!).

Does the source code for Marianne include potty training as shareware? If so can we download it please.

For Katherine the great loss of her life was her Butterfly Cup, a fairly ordinary toddler drinking cup which she dropped somewhere on a long shopping trip. I retraced my steps for as many shops as I could face...

I am told that spontaneity of life improves again when ones children get older, in particular when they are all out of nappies (source 1) or when they can all put their own coats on (source 2).

**Helen McCarthy**  
helen@ironfish.demon.co.uk  
147 Francis Road, Leyton,  
London

The picture of Sue is sweet, but misinterpreted. She was trying a yoga pose known as the Lucky Cow, but we didn't have a Japanese boy handy to make sure her hips were



properly turned out. (Very necessary, as Sue will doubtless confirm.) I've got a great photo of me doing the Cobra; my hands are slightly offline, but yoga technique has never been my strong point. [GIF! GIF!]

Still on photos, Vijay Bowen is the closest thing I've seen (apart from Rutger Hauer of course) to an acceptable substitute for chocolate. Loved those shiny tights. And Joseph Nicholas made the right fashion choice for white trainers—black opaque tights are OK, sheers would have been too tacky. There's a fine line between witty comment on the Essex girl look and actually being mistaken for one.

I liked Alison's piece on whims. I think it might be a childcare thing that cuts back on the impulsiveness reflex, because everything to do with children involves some planning—even if it's only "who can we dump them on next?"—that crafty move with Sue, Giulia and the shopping mall didn't pass unnoticed! Also, whimsicality isn't an unmixed blessing—it gets you very funny looks, and can even get you banned. There's a Woolies that bans anyone unwise enough to get into a fight with a seven year old girl over who gets a Barbie crying out to be fetish-dressed.

**Jerry Kaufman**  
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WA 98125, USA

No, really, I thought you'd be amused. I didn't really think the "Nepalese Good Luck Tantra Totem" would change your life (that's down to you), but I liked the series of statements it contained, folk wisdom like that "Kurt Vonnegut" speech you parody on your back cover. Besides, anything that includes Tantra in its title must be good.

Good job on reproducing Mae Strelkov's artwork. Despite doing it in black & white, you've still managed to suggest the delicacy of her work. We've gotten some of her

originals recently, too, and I know how difficult it must have been for you to work with it.

**Robert Lichtman**  
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I must give specific egoboo for the fanzine review haikus and the article on the secret life of Capt. Birdseye in Vol. 3, No. 3-1/2. To Vicki Rosenzweig's "Thousand Year Itch" and Alison's "Common People" in Vol. 4, No. 1. (And of the latter piece, I'm sure some other old-timey fan has already told you this, but if Surbiton does not exist then how did the late Ethel Lindsay live there? I have several dozen issues of her fanzine, *Scottisbe*, published from "Courage House, 6 Langley Avenue, Surbiton, Surrey," through 1978 when she relocated to Carnoustie in Scotland.) And in No. 4, No. 2, I loved the cover, Marianne's Linux logo, and Alison's account of Marianne's Eastercon aviary adventures. And special thanks for the photos of Vijay Bowen and Joseph Nicholas on page 13—I'm undecided who has "better" legs. Too bad I missed *H4A*; when I get back to work I'll have to look it up on the Web.

**Mae Strelkov**  
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Juyuy, Argentina

I'm sending some bird and animal pictures enclosed to Marianne. She looks sad in the June issue with a Linux badge on her forehead. She must be telepathic and knows that "that great mob of silly grownups" is trying to subvert her inborn common sense. I went through "brain-control" at her age in another fashion. All the grownups around me singing gospel hymns at the tops of their voices while wondering, "Is this sweet little child born to be lost?" I seemed so "naughty-looking" though I behaved "good".

Clones don't work out well, I've read. Clones of Dolly the Sheep turn out to be her age, no younger. (Clone me and

you'll get a second disapproving *great* grandma, approaching the tottering age).

I don't mourn for vanished fellow fans like our good Buck Coulson. You see, willy-nilly, I expect to meet him and all of us in the bleeding choir invisible. (Save Sue's butterfly, that has migrated here to celebrate Spring ahead and fill our garden with nasty caterpillars.)

I've been scolded by a fan for "pushing around gobs of acrylic with a brush"—I used *oils*—instead of getting back to hectography. My attempts to turn crystal dyes into hectopaints failed, lately.

"It turns out Lego's going to have USB support before Windows NT"

**Sue Jones**  
89 Sutton Road  
Shrewsbury, SY2 6ED

What impressed me most about your Hugo Nomination Special?

- 1) The brilliant way that SMS picture has turned out in black and white? Having seen the original in the art show at Easter, I would have expected it to lose a lot of its impact along with the colour. It hasn't.
- 2) The usual combination of the silly, funny and thought provoking among the articles and fillers, the tidy layout, good use of illos, etc., etc.?
- 3) The purple staples? I think it was 3) by a short head.

Now unravel a mystery for me. I wanted to send Kevon a picture of Giulia. (Kev's interest having been aroused by learning he's no longer the only Tasmanian reading *Tortoise*, he expressed a wish to see what the other one looked like. *Plokta* being the obvious place to search, I found a shot among the wedding photos in the issue you gave me at Novacon. Not terribly clear, but 'twould do. Duly photocopied and posted off, with the explanation that the

person standing on Giulia's right was Sue Mason.

Giulia is half hidden in the other mass photo on page 5, but I couldn't help noticing that the person on Giulia's right is Sue Mason. Is a patter starting to emerge here? I wondered.

And there's Giulia, I think, in the background of the picture of Guy Dawson, and there's someone's arm on her right, could it be...?

There's Sue *on her own* on page 6, but that picture is cropped *very close* on her left side....

All this makes me wonder. *Plokta* enjoys giving us those "separated at birth" photo comparisons. Is a reverse effect in progress here? Are Sue and Giulia gradually merging? Will they end up as Siamese twins in a few issues' time?

**Kim Huett**  
PO Box 679, Woden, ACT 2606,  
Australia

I knew my new home was in a better part of town. If nothing else, the emu, kangaroo and crocodile meat for sale at the butchers is a hint. So is the goat milk at the supermarket. My last place was lucky to have the regular stuff let alone anything else. To top it off the supermarket was sold right out of cumin today and that's an upperclass thing for a supermarket to run out of if you ask me.

**WAHF:**

**Patrick Lawford** (pathetic pleading to be kept on the *Plokta* mailing list), **David B Wake** ("You receive lots of fanzines, don't you?"), **Bill Bowers** ("Outworlds, I hope, will see the light of print by the end of July"), **Ken Cheslin** ("I hope to send out more pubs as trades ASAP"), **Harry Andruschak** ("I wonder if I should pretend to be Jewish so as to be able to wear a skull cap"), and **Alasdair Hepburn** ("If you know anyone who wants to be added to my hall of shamelessness, then let me know.").

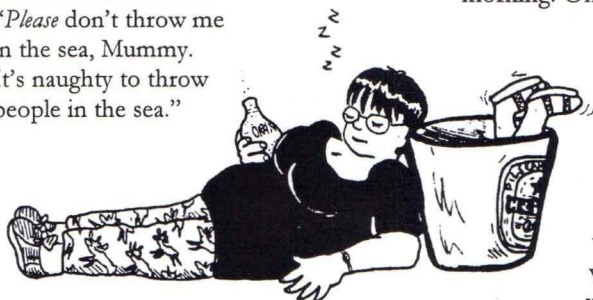


## Scenes From an Eclipse

WE DIDN'T HAVE a cabin on the ferry going over to France. Neither did most of the other people travelling, as far as we could tell. The tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free were kipping down in sleeping bags all over the boat, dreaming of a better life. Or at least a family holiday in an overpriced resort somewhere on the continent. So we went off to lay out our sleeping bags on a spare piece of ship.

Two of us lay down, thought how remarkably comfortable this was, and settled down to sleep soundly through the night. The third thought that it would be more fun to run around the ship shouting a lot for several hours. As Steven was driving the following day, I drew the short straw.

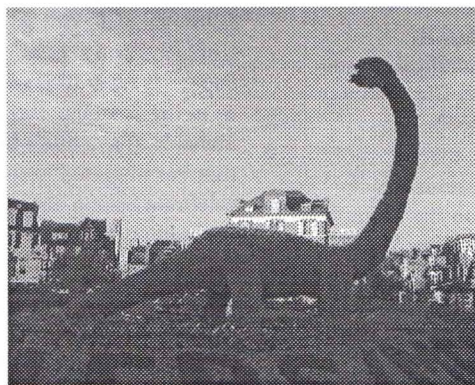
I confess I didn't score many points in the Patient Mummy award that night. Marianne was threatened with all manner of unreasonable horrors if she didn't shut up and go to sleep. And she didn't. At one memorable moment Marianne turned to me and said "Please don't throw me in the sea, Mummy. It's naughty to throw people in the sea."



We wandered all round the ship searching for somewhere quiet and dark. I suppose I had hoped that Marianne would wear herself out with walking and fall asleep. But the ship was bright, and there were people trying to sleep all over. The only dark spot was the bar. But it had a disco. I tried to buy Marianne some milk, but they only had proper drinks. So I got Marianne an Orangina, and me a bucket of Heineken. Maybe that should have been the other way around.

Eventually I found a quiet piece of corridor near the first class cabins, and finally persuaded Marianne to settle down to sleep at about quarter to five in the morning. At half-past five they woke us up because we were getting into port.

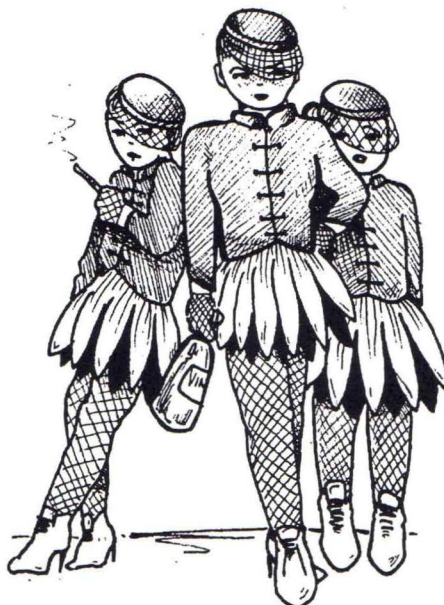
The plan had been to go and look at some of the beach towns in the morning. Unfortunately, our beach babe spent the entire morning comatose after her nocturnal excesses. So we just had to stalk the topiary brontosaurus at Villers-sur-Mer instead.



Travelling south to Normandy's cheese country, we arrived at our gîte, and waited for the other two cars full of fans, who we were expecting any minute. After some hours, Anne Wilson, Michael Abbott, Lilian Edwards and Christina Lake turned up. "We were a bit worried about Naomi, Austin and Caro," they explained. "We couldn't spot them on the ferry." It emerged that the plan had been that Naomi would pick up Austin & Caro from Cambridge at nine in the morning. Once we knew they'd missed

their ferry, we generally agreed this had been a rather poor plan. They eventually rolled in at three a.m.

Livarot was a good place to visit in eclipse week, because it was also the weekend of their cheese and wine festival. There was an infinite amount of each of these, much of which we bought. We also bought lots of cider and perry. The highlight of the festival was a dance routine by an entire case of red wine fairies.



In the UK we have majorettes, in America they have cheerleaders, and in Livarot they train their little girls to be *fées du vin rouge*. Being France, the older ones looked like tarts, while the younger ones stood around looking sulky.

We argued at length about the proper planning for the day of the eclipse. The gîte was about thirty miles south of the zone of totality, so we would have to drive north. We were divided into those who wanted to get up very early, or possibly even go the night before and sleep in the cars, and those who thought that seeing an eclipse sounded all right if it wasn't too much trouble. Eventually we compromised on getting up at five-thirty and leaving at six. We were worried that heavy traffic might cause the cars to become separated. So following the example of Julius Caesar, we divided the cider into three parts. We discussed the possibility of sacrificing a virgin to guarantee clear skies, but our virgin was busy feeding the ducks.



*It doesn't look 3-D to me*

Synchronising our watches, we left the gîte in darkness and headed for the Forêt de Brotonne—the only substantial area in the zone of totality south of the Seine. We were worried the bridges would be blocked. In the event, both other cars on the road clearly thought so too, and we arrived comfortably in eclipse country by eight a.m.

So we sat in the countryside and waited; watched the sun wane gradually, wondered if the clouds would clear. In the end it wasn't clear, but it was clear enough to see the disk of the moon and the corona behind it. Once the eclipse was over, we could relax and enjoy the rest of our holiday. So we did. We hung around on beaches rather better than Bracknell, read trashy novels, watched Marianne on the bouncy castle and made offerings to the Sun god.

—Alison Scott