

HARRY PLOKTA

and the Blue Screen of Death



J.R. HARTLEY

WALTHAMSTOW

This is issue 20 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 (copies to each of our addresses please), contribution, editorial whim, or in exchange for live Hugo ceremony feeds.

A special apology to Lilian, who sensibly e-mailed us to warn us that she and Victor were no longer an item, so we might not want to make any crass jokes in this issue. Sadly, we couldn't resist.

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The cabal also includes Giulia De Cesare, Sue Mason, George the cat, Marianne Cain and Steven Cain. But we expect it to have a new member next issue.

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RIP: Joe Mayhew died, only a short while after sending us more fillos and letters. It's a rotten shame.

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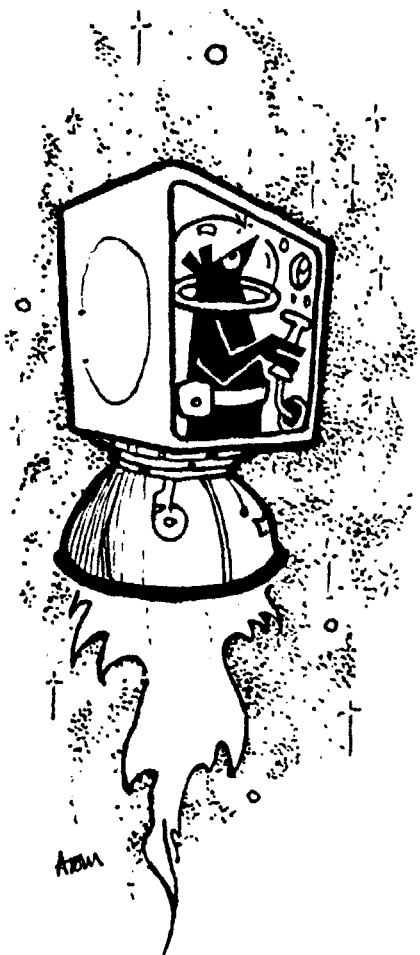
Plokta captures the Historical Perspective



⑤ Victor spent most of the con in bed with an embarrassing itch

Editorial

PEOPLE SEEM to have enjoyed <plokta.con>, but very few of them have answered our plea for them to send us con reports and photos. So we've just had to make various stuff up; you can see it elsewhere in the issue.



Alison is incredibly pregnant, and is waddling around like an unusually demanding arthritic penguin [*So, no change there, then*]. She assures us that she is unlikely to deebble before we finish the fanzine, though her midwife was slightly concerned to hear she was planning to travel as far afield as Reading.

Please say hello to Sue if you spot her on her TAFF trip. She'll be in the US from 18 August to September, and is planning to hit the fannish epicentres of San Francisco, Seattle, Minneapolis, Chicago and New York. Steve, Giulia and Mike will also be at Chicon, and Alison is sulking.

Last issue's CD-Rom caused great shockwaves to roll through fandom, with no less a personage than Arnie Katz describing it as "a milestone in the history of fanzine fandom" and all manner of people sending us email to explain that they had never realised that you could look for files using Windows Explorer. Sue, for example, accessed the entire thing through Word, causing Dr Plokta to suffer explosive decompression.

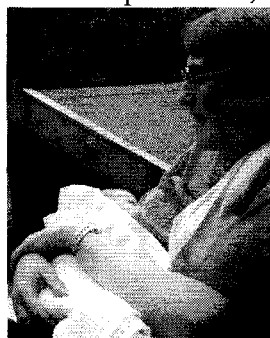
Lots of people wrote to us to tell us how much they liked the CD-Rom; almost as many as wrote to say they couldn't make it work on their machine, in fact. Carl Juarez has a tip for Mac owners to help them cope with the long file names: "There is a freeware download at <<http://www.tempel.org/joliet/>> that extends the Mac OS to handle the disk correctly. It's pretty small, and all you really need is the extension, called "Joliet Volume Access". Just drop it on your System Folder (or equivalent) and reboot, and the *Plokta* CD-Rom will be five times as graceful and easier to use."

The CD Rom contains lots of good stuff, including archives of art by ATom and Sue Mason, which are free for use in your fanzine (see left) provided you send copies to Olive Thomson or Sue Mason respectively. (Addresses on the CD Rom).

Team *Plokta* continues to rack up units at SETI@home, despite the project not having found anything more exciting than the radio equivalent of an old boot. Marcus Rowland provides his take on the entire SETI phenomenon later in the issue. Meanwhile, Dr Plokta, with a good grasp of what is really important, informs us that if we all just gird our loins and pay a bit more attention to Team *Plokta's* totals, we have a sporting chance of making it into the "Top 200 Clubs" listing. So, if you haven't yet added your units to the *Plokta* cause, please join in the fun.

We're all a bit interested in the future at the moment. You know, "What sex is the baby going to be?"¹ "Are we going to win the Hugo?"² "When's the next paycheck coming in?"³ Anyway, this issue we're asking you to make fools of yourselves by suggesting dates for when we'll have actually have wacky way-out sci-fi concepts like space travel, electric calculating machines and a left-wing government.

Finally, some good news for a change. Caroline Mullan managed to avoid going into labour at <plokta.con>, but has now had a



baby girl, Meriol Jessie van Ameringen. Like most small babies, she mostly seems to eat and sleep; we wonder whether she ought to join the cabal.

¹ Other

² No

³ Next Tuesday

BOLLOCKS

Tits for Tobes #1

So, there we were at the Scandinavian room party at <plokta.con>. The yoghurt and rum cocktails were flowing like, well, nasty curdled stuff, and suddenly Tobes announced that he was going to put on a dress. Not for TAFF or anything, but just because he quite fancied wearing a dress. An appeal produced a suitable mini red and black number from Alison Freebairn, and a quick strip saw Tobes follow in the footsteps of such luminaries as Tommy Ferguson and, well, Tommy Ferguson (again).

But there was something missing. We couldn't quite put our finger on it. Tobes seemed to be rather lacking in the cleavage department. Various solutions were suggested, ranging from Wonderbras to gaffer tape. But through the wonders of technology, we've gone for the virtual bust enhancement.



Don't fancy yours much, Anders

BOLLOCKS

The Hills are Alight

Leather Goddesses of Academia (4)



HAVE YOU ever realised the extent to which various cultures brainwash their children? Thirty years on, I still react to some pretty intensive brainwashing I received during my formative years in Tasmania.

During the recent heat wave, I sat threading beads by an open window, feeling the hot, dry air blow over me. I became increasingly restive—there was something I should be doing, now, what was it? Something to do with the combination of hot weather and a dry, strong wind.

Yes: I should be filling the bathtub and all other available receptacles with water, that's what it was. Furthermore, I should be checking that there wasn't any long, dry grass anywhere near the house, getting the garden hoses connected to the outside taps, turning off electrical equipment and pulling the plugs out of the sockets. Also, I should close all the windows and doors, making sure no pets or children were inside. I think that was all. At some point you had to be ready to start hosing down the outside walls of the house or any wooden fences.

Damp, muggy heat—not a problem. Hot, still, dry days—you start getting slightly twitchy. But a hot, dry, windy day and all your internal alarm bells ring, when you're a Tasmanian Junior Fire Ranger.

The British live in a country that is basically damp. If Christianity had formed in England, hell would be soggy. Tasmania is not soggy. All those lovely, damp clouds

blow in from the ocean, hit the mountain ranges on the west of the island and drop their loads. The lovely rain runs down the mountains and back into the sea. The now-unencumbered, light, fluffy clouds then head east where all the people and crops and sheep are, manage the occasional little dribble and float gaily out to sea.

A notable exception was the summer I first took Steve home to meet my parents. "Will we need waterproofs?" he asked me anxiously when we were packing. "Does the pope need contraceptives?" I replied.

We had so much rain that roads were closed due to landslides and the Midlands resembled a rice paddy. Presumably, the pope gave birth secretly and had the child adopted. A few years later, when more normal weather patterns had reasserted themselves, Steve's father, who had lived in Lebanon, India and Arabia, was to fly over the Midlands and remark that it looked like a desert.

After a couple of dry years, the ground cracks open, you can drive along river beds and farmers shoot their sheep because it's kinder than letting them die of thirst and starvation. My mother tells me that '99 has been one of these years.

Spectacular sunsets are admired in England. In Tassie a colourful sunset is a bad sign—it means there's smoke in the air. (Red sky at night: sheep are alight.) Here, they're normal as the air is so polluted.

Tasmania was the first place to have its very own hole in the ozone layer and the first place in the world to ban aerosols. It rather focuses your thoughts when you and all your belongings are under a blazing hot sun, surrounded by miles of tinder-dry vegetation with a high content of eucalyptus oil. The critical word here is oil. Australian vegetation

Thanks to Steve Green for coming up with a luvverly picture of Dr KL Maund winning the Best Costume made entirely from a trampoline" award at Intersection.

Spooks Beware

In a move guaranteed to strike fear into high-level government espionage organisations the world over, Dr Plokta has joined their ranks, gone to the dark side and become a spy. So, how do we know this, given that one of the conditions of being a spy is that nobody's supposed to know you are one? Well, it was a bit of a give-away, really: yesterday he went through what is surely the classical secret agent rite of passage and left his laptop on the train.

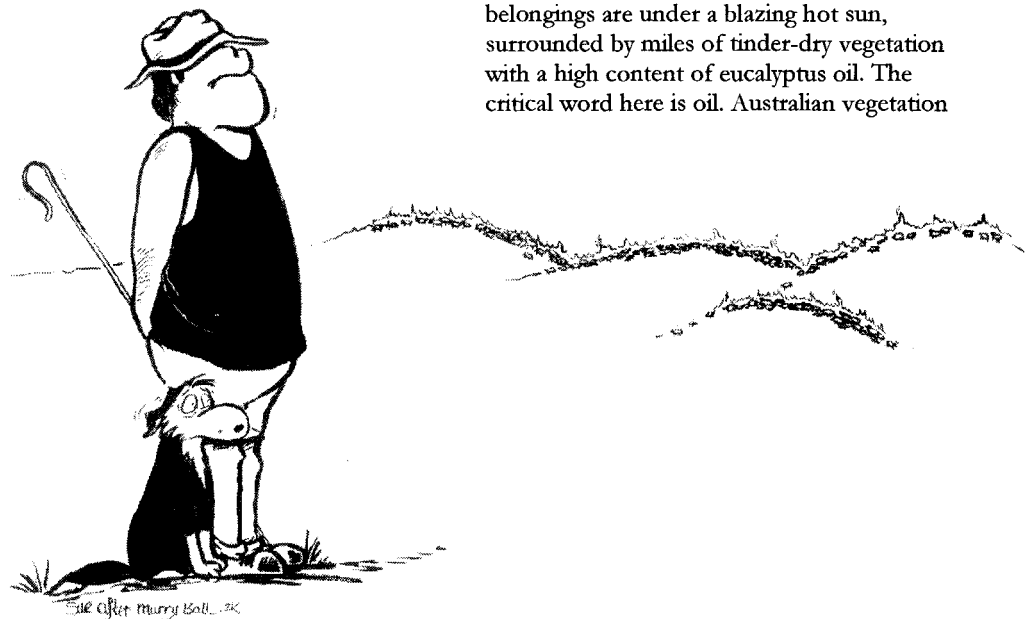
This caused great consternation at *Plokta Central*, as we thought about all those top secret files about our plans for world domination byte by byte. But some nice person has apparently handed it in.

So that's all right then.

Spooks Beware #2

Actually, Dr Plokta is a spy, story one above notwithstanding. How do we know? He's had an offer accepted on a nice 2-bedroom flat in, well, um, er, how can we put this?

Croydon.



spontaneously combusts under the right conditions, and some types of seeds don't germinate until they've actually been roasted. In the heat of a fire, a big gum tree won't just catch alight with a nice slow burn—it will explode, shooting burning shrapnel for hundreds of yards.

"It's all obscure islands in the Southern Hemisphere; what difference does it make?"

In February of 1967, with temperatures of 110° F, Tasmania suffered a huge bushfire of disastrous proportions. Most of the south of the island was burning at one point. I was nine and I no longer remember how many people or animals died. Thousands of houses were destroyed. At school that afternoon we were evacuated from the buildings and sent out to sit on the football ground. Smoke made it as dark as late evening, we could see cinders and ash in the air and the red glow on the surrounding hillsides. Some of us weren't allowed home until very late.

My family's weatherboard house had caught fire but had been put out—adults had been sent home from work to try to save their houses. I remember blistered paint and rooms full of soot. The wooden fences were gone, a neighbour had let out the hens but had not known about our pet rabbit in its box in the other end of the chicken coop. We told ourselves that the poor little sod would have suffocated first.

To this day the countryside is dotted with the remainders of homes less lucky: a brick hearth and chimney is all that is left of many little wooden houses which burned that day. You can still drive up Mount Wellington and see blackened trunks, only some of which have grown back. No other fire before or since has travelled so high up the cooler, more temperate sides of the mountain.

The government decided that such a thing should never happen again. Laws were passed specifying stringent control of dry vegetation near houses, firebreaks were bulldozed in the bush, every tiny little hamlet built a big, serious fire station with proper shiny red trucks and all the men trained as volunteer fire fighters.

"Just makin' trouble for the VFD"

Fire prevention officers regularly visited schools and drilled children in bush fire avoidance and survival. Not all of what I

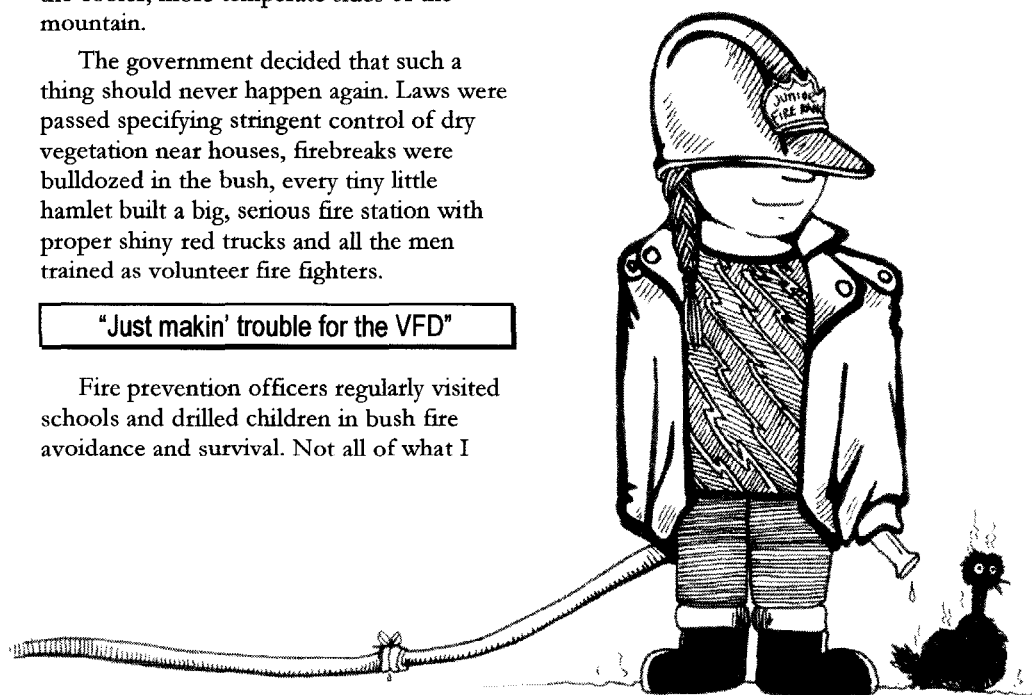
learned has stuck: for instance if you were in a car and got caught in a fire which you couldn't out-run—fanned by a strong wind, a fire can move amazingly fast—you had to get out of the car because the petrol tank would explode. But I don't remember what the heck you had to do when you were out of the car and surrounded by fire with no handy waterhole to jump into: baste yourself in a light vegetable oil or barbecue sauce, maybe, and just lie there thinking of your ancestors.

I think the main aim of these talks was really to stop us little buggers playing with matches while we smoked behind the bike shed. A secondary effect was to turn a generation of wide-eyed moppets into merciless junior informers, telling on anyone such as neighbours or parents who threw a lighted fag out of a car window or let the weeds grow too long near the back of the house. At the end of the fire prevention officers' talks, they distributed rather nice badges, and I wore mine with pride for years.



Tasmanians weren't the only people to brainwash their children, though, and I bet what I learned was more useful than "duck and cover."

—Giulia De Cesare



BOLLOCKS

Tits for Tobes #2

Well, we thought that <plokta.con> was a fun little convention. But let's face it, we just don't do desperate fun like the youth of today. A few weeks afterwards, we were completely overshadowed by Aliens Stole My Handbag, possibly the only SF convention ever to feature live action nipple piercing on the main programme. The willing volunteer was (surprise, surprise) Tobes, who was not only game but also set and match. In fact, the piercing harpies lovelies had to talk him out of having both nipples pierced at once.



Scalpel, forceps, 42D cup

"Oops, sorry, wrong Steve"

Bill Gates sometimes plays with himself

Meanwhile, Microsoft goes from strength to strength. We've been noticing the way in which the Microsoft Knowledge Base is getting increasingly bizarre, with article headers such as

"Sometimes Barney starts playing Peekaboo on his own", "Earth Rotates in Wrong Direction",

"Selecting Blendolini causes Choco-Banana Shake Hang", and, our favourite, that under certain conditions, your computer will randomly play *Für Elise* or (worse) *It's a Small World*.

Meanwhile, we understand that the various American denizens of rec.arts.sf.fandom are planning to go into the polling booths in November and vote for Gore, holding their noses and muttering under their breath "Supreme Court, Supreme Court, Supreme Court". We reckon that they would do better to vote for Gore while muttering under their breath "Microsoft, Microsoft, Microsoft".

Calling Occupants of Interplanetary Craft

I'VE JUST completed my fiftieth unit for SETI at Home, the project for distributed processing of radio-telescope data and recognition of alien signals, representing several thousand hours of processing on the pile of guano I laughingly call a computer. I note from the letter column that the assembled superfluous technology of *Plokta* has just passed the 10,000-unit mark. And have we received a single alien message yet? Have we hell!

Things were different in the good old days. You pointed your radio telescope at the stars, spent a few weeks decoding messages, then got the parts list for an Interossitor, a death threat ("Eat hot plutonium death you disgusting alien weirdos"), a cry of "Uuuulllllaaaahh", a request ("Mars needs women..."), alien religious propaganda, fraternal socialist greetings, or the secrets of FTL travel or immortality. If you were *really* lucky you got the plans for a computer that would build you Julie Christie (or Susan Hampshire in the sequel). If you were *really unlucky* the aliens would tell you how to build a gizmo that fried your brains, but hey, what would happen to the challenge of science if every experiment was a hundred percent safe?

Obviously there is something wrong with our methods. I've made an extensive study of the literature (and the films and the comics), and it seems certain that there are some basic shortcomings in the equipment we now use for SETI experiments and for the analysis of data afterwards.

First and foremost, where are the Jacob's Ladders? No self-respecting SETI project of the 1950s was complete without a few of these gizmos—basically, a couple of antennae that have a stream of huge high-frequency sparks rising between them. Perhaps the signals they put out happen to be the equivalent of a "Come and eat us" message in alien languages, or work like pheromones. Whatever, it's apparent that they are one of the keys to successful alien contact. Vacuum tubes may be another key, but this is less certain.

Second, where are the white coats and laboratory glassware? When was the last time you saw an expert on SETI wearing a lab coat, let alone drinking from a flask of bubbling green slime? The traditional SETI professor was a polymath, able to deduce the formula of an exotic chemical, extract an alien spleen, or translate binary to base 13 without using his fingers, active in at

least four or five different fields of science. These days everyone seems to spend all their time in offices hunched over computers. Why should aliens respect scientists with such limited capabilities? Why should they talk to someone they don't respect?

Third, the typical modern computer is a boring box, singularly lacking in dials, knobs, reels of punched cards and tape, flashing lights, teleprinter terminals, and other 1950s goodies. Why should aliens want to talk to people with such an appalling lack of design aesthetics?

"It's wicked and evil, but it might just work"

Fourth, it seems unlikely that many of the scientists currently active in SETI have beautiful daughters working as their assistants. Most institutions would refuse the job application, to avoid charges of nepotism. But it is apparent that a beautiful, intelligent, and preferably surprisingly ignorant dependent is a prerequisite for success. Without her the professor can't explain the plot, aliens have nobody to kidnap, and the hero has nobody to rescue. Of course beautiful *female* scientists can manage without a daughter, if they have someone else handy for exposition purposes, but this seems to be a relatively unpopular career move.

What can be done to solve these problems and ensure successful alien contact? I propose a programme of improvements, which should together ensure that alien contact is achieved within the next few years.

Step one: All SETI ground stations must be fitted with several strategically-located Jacob's Ladder machines. If the budget for experimental equipment doesn't pay for them, it might be possible to justify them as art objects, or even as insect zappers by adding a strategically-placed ultraviolet light.

Step two: All SETI scientists must be trained in at least three totally unrelated scientific fields, possibly adding an art or business course to keep them on their toes. This should make them more interesting to aliens, and will also generate useful revenue for all of the academic institutions involved.

Step three: There is already a booming market in retro-tech motorbikes, cars, and hi-fi equipment; surely some entrepreneur can take on the design and production of appropriate retro computers. The basic requirements

seem to be a couple of reels of wildly spinning tape, a few rows of lights, and a teleprinter. Optionally add a card sorter and oscilloscope displays. These needn't necessarily be wired into the works of the computer; at the simplest level, it'd be easy to build a standard PC casing inside an outer box containing the retro components and some valves, relays and gears to control them. True connoisseurs might want to go right back to the Babbage engine, but this is probably overkill for SETI purposes.

Step four: All SETI scientists must obtain appropriately nubile daughters. Since many are unmarried, and producing appropriately nubile daughters takes at least eighteen to twenty years, it is obvious that they must be supplied by other means. The government must take the initiative and fund the placement of suitably nubile young women, to be registered as Official Scientist's Daughters; they can be drawn from the pool of unemployed school-leavers, or imported if the local supply is exhausted, and trained to ask usefully ignorant questions and make tea or coffee. To be sure of success it's probably necessary to supply them to every site involved in SETI; I'd be happy to take a couple on if offered the opportunity.



If all of these modest proposals are acted upon it seems certain that alien contact will soon be achieved; with luck by 2001, pessimistically by 2010. And (hopefully) the world will then be a better place.

—Marcus L Rowland

Your Chance to Predict the Future

IT TURNED up in the *Plokta* in-tray, so perhaps one of you sent it to us. Or perhaps it fell through a wormhole in space. Who knows? At any rate, it's an article from the January 26, 1978 issue of *Computer Weekly*, entitled "Computers to the year 2000 and beyond—a Delphic Poll". They asked 500 readers in which year various technical advances would happen, with choices all the way up to 2000, or 'never'; lopped off the top and bottom 10% for each question, and charted the spread and median for the remainder. The results are, well, instructive, though you must remember that the readers in question were mostly computer geeks.

90% thought there'd be a computer-based shopping service using domestic TV by 1990. We actually got it in 1998 (hey, we know we were using telephones and the Internet before then, but they specified domestic TV).

90% thought we'd have widespread use of pocket terminals with radio links to computer services by the year 1994; the Palm VII fits the bill in 2000. And most thought that there'd be comprehensive information on all citizens stored in a central national database by 1995; but how many realised it would be run by private market research companies rather than the Government?

90% thought that traditional magnetic memories, such as tapes and discs, would be almost completely replaced by solid state devices by 1995; we're still waiting. On the other hand, 6% thought we'd never have a hand-held computer equivalent in power to a 370/148. Sadly, not even Dr Plokta has any idea what a 370/148 might be, but we're pretty sure that Marianne has irritating toys with more processing power. And 4% thought we'd never have a 5MB store with random access time of less than 100ms available for less than £100. About 10p's worth, I should think, and it'll be half that next week.

More than 50% thought that the average working week would have reduced to 20 hours by 2000 due to advances in robotics and automation. And the majority thought that major Government decisions would be based primarily on computer modelling and predictions in the late 90s, rather than the random whims of Ministers. And it's possible to argue that we have experimented with direct connections between microprocessor and human brain or nervous system to improve human capabilities, though it's really only been successful with severely disabled people.

Anyway, after we'd had a good giggle at all of this, we thought that *Plokta* could instructively mount its own Delphic Poll.

We'd like you all to predict the dates on which the following events will happen. Dates up to 2050, or "later than 2050" or "never", please.

1. *Plokta* wins its first Nova
2. *Plokta* wins its first Hugo
3. *Plokta* gives up and goes away to sulk in a corner
4. First fan fitted with a datajack
5. First fan fitted with a datajack, spills beer all over it and has to put themselves through the dishwasher
6. Entire *Plokta* cabal relocates to Croydon
7. Entirety of Croydon fandom relocates to Reading, Walthamstow, Altrincham and Chester
8. With the majority of web servers powered by potatoes, Silicon Valley transplants to Idaho
9. Tobes has brain transplant and becomes boringly normal
10. Alcoholic laboratory rat stands for TAFF after getting all 10 nipples pierced
11. SETI@Home detects intelligent alien life from Marcus' bedroom
12. Genetic engineering allows birth of mythical beasts like unicorns, elves and whales
13. Marianne gets pregnant
14. Marianne has litter of sentient kittens
15. Human race extinct due to being supplanted by sentient kittens
16. Sentient kittens extinct due to unwillingness to open doors, tins of cat-food etc. on their own
17. Sue meets a nice elf and settles down
18. Sue taken to court by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Elves
19. First Internet re-creation society starts up
20. First re-created Internet flame war aborted after nobody can agree whether or not using an AI version of Gary Farber is in-period
21. JK Rowling turns out to be the cryogenically frozen brain of Enid Blyton
22. Dr Plokta receives the Nobel prize for physics, following the fannish takeover of Sweden
23. Worlds first bio-fanzine published (old-time electronic fandom claim it will never catch on).
24. Delphic Poll abandoned due to lack of interest

—Alison Scott et al

BOLLOCKS

Cheggers Plays Pop

The dangers of late night channel surfing. I mean, I know it was after the 9pm watershed, but still. As part of its commitment to Naturist week, Channel 5 screened *Naked Jungle*, a game show in which all the participants were stark bollock naked. Apart from their elbow and knee pads, of course. And the presenter wore nothing but a pair of dodgy sandals and a pith helmet. So, who did they get to present this marvel? Denise van Outen? Jude Law? Nope. Keith Chegwin. It was not a pretty sight.



Enough to put you off fish fingers for life, really.

Needs a Name, Vern

Alison & Steven found it quite easy to name their *first* child. When you're expecting your first child, you spend long evenings cuddling, and gazing lovingly at the bump, and looking through books of baby names. When you're expecting your *second* child, the first child keeps you far too busy for that sort of rubbish.

Luckily, the *Plokta* cabal has come to the rescue, and the difficult question of the name for the second baby Cain has been settled. If it's a boy we're calling him Hugo, and if it's a girl we're calling her Nova. Any suggestions that this is the only way we're likely to acquire a Hugo or a Nova of our very own will be roundly ignored. And we strictly reject any notion that Nova Cain is an unfortunate name for an innocent little girl.

Needs a Gantt Chart, Vern

RECENTLY I've been working on a project for our client, S, in the rural town of T. We don't want any more incidents like the unfortunate Z escapade, do we? So anyway, this project, which is intended to do I... look, it's another bloody internet portal, OK? All the downside of being in a dot.com and none of the advantages. Where was I? Oh, yes, stranded in the wilds of T.

This is my first encounter with our management consultancy arm, G. Up to now, I've always been working in the development and delivery end of the business, this is different. This is the real heart of consultancy, single-handedly carving the raw stuff of new business from the unformed protoplasm of the internet while all around the mad, blind, battle of e-commerce rages on. I'm supposed to be a technical architect, helping to define the mould that S hope to pour this new business into. Incidentally, did you know it's illegal to call yourself an architect in the UK unless you're designing buildings, and you also have to be a member of the RIBA to boot? I've never had an illegal job description before. Yes, this is my first time as a technical architect. Fortunately there are a handful of experts on the project, pointing out the true way and generally stopping me from collapsing into fits of giggles. No, must be serious, must share the values espoused by our leaders, must... hell, I don't get paid enough to be this serious. Mind you, I'm not sure I get paid enough for living away from home all week, working on an industrial estate in the middle of nowhere, starting work at 8am (it'd be earlier, but that's when the building gets unlocked) and with meetings going on past 9.30pm some nights.

Where to start? Remember when you were in kindergarten? Remember how some kids were really good at cutting out bits of paper, and doing collages, and making stuff with sticky-back plastic and so on? Remember their horror on discovering that this wasn't what school was really about? Ever wonder what happened to them? Management consultancy. No doubt about it. I reckon that G consumes something like 60% of the brown paper produced in the UK, and no, they don't wrap a lot of parcels. The walls of the office are covered with metres of brown paper. On them are stuck printouts of PowerPoint slides, charts of progress measured in every conceivable way and enough

multicoloured Post-It notes to camouflage a small African country as an entry for the Eurovision song contest. Arriving at the office means unrolling the brown paper, cutting it into sheets and sticking up the latest set of PowerPoints. Then it's into the fray, IT stream (that's us) fighting with the business stream, customer stream and other assorted water features for which of us gets to stick our sheets of brown paper over the remaining bits of uncovered wall. You know, I really never thought it was going to be like this, sneakily hiding away piles of brown paper while their owners are off in Zurich or Paris and can't complain.

It turns out it's an anagram of
'One Grimmer Alien'

Of course, this is highly skilled use of brown paper, you realise. At our rates it would have to be. One time we let the project manager stick together a few sheets and he made such a mess that he hasn't been allowed to do it again. Senior management get to play too. The other day we went into the meeting room and discovered an immense sheet of paper, covered with pictures cut from magazines. It appears that this is a modern management technique for getting in touch with how your inner child feels about various parts of the business (and no, it was mostly *Country Life*, not *Busty Babes in Leather*). Maybe I should go into the dot.com thing in a big way. I've got lots of old magazines that might come in handy.



...and here's some brown paper I made earlier

This is a very new office. Since the whole business is several months short of going live, and they're still waiting for the focus groups to come back and tell them exactly what the business ought to be, things are a bit basic. When I got here, there were just a few clusters of desks in a big open-plan office, a couple of big stuffed toys, a colour laser printer (for printing PowerPoint slides) and a table football game. The stuffed toys (a bear and a dog) are the project mascots.

The table football is apparently an essential piece of management consultant's equipment. If two people can't reach an agreement, they go and play table football, first to 10 goals, and the winner gets their way. Apparently, there's a rule that says if you lose 10-nil you have to run round the office naked, but when someone did fail to score, she decided she was an exception. Meanwhile, office furniture has been sneakily appearing. A desk here, a set of pigeon holes there, a putting green by the window. The other day I was hand-waving in the direction of my sheet of brown paper, turned around and nearly walked into a potted plant that hadn't been there when I started. The network is an artform in Cat5 cable and gaffer tape, the PCs are all ultra-thin (no grotty old CRTs here) and everyone uses mobiles because only a couple of desks have got phones on them. It's a brave new world out there. Mind you, in the way of Internet start-ups, there seems to be a change of direction at least every other day. Our new lead architect has just told me to abandon all the brown paper we just spent the last two weeks compiling. He wants to take a completely different route, so several man-weeks of work is about to hit the shredder.

It'd all be great fun, if only so many of these guys weren't quite so earnest. It's the kind of place where everyone takes going down the pub terribly seriously because (1) it's bad because it's taking you away from work, but (2) it's good because it allows for team-building, knowledge-sharing and cross-cultural interaction (not to mention a bit of hard drinking in-between). Me, I'm all for cross-cultural interaction, though perhaps not as much as a couple of members of the team who took to spending rather more time in each others' company than the corporate guidelines allow.

—Steve Davies

Lokta Plokta

Art Widner
PO Box 5122, Gualala, CA
95445, USA

Hey, all roit, Babe: Tonnes of thanx for the perfect directions & of course, the CD its very own self. Looks like itll keep me off the streets for some time. Also gracias for the paper version v5n3. I figured out the strange hieroglyphs on p3 were Wingdings, wch i have in my font file & the message is "Oh my god! They've killed Mike! The bastards!" However, i have no idea what Mike it myt refer to, or who the bastards myt be.

Nick Mills
2 Hart Avenue, Sale, Cheshire,
M33 2JY

If you do try playing it as an audio CD and run it backwards, you discover that Dr Plokta has replaced the rest of you by simulacra. Don't believe me?

Here's a clue for you all: the Walrus is George.

Dale Speirs
Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta,
Canada T2P 2E7

Plokta April 2000 received and read. I didn't know the Japanese bound their periodicals Hebrew-style as was *Plokta* A2K. I have a number of Japanese aquarium periodicals, all of which are the normal lefthand binding style.

Fannishness, like all the other hobbies, is being swamped by so many other things to do. Where are the non-passive kids going who forty years ago might have published an SF fanzine? They are becoming punk rockers, for example, who have always made a big thing out of staging basement shows, how to run your own band, produce your own recordings, and publish a musiczine. They get into direct action, and SF is pretty bland compared to the thrill of being in a riot at a WTO

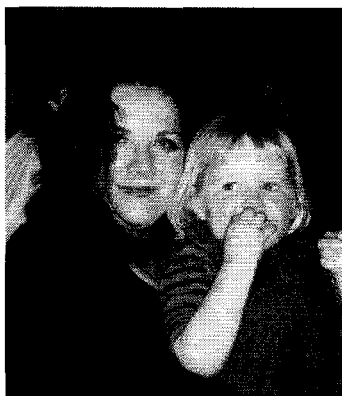
meeting. They hack with computers, or, the latest fad, go infiltrating (exploring hotel back rooms, storm sewer pipes, or any other place you're not supposed to be).

I now believe that, paradoxically, introducing people to the Papernet and traditional SF fandom (clubs, DIY conventions, etcetera) will have to be done via the Internet. That is the first place newbies will go to find information. Welcoming new fans via chapbooks or club tables at events simply won't work anymore, as people are now conditioned to do a search on the Web if looking for something. They won't know where to find local clubs or zines using old-fashioned methods such as asking the reference librarian at the local public library. Even apas now have their own Web ring.

Alison Freebairn
41 Kendal Road, East Kilbride,
G75 8QT

Thanks to Ken MacLeod, who I thoroughly enjoyed meeting again and who I didn't get a chance to say goodbye to. The same goes for Marianne. Although I must stress that Marianne was the only one of the two who I gave whirlygigs to.

She has ruined my hard-bitten reputation but it was worth it.



Paul Campbell
67 Jameson Road, Clacton-on-Sea,
Essex CO15 2AW

Thanks for starting me on the long, downward slide by

sending the ish & bits. Actually I suppose it's restarting, but seeing as how my first time round was when Tarzan was editing *Moorcock Weekly* or whatever maybe my gafia can be forgotten.

So, maybe this unreadable'll keep me in touch at least long enough to figure out whokta fokta plokta means....

Harry Warner, Jr.
423 Summit Avenue,
Hagerstown, Maryland, 21740,
USA

The April issue of *Plokta* arrived safely via Zurich. It has blood on one page, but the Swiss agents aren't to blame. My electric shaver went bad the other day, I forgot how to use my safety razor without cutting at least one finger, and I broke open the wound when I removed this issue from its envelope for locking purposes. Maybe in some future century fandom will need a locker and will close one from the part of me that partly obscures Giulia's narrative about how a modern young woman has trouble keeping her good name, at least on a passport.

I don't want to take sides in this impending conflict over static cling. But I do find myself wishing someone could tell me if these newfangled dusting devices that use static electricity to do their thing are safe around electronic equipment and tapes [*Dr Plokta reckons that tapes will be fine but sensitive electronics might not be too happy*]. I've been tempted to buy one in the hope that it would end the way my receiver cabinet and the tube on my television set reach out and grab every dust particle in the house within seconds after I've wiped them clean with an unelectric piece of cloth.

Fortunately, there is nothing else in fandom quite like the disturbing feeling of sadness and pleasure that occurs when I read excellent prose

with the knowledge that its creator has recently died. Mae could have written a book about life in Argentina and every page from her on that subject is only partial compensation for what we don't have. I hope all her notes on language evolution somehow survived her passing and eventually find their way to someone who will develop them further.

I also read with great interest the material about beds and mattresses. Somehow, mattresses seem to be growing into an increasing role in both fannish and mundane life. Several stores in this area have opened with mattresses as their only or principal stock in trade. Twice a year, Hagerstown encourages its burghers to put unwanted stuff onto the sidewalk for hauling away by municipal trucks, and you can hardly find a sidewalk at those times because it's a poor house that hasn't put out at least two or three mattresses. Mattresses have come into attention in several United States fanzines recently. In one article, there was the claim that a mattress should be replaced every second year. I'm somewhat behind that schedule, because the one I'm now using is at least forty years of age and it would still be excellent if it weren't for the three inch depression near the center and the innersprings that have become outersprings.

Steelhead was much fun to read, if hard to believe according to the quick publication feat described in *Plokta*. But it made me feel uncomfortable when it spoke so much about fondness for salmon. That's because I videotaped from a television showing *The Silver Horde*, a 1930s movie with a cast of thousands, almost all of whom are salmon who meet a gruesome fate. I wanted to have the movie on tape because of the presence of

Jean Arthur, one of the few non-salmons who figure in the events depicted.

John Berry

4 Chilterns, S Hatfield, Herts, AL10 8JU

Sorry to have to inflict my rather attractive handwriting on you...it's rather sad but, in another way most encouraging because my wife and I have just purchased an iMac and hope soon to be on-line. So why my gorgeous handwriting? Well, last week we creosoted the garden shed—the fumes are supposed to be excellent if you are chesty. I wasn't but I am now.

When the iMac and printer arrived, the only place where they (and our newly acquired desk, duly constructed by yours truly with only minimal injury) could be sited was in my den—we do live in a small pensioners' bungalow.

"The only place to put your typer and other office material is in the shed," observed my wife.

I did point out it had just been creosoted, but accepted the fumes were good for my chest.

Obviously this is being written in the lounge—it's pouring with rain, and on occasion, when typing in the shed, I've heard little mouse-like scuffles near my feet.

Marty Cantor did observe in a lettercol that I was an 'old phfart' because I was not on line, but we have taken the decision to eventually become part of E-mail fandom, instead of communicating by Snail Mail, but the present essential requirement is to get the bloody iMac operational. When my wife (as she frequently does) rings the Helpline, you can plainly hear doors banging as helpers are leaping over desks to escape having to explain things to her. At least, we've got the printer to work, but www, at the moment, is just a dream. We cannot work it all out.

Patrick Lawford
Patrick@lawford.net

I am currently getting more of an idea about how much work goes into *Plokta*. The house share I live in is also home to the editorial team behind a new SF magazine (Science Fiction World, first issue due in the new stands at the end of May). The scale is a bit up from *Plokta* of course, and the deadlines have a little more bite, but I think a lot of the same problems (another writer failing another deadline, variable paper/print quality, the e-mail download on the fritz again, you want this when!?) are common to the two endeavours. Will probably say more about this in future, watching the filthy pros is always an education.

Jo Walton
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Swansea, SA2 0UJ

And what do we do if our copy doesn't work?

[Send it back, there was one batch of 6 that don't work]

Mine doesn't work. Emmet's does. Sasha has done nothing but read Emmet's every time we've been in the house for the last few days, but as Emmet is going to be taking it back to Cambridge tomorrow this is likely to become a problem.

Sasha thinks the CD is wonderful, especially Sue's illos, almost all of which I've been dragged over to Giant Ant to see, especially the one which he thinks is supposed to be his parents. ("SF Fans, a breeding pair." Errr, Sue...?) And he's now playing with Paint Shop Pro making his very own fanzine cover, though goodness knows if he'll write the inside.

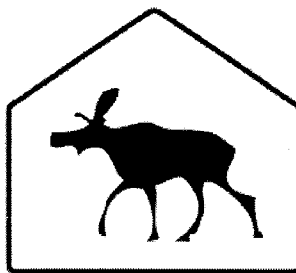
Ben Conable

My name is Ben Conable and I am a film production designer working in New York. My web search for moose crossing signs turned up your site and its moose hazard. As it is the only

moose crossing sign I have yet found I wondered about its origin. Seems strange to talk to someone in England (where, I believe, there are no moose) about an American road sign, but there it is. Do you have any other pics of moose crossing signs? Perhaps in their natural environment? Thanks for anything you can tell me.

Ben Conable (again)

Thank you for your prompt response. The moose lives on. I used a translation algorithm and came up with this slightly elegant moose in house American style sign that will appear in the forthcoming movie Super Troopers, about a renegade band of Vermont State Highway patrolmen.



Brad W Foster
bwfoster@juno.com
PO Box 165246, Irving, TX,
USA 75016

I've missed the episode of Iron Chef where the secret ingredient is inflatable beef, but I'll keep an eye out for it!

James Allen
james.allen@vu.edu.au

Years ago I was involved with con running and our con Conjunction had a progress reports named Kipple. We were into Phil K. Dick and irony in almost equal amounts.

Having just moved a couple of months ago I find that a frightening amount of interesting SF stuff from ten or more years ago is now kipple that I wish to get rid of. I have recycled some of the books as paper, but there is so much to sort through still. And why is it that things I need, like the key to the gate lock disappear, but I can

always find a Piers Anthony novel?

David B. Wake
160 Beaumont Road,
Bournville, Birmingham,
B30 1NY

Thanks for the latest issue and the COVER DISC. Looks good, if only my setup would stop putting up the message "Would you like to view this exciting web page in NotePad—Yes, No, Cancel".

It reminds me that, as Chairbeing of the Birmingham University SF Society a position first held by one Steve Davies of this parish, my great success was producing a magazine with a COVER DISC shaped beermat. The cover itself was of a scantily clad female with all her explicitly erogenous zones covered by the said COVER DISC shaped beermat in the bottom left corner. It was quite a tricky posture for the model to contort herself into, I can tell you. Beneath the COVER DISC shaped beermat was, of course, a box explaining that you should have a COVER DISC shaped beermat.

I have searched the contents of your COVER DISC and discovered that I've never been to a Science Fiction convention. Or alternatively I don't exist. Or do I go to conventions, it's all a hazy blur. Perhaps I do, but when there I deliberately avoid you. Or one of you is my secret identity. Or I am one of your secret identities. If I am, which one would I choose?

SMS
eirasms@aol.com
101 Belfield Lane, Newbold,
Rochdale

Whoops: The missive you were kind enough to print Re: Beer Consumption at Cons suffered an erroneous word. Rather than: "Get a statement of how much beer was drunk at a convention from The Organisers".

It should've read "Get a statement of how much beer was drunk at a convention from The Hotel" This, I am

sure you'll agree makes a curious and unlikely sentence into something that may well be of some use.

I have a dreadful suspicion this is my typing error.

Dave Weingart
17 Chapin Road, Farmingdale,
NY 11735, USA

Well, a 2 hour drive through heavy traffic and steady drizzle from jury service home, and what to my wondering eyes should appear but an envelope from the *Plokta Cabal* (OK, well it didn't say it was from the *Plokta Cabal* anywhere on it, but I get little enough mail from Europe that it was a pretty safe bet that it was from the *Plokta Cabal*) and there inside is the <plokta.con> ish, with a cover that pretty much tells me that I'm *really* annoyed to have not been able to get to it—having the first two items on the top of the page be sex and beer...! American cons don't seem to *do* that any more).

Paul Barnett
1554 Greenwood Lake
Turnpike, Hewitt, NJ, 07421,
USA

It took me a hell of a long time to work who it was—labelled just as “unknown” and placed between Diana Wynne Jones and Rowan Bell in one of the Eastercon '99 photos on the *Plokta* CD. Could it be... the woman I married? And on... what passed for her honeymoon?

She herself is stoic about it. “I'm perfectly happy that people don't recognize it's me in such a bloody abysmal photograph,” she said with a broad puke, adding with typical Yankee disarming candour, “But I plan to sue anyway.”

Joseph Major
jtmajor@iglou.com
1409 Christy Avenue
Louisville, KY 40204-2040 USA

This morning's newspaper contains an article on how the really hip executives are discarding their pagers and

cell phones. However, not all is lost. The article described how people would take calls during therapy sessions on how to reduce stress from being on call all week, what they call 24/7. So wherever you are, there is *beep beep beep*. SF has been often pronounced dead, beginning when Hugo himself was ousted from *Amazing Stories* (now a division of Hasbro) and repeatedly since then, including by an entire Worldcon. But then Uncle Hugo thought that scientification was dead because this new young whippersnapper Campbell was blue-pencilling out his beloved “As you know...” paragraphs, and so on, as everyone confuses change with death.

But what is the point of “non-addictive” corflu? Half the usefulness of it is sniffing the bottles.

Eric Lindsay
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PO Box 640, Airlie Beach,
Queensland 4802, Australia

Thanks for the programme issue. It has always sounded like a great, fun con to attend. I am delighted that in your hitech world you didn't need badge numbers, but has anyone complained about the branding with bar codes?

Lloyd Penney
1706-24 Eva Road, Etobicoke,
ON, M9C 2B2, Canada

I would imagine by now that Sue is already roaming the Altered States of Umerica, visiting fans where she can. No idea if she was planning to come to Canada at all? If I'd been able to get this zine earlier, we might have been able to extend a little hospitality. Don't TAFF winners ever visit Canada? We've had all our shots, and we have better beer than does America.

The pictures of Tommy Ferguson as the local Playboy bunny has provided no end of merriment for us. I've got to print up some pictures and take them to our own First

Thursday to disrupt the entire proceedings. I don't recall if there are more pictures like this one on the CD-ROM. Here's to Tommy! we toast, and Tommy replies, I'm sorry, that's not my table.

Taral Wayne
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Toronto, Ontario, M6K 1S6,
Canada

Fanzines on disk? Does that mean neos in the future will have to have lap-tops to read their zines on the bus? Will the computer-illiterate be laughed out of fandom, or simply be unable to follow the action once paper is obsolete? Maybe not, I found that both files for *Babes* were either corrupt or had an unintelligible header, and wouldn't open. I suspect glitches will always plague the digital medium, though I suppose also that most people will find the low percentage acceptable as long as you can return your copy of *Sonic Youth* to the store when you luck out. But I doubt there's a likelihood that fanzines can be similarly guaranteed.

Good cover, though I don't understand it.

And I liked the cartoon of Rupert. I imagine he thought it was hell having no genitals under those check pants. (At least not many Teddy Bears do.)

Milt Stevens
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CA 93063 USA

The CD-ROM which accompanies *Plokta* #19 is truly impressive. It is the greatest innovation in fanzine publishing since the discovery that slices of bologna could be run through a ditto machine. The CD-ROM is about the same size as a slice of bologna, and completist fanzine collectors won't have to store the CD-ROM in the freezer.

Ken MacLeod espouses a mixture of libertarianism and socialism? That sounds like the Kentucky fried sushi

approach to politics. It does rather sound like he is holding two diametrically opposed views simultaneously. I've met a few people in fandom like that. You can usually just lean them in a corner, and they will argue with themselves.

The letter from SMS certainly shows that fandom has come full circle. We used to try to convince hotels we were perfectly respectable people despite appearances to the contrary. Now you have to convince the hotels you are really a bunch of sots who will drink everything in the place including the contents of the goldfish pond. Too bad breweries don't have things like the airline frequent flyer programs. You could cite that 92% of the members of your con were enrolled in various frequent boozer programs. The other 8% of your members weren't tall enough to see over the bar yet.

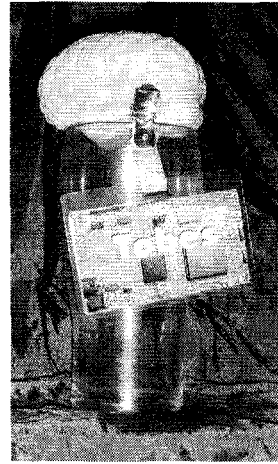
We Also Heard From:

Bridget Bradshaw (Enclosed are a couple of photos of gerbils eating the von Däniken book), **Dave Langford** (Victor seemed very pleased that I went to his panel about the desperate need to fix the fan Hugos, i.e. demolish Langford and plough salt into the ruins), **Pete Tyers** (Help! Please send gurl!), **Karen Pender-Gunn** (the kipple fairy has struck), **Kim Huett** (with an apparently incomprehensible rant), **Ned Brooks** (I was crogged to see the CD-ROM!), **Mary Kay Kare** (I'm still too drunk to actually look at the contents of the CD), **Sue Jones** (worth more than a casual gawp), **Jackie Duckhawk**, **Irwin Hirsh** (I've meant to loc a fair number of the fanzines which have arrived here in the past year or so), **Rodney Leighton** (my repugnance at the description and depiction of booze consumption has reached a ridiculous level) and **Teddy Harvia** (with a CoA).

A Few Stills From the Ploktacam



The main lounge at <plokta.con>: (l-r) Brian Ameringen, Roger Robinson, Tobes, Austin Benson, Robert Sneddon, Steven Cain, Alison Scott, Mike Scott, John Dallman, Tom Womack



This is your brain... and this is your brain on Tobes

Sunday night at <plokta.con> was Cleavage Night. Most of the cleavages on display would be familiar to regular *Plokta* readers; but we did get this rare shot of Jo Walton:

"We should use this shot of Tom—it's got more computers in it"

Beth Friedman turned up late on Sunday, having spent the weekend at a small, select, slash convention somewhere in the Midlands. She's depicted below checking out the state of the art facilities in the <plokta.con> Internet lounge.



*Just gotta fire off a quick email to J*ly R**d*

One major programme item was *Style Challenge*, which Dave Hicks compered wearing the least pleasant football strip of all time, the famed Dukla Prague Away Kit.



Hicks prepares for his live-action body piercing



The King's Piece

Once again, strange things were auctioned for the fan funds. Dave Clements bought the right to put his head between Sue Dawson's tits and go Flobbleobbleobble; watch out at Novacon for the right to put your head in Tobes' cleavage and go Flobbleyeucchl! A von Däniken book was sold to Bridget Bradshaw so that her gerbils would have comfy nesting material. They devoured it in about a week, and we have the photographic evidence to prove it.



But the *piece de resistance* was the right to appear as a political or religious faction in a future Ken MacLeod novel. Sadly, strong support for the Square Bear Tendency was outbid by Guy Dawson. Expect to see the Little Sisters of the Cleavage turning up any time now.