

Tales From
Typographic Oceans

JESUS CHRIST



Wallyphone

A FLOCK OF GOPHERS
GLASGOW CALLING

- SEE TWO
1. To the Monkey for those that don't do that
 2. Being on the Edge of the State
 3. Back to the S.C.C.
 4. Another Quiet Night in Glasgow
 5. Who's Got the Best Party
 6. Gonna Be Somebody
 7. Don't Fear the Revolution

MOOSE

NEVER MIND
THE BOLLOCKS

HERE'S THE

NEW PLOKTA

HIS MOOSTER'S VOICE



DR PLOKTA'S BIG BAND SOUND
ISSUE 33 - THE LONG PLAYER

- SEE ONE
1. Living Like a Fooly To Play
 2. Stand By Your Love
 3. Music in White Suits
 4. When in Romeing Workin'
 5. My Old Man's a Cowboy
 6. 1992's Best Club Anthem

THE BONZO MOOSE DOO DAH BAND
STICKY ANTLERS

- SEE ONE
1. The Best of the Moose in the Woods
 2. The Best of the Moose in the Woods
 3. The Best of the Moose in the Woods
 4. The Best of the Moose in the Woods
 5. The Best of the Moose in the Woods
 6. The Best of the Moose in the Woods



This is issue 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ of *Plokta*, edited by Steve Davies, Alison Scott and Mike Scott. It is available for letter of comment (one copy to Alison's address is fine, we pass them over to each other), trade (copies to each of our addresses if possible, please), contribution, editorial whim, or for MP3 versions of all our vinyl records.

Steve Davies
52 Westbourne Terrace
Reading
Berks RG30 2RP

Alison Scott
24 St Mary Road
Walthamstow
London E17 9RG

Mike Scott (COA)
13 Collette Court
Eleanor Close
London SE16 6PW

locs@plokta.com
www.plokta.com

The *Plokta News*
Network is at
www.plokta.com/pnn/

The cabal also includes
Giulia De Cesare, Sue
Mason, Steven,
Marianne and Jonathan
Cain. And not Flick. So
she insists.

Cover by Alison Scott

Art by Brad Foster (3),
Galen Wainwright (5),
Feòrag NicBhrìde (6, 9),
Sue Mason (8, 9, 10)

Photos by Mike Scott
(Cover), Alison Scott (4, 5)

Contributors

Eddie Cochrane, 72 St
Paul's Gate, Wokingham,
Berks, RG41 2YR

Flick, as for Mike Scott

Sue Mason, 18 Boundary
St, Lostock Gralam,
Northwich, Cheshire,
CW9 7NG

Feòrag NicBhrìde,
www.antipope.org/feorag/

CONTENTS

- 3 Editorial**
The Cabal
We seem to be working on this convention in Glasgow in August that you may have heard about.
- 4 Before They Were Famous**
Alison Scott
Alison describes an evening spent in a disused public lavatory in Shepherd's Bush.
- 6 Spending Money For Dummies**
Steve Davies
Steve's spending on superfluous technology is not restricted merely to buying hardware and software, alas.
- 7 Redemption Con Report**
Eddie Cochrane
We think it safe to say that you've never read a con report quite like this one.
- 8 Maximum Damage Don't Do That Mason**
Sue Mason
Sue has accidentally acquired a new cat. Our lack of surprise knows no bounds.
- 10 Fütspal!**
Alison Scott
Alison has adopted a new approach to acquiring superfluous technology, and now gets people to give it to her for nothing.
- 11 Lokta Plokta**
Our postbag is a little lighter than usual, thanks to our now-traditional delay in posting the previous issue.
- 12 Treacle Sandwiches Flick**
The second in our occasional series of treacle-related articles.

Record Collector's Corner

Vinyl-lovers should keep an eye out for the Plokta Cabal's rare 3-sided LP. This classic amongst albums is hard to get hold of in your local record store, and copies in good nick fetch implausible amounts on eBay. Of course, our copy is in unplayed condition—not because we don't want to listen to the music, but rather because none of us own anything that plays these things any more. If you're interested in hearing the music, I suggest you seek out the tracks on the internet using reputable file sharing software such as Acquisition.

For Our Younger Readers

You might have thought that the big black plastic things on the cover were weirdly shaped iPods. But no, astonishingly enough, it used to be possible to get rudimentary musical sounds out of the plastic by joggling a needle up and down on the pitted, grooved surface. I know, it sounds pretty implausible, doesn't it? But there you have it. Just to put it into perspective, a typical 12" long playing album with its sleeve and cover weighed about ten times as much as an iPod Shuffle, and could store as many as a dozen songs. Provided they were short. They were called 'long playing' because you could listen to 20 minutes of music all at once, before getting to perform a little ritual of taking the needle off the record, taking the record off the turntable, turning it over, putting it back on, carefully wiping off every last speck of dust, and setting the needle down again.

Ah, those were the days.

Dr Plokta's Big Band Sound:
Issue 33 1/3: The Long Player

1. Living Next Door to Pat
2. Stand By Your Moose
3. Moose in White Satin
4. When I'm Running Worldcons
5. My Old Man's a Conrunner
6. 1952 Vinç Clark Gestetner

A Flock of Gophers:
Glasgow Calling

1. I'd Do Anything for Vince (But I Won't Do That)
2. Sitting on the Dock of the Clyde
3. Back in the S.E.C.C.
4. Another Quiet Night in Glasgow
5. Won't Get Fooled Again
6. Glaswegian Rhapsody
7. (Don't Fear) the Worldcon

The Bonzo Moose Doo Dah Band:
Sticky Antlers

1. The Most Beautiful Moose in the World
2. Livin' La Vida Plokta
3. The Devil Went Down to Croydon
4. Who Let 'The Moose Out?
5. Smells Like Bombay Sapphire
6. Walthamstow Sunset

Editorial

AS we move into the tenth year of *Plokta* (and doesn't that make us all feel old), there is a certain reluctance to make forecasts about the future. We definitely never anticipated being here, writing this editorial surrounded by Apple computers and the debris of small children. Unfortunately, this is made up of debris left *by* small children, not debris made up *of* them. Fortunately for our collective sanity, Caroline has agreed to take the under-age contingent of *Plokta* out to the theatre for the day. Order of Soviet Motherhood First Class (with sticky treacle cluster) that woman.

With this thirty-three-and-a-third issue we can definitely declare ourselves to be a long-playing fanzine (eat your heart out, Steve Green). As a result we will doubtless all gafiate before next Tuesday. In the mean time though, here are a few things by which to remember us.

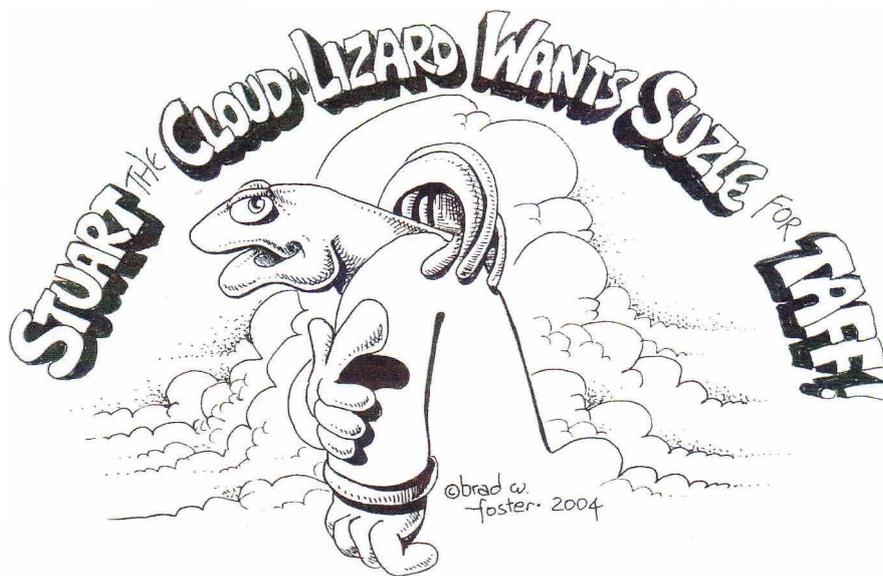
We have in this issue a con report from Eddie Cochrane. Unfortunately, as is so often the case with conreps these days, this does rather dwell on the problems of getting to the convention instead of the convention itself, but we still think it's well worth publishing.

In other news, Sue has acquired a new cat through the internet. The good side of this is that she somehow failed to adopt the houseful of cannibal kittens that had eaten their owner. Unfortunately, the cat she did adopt, Max, appears to be trying to eat her. Meanwhile, Steve and Giulia are now into the 10th month of trying to move house and are beginning to wish that they'd never had the idea in the first place. If we're lucky, maybe there'll be a change of address next issue. Or maybe not.

Our main headache at the moment, though, is that we've foolishly agreed to run the Fan Lounge at the 2005 Worldcon in Glasgow. We're basically planning to make this as much like <plokta.con> as we can possibly manage. We do expect all of you to turn up and have desperate fun for the cause. We've therefore announced that Friday night is Space Pirate Night. Come as your favourite buccaneer, parrot, black pirate of Barsoom or whatever. Anyone who doesn't show up in costume will be given a suitably piratical headscarf and forced to either walk a plank or jump out of the airlock. If anyone has any suitably space piratical props, they'd also be appreciated.

Alison is currently having a weird Kafkaesque experience in which she has woken up to discover that she's turning into a ~~cockroach~~ accountant. This will bring the number of accountants in the Cabal to three (if we ignore Flick's feeble protestations of non-Caballitude—I suppose we may have to put it to a vote). Will we fall into the Accountancy Event Horizon? Is finance the new IT? Will we have to subtitle *Plokta* as the Journal of Superfluous Accountancy? Will our accountants take one look at the P&L account for *Plokta* and forbid us ever to pub another ish? Find out in the next exciting issue.

This fanzine schizophrenically supports Suzle Tompkins, Chaz Boston-Baden and Curt Phillips for TAFF. But Suzle was the only one to send us a cool Brad Foster promotional fillo. However, Chaz was the only one to send us campaign ribbons to hand out at Eastercon.



BOLLOCKS

They Smof For You

<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/> is a website set up to allow people in the UK to keep tabs on the politicians who are supposed to represent them—you can check their voting and attendance records, what they've said in Parliament, and so on. It's all based on Hansard, the official record of Parliamentary proceedings. We plan to take their source code and set up <http://www.theysmofforyou.com/>—we'll feed WSFS Business Meeting minutes into it to allow everyone in fandom to check up on their local smof. Now you too can be emailed whenever Kevin Stanley refers to Section 117 of Roberts Rules of Order or any time someone mentions the eligibility criteria for the Dramatic Presentation Hugo. RSS feeds will be available as soon as we can get a motion passed by WSFS on what version to use.

"We do still have the bath, but it's getting a bit dented"

Mind Hacks

Mike recently acquired a copy of the new O'Reilly book 'Mind Hacks' which explains how you can take advantage of the way your mind works. You know, because we evolved a revulsion for poisonous molds, you're naturally repelled by blue foods. This means you can stop members of the *Plokta* cabal from nicking your chips by careful application of blue food colouring.

Anyone coming up with possible mind hacks for keeping children quiet and well behaved (those pain receptors must be good for something) should apply to the editorial address.

On a similar note, Alison is currently trying to become a member of the "Getting Things Done" cult. Unfortunately, her mind appears to be wired completely backwards in this area and it's beginning to look like the best mind hack might involve a pickaxe.

"Do you think I should set this issue in Minion?"

Before They Were Famous

“YOU guys need to check out Vienna Teng”, said Patrick Nielsen Hayden, electronically popping up on screen and then disappearing. Turns out she’s a singer/songwriter/pianist from the Bay Area. Got a name for herself as a student at Stanford, singing in bars; took a job with Cisco Systems. As she says, when that dream of being a computer programmer just didn’t work out for her, she had to fall back on singing.

Now, luckily we live in a world where it’s easy to check out new music if artists have their act together, because they’ll put sample tracks on their website. Not just 30 seconds, the whole thing. And Vienna Teng has a website, viennateng.com, and has half a dozen sample tracks. So I downloaded them, and I thought they were pretty good.

So next I checked out eMusic, the independent online music store that works out much cheaper than iTunes provided you don’t buy as many tracks as I do. I was delighted to find that they had both of Vienna Teng’s albums and a live set.

She sings nicely, and she plays piano terribly well, and her songs are good. Melodic, somewhere in that area between pop and folk. And you know, you’ll do better to download the songs than try to work out what the music’s like from a fanzine article. Her first album was written and recorded while she was a student, and then re-recorded when she got her record deal. The second one has lush arrangements and slightly more complex songs that move further away from the experience of a California student.

“She’s playing a couple of shows in London next month”, said ePatrick. “We went to see her in New York last month and were Blown Away”. I went to see where those London gigs were, and found she was playing Ginglik, a club in Shepherd’s Bush. We seem to go to Shepherd’s Bush a lot. My brother lives there, and it has several venues, in particular the Shepherd’s Bush Empire, an old theatre with seats upstairs that’s just right for bands that aren’t quite big enough for the Brixton Academy. But Ginglik was new to us.

I looked it up on the internet. The internet is way cool. I want one when I grow up. It turns out that Ginglik is a members-only club converted from the

now-closed public toilets on Shepherd’s Bush Green. Small then. I don’t think I’ve ever been to a concert in a WC before.

Now, the thing about me is that club culture passed me by. I know, because I read newspapers, that not all clubs are hot, dark, smoky places where the music is too loud. But I haven’t really experienced it first hand. London has clubs of all kinds. Ginglik has good reviews, which talk about its laid back nature and friendly vibe. They also talk about how it’s full of beautiful people. Perhaps they wouldn’t let us in.

Maybe if I took my beautiful brother and his beautiful wife as camouflage it would work?

As well as featuring US singer songwriters, the club has DJ nights, open mic nights, comedy nights, film nights, and kung fu nights.

Right. Apparently “Ginglik” is a martial arts term meaning ‘explosive power’.

I rang them, to find out if I could get tickets in advance (no) or if I needed to do anything special to become a member (no). So all I could do was wait. Meanwhile I put all the songs on my iPod on rotation, along with other pre-Christmas acquisitions like the new Steeleye Span album *Winter* and *Barney’s Happy Holidays*. OK, that last one was a mistake.

I was delighted to discover that Vienna Teng had written a Christmas song, “The Atheist Christmas Carol”. It’s actually a much less cynical song than the title would lead you to believe. So I had that in my Christmas mix, and had all the rest in my new music mix, and heard all

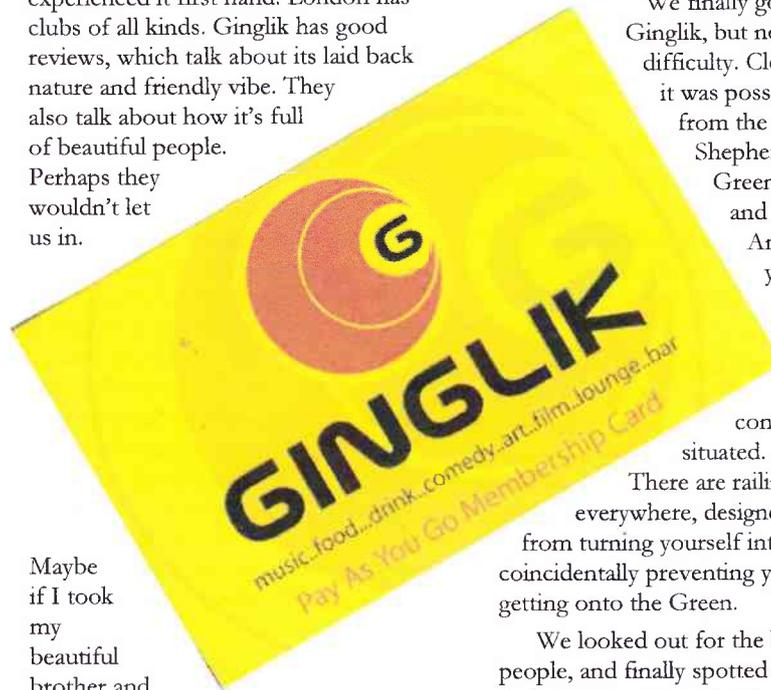
her songs, and her live set, and looked forward to hearing her live.

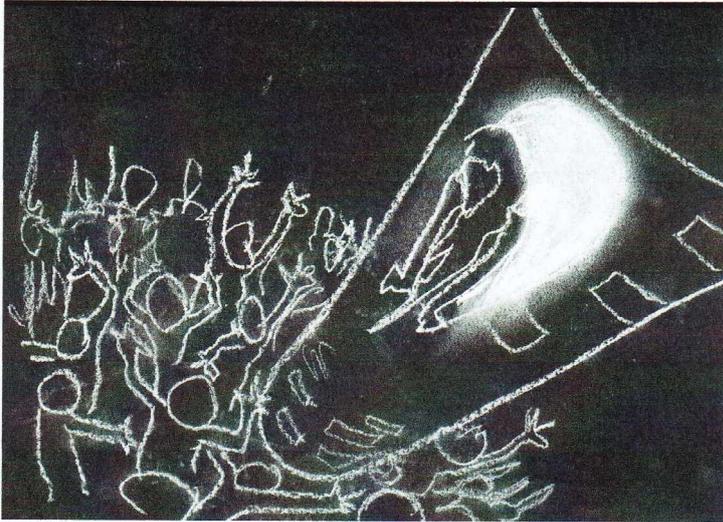
“I’ve just discovered Vienna Teng,” I said to Lucy Huntzinger over the ether, just before Christmas. “One of her songs is The Atheist Christmas Carol. Patrick told me about her”. “Excellent!” declared eLucy. “I was the one who put him onto her”.

We finally got to go to Ginglik, but not without difficulty. Clearly years ago it was possible to walk from the tube station to Shepherd’s Bush Green, across a road and onto the grass. And no doubt if you needed to relieve yourself, the public toilets were conveniently situated. Not any more.

There are railings everywhere, designed to stop you from turning yourself into roadkill but coincidentally preventing you from getting onto the Green.

We looked out for the beautiful people, and finally spotted a couple finding their way to the club by jaywalking spectacularly. We followed suit. Strings of fairy lights in the railings and the trees and the sign that used to say ‘Public Convenience’ helped show





The Tower by Galen Wainwright

the way. We descended to the subterranean and completed the various formalities. We both liked the club instantly; three small rooms, one with a tiny stage and one with a bar, loads of unmatched comfy chairs and sofas, yummy organic hamburgers and free monkey nuts. No real beer, sadly; hard to think how you'd cellar it in a converted loo. But plenty of yummy quaffing wine. The third room had red walls and a wall full of Carom boards and other games to play. We had a meal and chatted, and tried and failed to persuade my brother and sister-in-law to join us, and fell into conversation with the people at the next table, and drank more wine, and waited for the music.

It turned out to be several singer-songwriters, not just Vienna Teng. Which was a bit of a shame, particularly when we discovered that on the *other* night, which we missed, she'd done a full set, whereas we just got five songs.

But the other singers were pretty listenable too and we had several interesting conversations. And we discovered that it wasn't just a singers' night; Ginglik has an artist-in-residence on these nights. Galen Wainwright drew pictures of the music as he heard it, in white chalk on black paper. He'd sit listening intently and not moving, and then suddenly, perhaps half way through the song, burst into a frenzy of drawing ready to have a finished sketch by the end of the music.

The club supported this with superfluous technology; a suspended webcam recorded the artist's hands and drawings and the pictures were projected onto the walls of the room. Of course, every few minutes its associated laptop went to sleep and they had to nudge it back into life. But it was still an

interesting idea; one I've never seen before.

I enjoyed seeing the way that different artists inspired Galen in different ways, and the way that his interpretation of songs was often different, sometimes radically different from mine.

Meanwhile of course, those five Vienna Teng songs—Gravity, the Tower, Unwritten Letter Number One, Green Island Serenade and Harbor—were sublime. She had a cellist with her to complement the piano, and I'm sure if I were a little more organised I'd have noted the name. She was completely assured and note-perfect, and we loved every second of the all too short set.

Realising we were fans, someone next to us offered to send us a CD-R of the other London gig—he'd gone along to the other gig on spec, and concluded he had to hear this one *as well*.

I observed that Galen's pics just went into a pile and formed a plan to grab the one of "Harbor", Teng's standard finisher. But when I looked for it afterwards it had gone, and I realised I would have to be content with grabbing a photo of Vienna and Galen with the picture, which he'd signed for her to take home. Meanwhile, I explained that I was planning to write this article, and he gave me the picture of "The Tower". So, hey, I can't tell you what the music's like, but I can at least print *pictures* of it.

We were well pleased with our evening in a culture we don't normally inhabit at all. We'll go back to the highly agreeable Ginglik, forcing the local relatives with whatever inducements are required to prise them out of their living room. Would that all London's discarded underground toilets were repurposed so excellently.

And here in the future, our electronic networks mean that word of mouth can travel thousands of miles, and a singer from the far side of the world can arrive to play in a country where she has no records available, to find that fans familiar with her work have appeared ahead of her.

—Alison Scott



Galen Wainwright & Vienna Teng

BOLLOCKS

Spending Money For Dummies

New Career!

Flick's recent abandoning of her promising accountancy career for the isolated backwoods of academe, coupled with Steven's departing the National Audit Office for pastures new, have led us to wonder what we might all have been doing if we hadn't adopted the rich and exciting careers we actually did.

Alison, for instance, could have been one of the world's great ninjas with her quiet and stealthy nature, whilst Steven could have been an exemplary short-order chef. Steve's sunny nature and early morning chirpiness would make him an ideal holiday camp redcoat.

It's always possible that, in some alternate universe, Mike doesn't limit his bids for global dictatorship to LiveJournal. And, of course, Sue's natural talent for spelling and ability to tell left from right would have made her a world-class audio typist.

Unfortunately, Giulia's previous career as an educational psychologist already crashed and burned, leaving her attitude to children (and some of the children) scarred for life.

"Steve's isn't as long as he thought it was."



Mu-shusushi

Healthy Eating

We note recent press coverage of unrelated pieces of research indicating that beer, chocolate and turmeric all help to prevent cancer. And of course, it's well established that red wine fights heart disease. Given the amount of booze, chocolate and curry that we consume, each *Plokta* weekend probably adds six months to our life expectancies.

I BUY quite a lot of computer books. Not, like, heaps of books you understand. Just considerably more than I can read, given that I also have a job and a computer game habit to keep. Not to mention the SF and comics. Thank goodness I don't watch television, I don't know where I'd find the time.

Anyway, I buy a lot of computer books. My study walls are carpeted with a reasonable proportion of the consolidated outputs of O'Reilly, APress and several others. It's a bit like an addiction, go into a bookshop, start to feel panicky at the numbers of books I don't have, come out with 'The Web Performance Tuning Cookbook for Mac OS X with Java Swing' or something like that, as a palliative treatment. Usually several somethings. Come on, everyone's had that problem of going into a bookshop on the way to pick up a pound of apples and ending up eating soup for the next two weeks. No? Sure?

Now there was a time when I actually read all these books. This was back in the days when I was buying things like 'Object Oriented Programming using 8086 Assembler'. The sort of meaty subject that took some getting through without plentiful supplies of intravenous caffeine, but then there wasn't much else to read. Well, apart from trying to get to Vol 2 of Knuth, a series which has a place in my personal mythology somewhat akin to dwarf bread in the works of Terry Pratchett.

Of course many of these were big, thick books. For some unknown reason, certain sorts of computer books apparently need to be at least 2 inches thick and preferably 3 inches or more. Some of them make it to 6 inches and require innovative new binding technology to stop them exploding in a shower of pages as the glue reaches its Roche limit and begins to break up. Not to mention coming with a free block and tackle and a course of hernia treatment suppositories. Since a lot of subjects can actually be covered in a few well-chosen paragraphs, a tradition has developed of using 72-point type with lots and lots of screenshots. The excuse is that geeks generally have bad eyesight and sometimes need a nose job in order to get the books close enough to their eyes to be able to make out the text. Unfortunately, that sort of person is more likely to be reading the sort of book that is actually worth the effort and tends to be smaller and more concentrated. A bit like the computer book version of espresso compared to the 3 litre coffee-flavour QuikShake which constitutes the majority of computer books.

So. Eventually I stopped reading the books all the way through. Actually, I stopped reading the beginnings first. I found was having to skip the first three or four chapters because they were too basic. Then I'd skip the last bit because it was too boring and I'd generally got fed up with the subject by then. I'd still buy the books though. Sometimes I'd buy books that I didn't want immediately, but just because they looked interesting and might come in useful someday. I picked up a number of Java and Python books that way. Then for a while there didn't seem to be any books in the areas I was working in, so a colleague and I talked to a publisher about us writing one together. Unfortunately everybody else was thinking the same thing and we were beaten to it. None of this stopped me buying books on other areas and then not getting around to reading them though.

Not long after, I changed specialities again and found myself in an area where not only were there not any books, but everyone seemed to be making it up from first principles. I still kept buying technical books. They might not be immediately useful, but they'd come in useful someday. Just having them around meant that the problems would magically not happen. Why, I didn't have to solve any Java problems for years. All I had to do was hold up the unread textbook, invoking the sacred Sun, and the forces of evil instantly headed for the hills. And that remaindered edition of 'Disaster Recovery Planning for SQL Server 7' turned out to have a whole useful chapter...

Of course, it didn't solve problems with lack of space or money, but you can't have everything. Although we no longer had our wonderful branch of Blackwells that had more computer books than most universities, someone had noticed the local concentration of addicts and had opened a half-price computer bookshop in town. My expenditure on books halved, even if the rate of bookcase depletion stayed the same. Anyway, by now all I needed was to be able to convince people that I was an expert in everything except their own speciality. This works surprisingly well, by the way. I tell people "I'm the next best thing to an expert until one comes along". They believe me. Occasionally, it's true. And if I need to know more about something, well either I've got a book on the shelf that'll teach me, or else it's back to Google.

—Steve Davies

Redemption Con Report

[Eddie Cochrane has kindly allowed us to reprint his ... unusual ... Redemption con report from LiveJournal.]

MY earliest memories are of the Wenzhou Light Industrial Factory No. 2 in Ningbo. I and my fellow comrade lanyards were part of the record-breaking total production for the 10th Five Year plan period produced that day by the heroic workers of that Ningbo factory. We lay in great piles, debating among ourselves how we might best put into practice the spirit and purpose of a pure communist party lanyard. Those of us manufactured earlier in the day counselled the younger, more reckless lanyards from the afternoon shift on adherence to the principles laid down in the latest Circular On Strengthening Management of Engineering Quality of Garment Accessories. Within hours our patient wait was over and we were batched into cadres of 100, crated and began our bumpy journey from the factory. After a brief discussion amongst the cadre, it was my honour to be selected as cadre leader for the journey, and so, to keep spirits raised I led them in a song,

*The noble spirit of Taihang
Mountain is forever,*

*The brave warriors, like the clouds,
are singing in the gale...*

As my comrades took up the song, I caught the scent of the sea upon the air and knew that our destiny would lie far from the shores of our native China.

The hold of the ship seemed cavernous, filled with crates from all over Ningbo. We were stacked next to a crate of generic flash MP3 players. Already they were playing decadent, pirated Western pop music to each other, speculating on the size of the homes they would end up in, and the wealth of their new owners.

"You should be ashamed of yourselves!" I cried, "You were not manufactured to enjoy yourselves, you were manufactured for a purpose." But they jeered, "You are just a common black lanyard, a simple piece of braided nylon". Quietly I said, "And Lei Feng was just a simple man". There was a shamed silence from them as they recalled the story of the peasant hero Lei Feng, the revolutionary screw that never rusts. "Xiang Lei Feng tongzhi xuexi" (Learn from Comrade Lei Feng), one of

them whispered. "Yes", I said, "What Mao said of Lei Feng then is true today. You should live to serve the People and Communist Party of China. You are setting off on a great journey for a great task. Do you see the destination stencilled on your crate?" Of course, they could not, they were in the crate. "It says Wal-Mart. Yes, you are to be taken into the heart of American Imperialism, where your cheap price and good quality will lead to the inevitable destruction of Western manufacturing industry". My fellow lanyards cheered, and we heard no more from the MP3 players on the remainder of our long journey across the Pacific, except for occasional bars of *The East Is Red*.

Landfall came after many uncomfortable days. We were in America, and we bid goodbye to most of our comrade products from Ningbo, while my crate of fellow lanyards was loaded onto a train which headed east. "Where are we headed?" my cadre asked me, but I did not know. "It matters not", I told them, "As long as we carry out our duties with resolution and discipline and in accordance with communist principles we will prevail." After many hours we were unloaded, and I could see we had reached the town of Branford, Connecticut, and the warehouse of a company called Just Lanyards. Over the weeks, bag by bag, our comrade lanyards were sent off, some to sales meetings, some to colleges, some unlucky fellows to an IBM marketing event, until there were only six bags left, my cadre and five others. The day came when it was our turn, and all six hundred of us were scooped up, packed and posted. Through a loose corner of the package I spied where we were going: Rochester, New York. "What is in Rochester?" my comrade lanyards asked me. "It is a large manufacturing city, home of Kodak, and many other optics companies on the bank of Lake Ontario". One of the other lanyards piped up, "That is near to Canada, perhaps we will be sent there. It is almost a communist country." "Only comparatively", I replied drily.

Surprisingly we were not delivered to a business, but to a modest family home, and more surprisingly still, we were re-packaged and posted again in separate packets. I strained to read the address before we were packed. "We are leaving America!" I told my comrades, "We are

going to Britain". "But isn't that just another Capitalist country?" one of my comrade lanyards wailed. "Fear not", I said. "The workers and revolutionary masses threw off the reactionary shackles of their conservative government in 1997 and put in place a socialist government under the wise leadership of Premier Tony Blair. With luck we will be sent to a union conference, or some fraternal organisation." Before long we were in the hold of an aircraft and heading across the Atlantic. As the aircraft climbed it grew colder, and we huddled together for warmth. "How will we survive this cold?" a frightened lanyard said. Despite the cold I put on a jaunty voice: "This is nothing comrade. On the Long March Mao's First Front Red Army had to climb the Great Snow Mountain (Chiachinshan). Blanketed in its eternal snow, over chasms and glaciers, pierced with the cold of three million white jade dragons as the Great Helmsman wrote, yet they crossed it, and joined up with the Fourth Front Army for the battle to come." This heartened them, particularly as I did not mention that we know this from Lin Piao, the official historian of the Long March, who had both of his legs amputated due to frostbite on that climb.

This journey at least was short, and within hours we were landing at Heathrow airport, and scant days after that, completed the 28 kilometers to our destination. We lay in our bags, pensive, waiting. What would the event be? Another journey by car though snow followed, and finally my comrades and I were taken from our bags. As we were handed out, one-by-one I could scarcely believe my eyes. It was if we had fallen among some alien race, and my discipline wavered, but among the strangeness I saw people of many backgrounds greeting each other fraternally, and workers who toiled not for gain, but for their comrades, and I recalled the motto of Lei Feng, "To live is to serve the people—live to make others happy." Clearly the revolutionary spirit of Lei Feng lived here, despite the strangeness of the people, and so I became the happy worker lanyard of a Redemption member. Now we are off to an educational item called "Realism in Slash." I do hope slash is something that is true to the spirit of a rustless revolutionary screw.

—Eddie Cochrane

Maximum Damage Don't Do That Mason

I HAVE a new cat.

This radical step came about as I had Spookie, the previous incumbent, put to sleep in the Autumn at the grand old age of 22, not a bad innings for a saggy old bagpuss.

I didn't set out to get another cat, I was just browsing.

The web is a wonderful thing, type in cats/Cheshire/home and it pulls up all manner of shelters and societies with hot and cold running cats on tap, you can browse for an adorable bundle of fluff from the comfort of your armchair (or desk at work).

For example I could have adopted:—

Muffit

She was one of nine cats that belonged to an old lady. In 1995 we were asked by a national rescue society if we could rescue nine cats that had belonged to an old lady who had died and had not been found for a week. It would not be appropriate to say what the cats had been feeding on since the old lady had died but they were quite emaciated. One of Muffit's kittens was dead and partially eaten but all the other cats were alive though traumatized.

Well, that certainly made me want to adopt her! Obviously not a very large old lady, if the cats had been eating her but were still emaciated. As I live alone, I decided to pass on Muffit in case she had developed a taste for white meat.

We also have:—

Marty

It soon became apparent that Marty was not feral but the victim of abuse. To this day he remains frightened of women. The strange thing is that he his nervous of anyone during daylight hours but after dark he will wait for me to go to the toilet and then he becomes friendly with me. When I go to bed I can do anything with him.

Lucky old Marty... and while I fancied a bedroom companion, Marty was not quite what I had in mind.

But instead I went for:—

Jake, affectionate 18 Month old grey male tabby.

Needs good home.

I called the number, just to see whether he was still there, if no one else had taken him, just on the off chance, you understand...

So I ended up going home with an 18 month old grey male tabby. As anyone with any whit of sense could have guessed.

He came with his own bed. And scratching post. And cat loo (with lid, the person who invented the cat loo with lid and little door gets my utter adoration for cutting down the crunch of litter underfoot by about 90%). And Beany Bear—his teddy, apparently big tough cats can't go to sleep at night without Beany Bear. He looks very much like Spooky, which is in part why I chose him, very handsome, bright orange eyes, spots down his flanks, cream tummy. Beautiful plumage.

And he is a big cat. Huge. Bigger than Spooky. It's rather like living with a grey spotted tiger, he's also very long, makes a great draft excluder. I think he's stopped growing, I hope he has because he's big enough to make two cats out of, the idea of him expanding anymore is scary.

He's also a little git, way, way too bright for his own good. There is a scary amount of intelligence behind those orange eyes. Spooks might have been my baby and the sweetest tempered cat (with people at least) but no one ever accused him of being the sharpest pencil in the tin. Max is so bright he's the pencil sharpener.

He also bites.

One cat bite equals:

- Two nights in hospital
- One operation under general anaesthetic
- Two weeks off work
- Six weeks of physiotherapy.

He bit me on his first night in the house. I was petting him in the bathroom and the combi boiler fired up with a whoosh. Whoosh goes the boiler, whoosh goes the cat.

The bite was deep into my middle finger, right at the base. Didn't bleed much, always a bad sign with a cat bite. I went straight to the Doc's for oral antibiotics, cat's mouths are horrid, almost as bad as humans.

Next day at work, the health and safety bod took one look at the festering digit and said "Get thee to the emergency room" so I did. The local hospital is only 100 yards up the road

from work. The ER nurse took one look and said "sit here for three hours" Which I did. I was then seen by a general ER doc who sent for the plastic surgeon, who sent for his boss, The Big Plastic Surgeon. Who said "Don't eat or drink anything, you're having an operation."

So I sat there, from 12.30 till 8pm, with little side trips for blood tests, X-rays and the like, while my bum grew progressively numb and the red patch on my finger crept ominously down my hand. Best friend Annie came by to pick up keys and go get overnight stuff from home—and to feed cat before he ate anyone else; she took her husband along as a decoy.

8pm they admitted me to the acute plastic ward and The Big Plastic Surgeon came and poked my hand a few times. They decided to do the op on Friday and hooked me up to an IV antibiotic and fed me a cheese sandwich.

So there I am, one hand with the antibiotic drip, the other trussed up in a fetching blue foam affair which held my hand at a 45% angle. Great.

In the bed opposite was another Sue, trussed up just like me. She had been bitten on the same hand, on the same day but she'd been bitten by a dog. So instantly, she was Sue the Dog and I was Sue the Cat, to the amusement of the nurses.



In the bed next to me was the Evil Woman from Hell. Or Wythenshawe, same difference.

Annie had my important supplies, nightwear, toothbrush, book (note to self, never, ever, leave home without a book—I spent all those hours in casualty without anything to read—there was a folder of fan fiction in the car but it wasn't stuff suitable to be read anywhere someone could be reading over your shoulder) and I had the fun task of getting into a nightdress while tied up like an extra in a low budget bondage show. Sue the Dog did her best not to laugh.

As we settled down to sleep, Evil Woman from Hell started. She'd had a rhinoplasty and had been loud and aggressive when coming out of the anaesthetic but Sue and I put it down to the drugs and disorientation. Her (long-suffering) partner left about 11pm and we had to put up with her. She wanted a private room and was going to be loud, obnoxious and irritating until she got one. She started every complaint with the line "I don't want to be any trouble but..." 'til Sue and I were at screaming point. The nurses were dreadful, they treated her awfully, she couldn't sleep (neither could we), she kept phoning poor long suffering hubby (every hour, on the hour, all night) her face hurt, her arm hurt, she was hungry, she felt sick, she wanted a private room. To the point where Sue and I were planning murder. Neither of us felt up to just telling her to "Shut the hell up!" which is what we should have done.

Next morning I was whisked down to the operating room, where I had to tell the OR nurses the whole 'cat ate my finger' story again. I was getting it down pat by this stage. Then we discussed if the oxygen mask smelt of strawberries or vanilla. Then I woke up with a bloody great bandage round my hand and a new antibiotic drip.



Joy of joys, Evil Woman From Hell had been ~~thrown down a lift shaft~~ moved to a private room to the rejoicing of staff and patients alike.

Everyone else seemed to wake from the anaesthetic feeling sick or being sick. I woke up fine, no queasy tummy, no aches pains or anything, and hand, even in huge great bandage, felt much better.

Then I got bored.

The main entertainment (Evil Woman From Hell) dethroned. Most other people considered TV to be distraction—day time TV... shudder—but it was damnably hard to read with the constant mumble of other people and with one hand suspended in sling and other with drip. I managed, but it was an effort.

Worse of all, no computer. Even if I'd had the iBook, I would have been dependant on its battery power and there was no internet, not even an internet cafe. Oh, the despondency of the fan cut off from everything for a couple of days.

They released me after two days and I spent the next two weeks struggling to live one handed—and finding out how very left handed I am. I couldn't even blow my nose properly for a fortnight.

And is Max suitably chastised?

No, he had new mummy home for a couple of weeks to be at his beck and call. He now has the cat flap conquered (he only just fits through it), allowing him access to the back alleys of Northwich; the local cat population is traumatised. We have a running book on what the first gift is going to be, bird, mouse, newt, frog, goose or bullock; my bet is on bullock. He bit the neighbour (but the neighbour is a macho twit—how many times did I have to say "Don't do that, he'll bite you.") and now has a little dangly thing on his collar with his name and address and MAX—He Bites. Which lets people get just close enough to read it to put them in his range. My floor is strewn with numerous cat toys, including Beany Bear, who I found on my bed when I came home from work the other day, big tough pussy cats needing their teddy, obviously.

There was considerable discussion over his name. He spent at least a week known as EllBee, short for Little Bastard, but, after some perusal of *The Campaign for Real Cats* book (T. Pratchett), I decided that I couldn't stand on the back doorstep late at night calling for the Little Bastard without worrying the neighbours so he is Maximum Damage Mason. Mad Max for short. I've never had a real cat before...

—Sue Mason

BOLLOCKS

Protest Group

The group Fathers for Justice has been getting a lot of publicity recently in the UK, with stunts involving people in superhero costumes climbing onto London landmarks. They're campaigning for divorced fathers to have more parental rights.

Mike, on the other hand, is planning to launch Ex-Husbands Against Parenthood. Next weekend, he'll be climbing Big Ben dressed as King Kong in order to demand that he has to have no contact at all with his ex-wife's children.



Cthulhu-Nigiri

"Alison was going to write about *Getting Things Done*, but she didn't get round to it."

New IKEA!

We tried very hard to avoid having an IKEA story in this issue of *Plokta*, if only because talking about IKEA gives Flick nightmares about giant wasps. However, now that a new branch of IKEA has opened up only seconds from Steven and Alison's front door, their house has become merely an outpost of the IKEA warehouse.

As you may have heard, the new IKEA opened with ceremonial riots as the furniture-deprived masses threw off the imperialist yoke and demanded stylish bookcases for all. Fortunately, the fighting seems to have missed Walthamstow, although a large number of blood-spattered flat-pack wardrobes mysteriously appeared in Alison's bedroom shortly after.

BOLLOCKS

New Plokta!

Plokta Enterprises Inc. announce their new models, the Plokta Mini, the Aluminium PowerPlokta and the cinema size iMax Plokta. In accordance with our long-standing tradition of charging too much money for a perfectly fanzine with a very trendy style, we're going to make the zine either too large to read, too small to read, or just engraved on aluminium sheets so you haven't got a hope of reading it unless you're blind.

Next month we plan to introduce the Plokta Shuffle. For only exorbitant amounts of money we will send you a random selection of unnumbered pages, each one the size of a piece of chewing gum, that you can read in any order you want.

"I remember when Meriol was conceived."

New Cat!

Sue's new cat seems to prove the law of preservation of *Plokta* cats. Not many years ago, Steve and Giulia owned the worst-tempered cat in the world, George. Meanwhile, Sue's Spooky was a pleasant and placid old puss-cat. Now, the situations are reversed with Shadow being gentle and affectionate, while Max is a man-eating demon in feline form. So much for evolution.

Coffee Disaster

Alison recently went to the Monmouth Street Coffee Company, and as well as getting a couple of hundredweight of coffee to get the Cabal through the weekend, she got some estate-grown black peppercorns at a price suggesting that pepper is once more worth its weight in gold. They came in a nice Monmouth Street Coffee Company paper bag, with a discreet little label saying what the contents were. So you may be able to guess what happened this morning when Steven was putting the first batch of coffee in the coffee grinder in a normal first-thing-in-the-morning-and-half-asleep mode.

Fütspa!

I SPEND a lot of time listening to the radio while half asleep. Drifting at the edge of my consciousness, I learnt that life in the 21st century is full of electric mathoms. Nearly every household in the UK has gadgets in the cupboard that they don't ever use but won't get rid of. Things that are theoretically useful. Bread machines, electric carving knives, slow cookers, sandwich toasters, juicers. You know the sort of thing. And footspas.

"What's a footspa?" asked Phill Jupitus, somewhere at the edge of my psyche. He's a comedian who likes music, does what is theoretically known as the breakfast show but, in my house at least, is the hiding-under-the-duvet-failing-to-get-up show.

"Footspa? Footspa! Fütspa!" said the DJ. "It sounds like something Eastern European football teams shout when they score a goal. Fütspa!" They were quite enthusiastic. And I was forming an idea.

Now, we don't have many of these gadgets. We do have plenty of junk, but most of it is paper. But as it happened, we were looking for a slow cooker.

The problem with choice is that it makes you unhappy. I mean, a little choice is good. "Would you like your iPod Mini in green or blue?" That's fine. But here in this modern world, we're paralysed by choice. I knew I wanted a slow cooker, but did I want a big one (slow cook a whole chicken!) or a little one (fit it in the kitchen!). Did I want one with a timer, or an auto setting, or that would steam? Stainless steel or traditional-looking? Removable crockpot? Dishwasher safe? So I kept wandering into John Lewis, looking disconsolately at a row of 25 slow cookers, none of which had *anything like* enough technical info, becoming paralysed by choice, and wandering out again. I'm sure that if

they'd had two slow cookers, I'd have bought one. Except, of course, that the web tells me about the other 23, so I'm doomed.

So we hadn't bought a slow cooker.

I formed an idea. Posting on LiveJournal, I said 'Does anyone have a slow cooker they're not using that I could borrow, or indeed keep? If this works I'm holding out for a footspa...'. 24 hours later I had a promise of both a slow cooker *and* a footspa.

We collected them at Novacon. First I tracked down the fishlifters. Mark handed me a large heavy carrier bag. I peered in and saw a neatly wrapped slow cooker. "Why are you getting rid of it? We never use it, it's just taking up space." "Any instructions?" "Er, I couldn't find them." Oh, well. How hard can it be? Meanwhile, Max handed me a large light carrier bag. I peered in and saw a footspa. "Fütspa!" I declared. "Why are you getting rid of it?" Apparently her other footspa *is a Porsche* has bubbles. Mmm. Bubbles. "Any instructions?" "Er, I couldn't find them." Oh, well. How hard can it be? I peered at the fütspa. A line inside was marked 'Max'. Bloody hell, she didn't mention that it was personalised.

We tried them out. The slow cooker was straightforward enough. Fill with hot uncooked stew, go out for one of those exciting family days out they only have in the fifties, come back, cold, tired and hungry to find yummy ready-to-eat stew. Wow. Normally we have to rely on the Red Fort Tandoori for that sort of thing.

So after tucking into the stew, I tried out the footspa. I placed it under the computer, poured in water gingerly, as Steven wrings his hands and pointed out the 19 power sockets within splash distance of the footspa. Nonsense! I said, and turned it on. The water shimmered. The footspa vibrated. The floor vibrated. The desk vibrated. The computer vibrated. The screen vibrated. Steven's mouth formed the words 'I told you so', but I couldn't hear him properly over the noise of the footspa.

Luckily, when I put my feet in, the vibrations died away. It was quite nice. My feet felt nice. The study filled up with an aromatherapy fog. I took my feet out and then dried them off. And then picked up the footspa, drained it carefully, and put it away in a cupboard next to the slow cooker.

Now. About that deep fat fryer.

—Alison Scott



Lokta Plokta

Stop Press:

Sue reports that her evil monster new cat Max (see pages 8-9) has taken to bringing home his kills. The score so far is two Beanie Babies, acquired from a neighbour who really shouldn't have a cat-flap.

[Not many locs this time, as we've been crap about mailing the previous issue, and we gave out a lot of copies at Novacon—giving out fanzines at conventions always ensures that you will receive no locs.]

Pamela Boal
 pamelajboal@westfieldway.
 fsnet.co.uk
 4 Westfield Way, Wantage,
 Oxon, OX12 7EW

I only have time to give the other side of the story put by John Berry.

Thorns in a WRAF PTI rose bed

Deep rumbling voices punctuated by high pitched squeaks outside the gymnasium door. I look at my wall chart. "Oh hell I forgot about them!" Open the door to view a gangling, spotty and even giggling youths. Needless to say the sergeant supposedly in charge of this ATC group had dumped the boys and skived off. He knew only too well that the lads (some of whom were away from home for the first time and anxious to assert themselves) did not take kindly to orders from a WRAF only a few years older than themselves. He also knew I wouldn't drop him in it.

First thing to do is identify and separate out the leaders. Young Adonis (or so he thought) was definitely one and that one's face was too innocent to be true. Those two, definitely first hangers

on, balance it with the two who seem to be on the fringe of the group. "Right you two, come in pick up a bench and place it on the serving line of the badminton court, if you don't know what that is hold it until I can show you. You two pick up another bench and place it on top of theirs, make sure it is square to and firm. You two drag some of those landing mats and pile them in front of the benches. Rest of you line up over there.

"Now before we let you in to one of our aircraft you have to learn the parachute landing drill. What's that you are holding Cadet?"

"A fag Corps, want one?" Grins all round.

"Corporal if you please, I'm not dead, though I'm not sure about you, at least from the neck up. I'm sure you didn't expect me to allow smoking in my gym but I'll make an exception for you. Here's an ash tray, stand by the door and smoke every cigarette in that packet. You should manage to finish them before your sergeant comes to collect you.

I try not to hold my breath while the Cadet decides between defying me or showing that he could chain smoke if he wanted to. Ignore him as he picks up the ash tray and ambles to the door. Pick the most sensible looking chap and use him to demonstrate the landing position of feet together, knees bent, chin on chest and elbows tucked in. Gather them round the mat, get the Cadet to show how easily he can roll from a correct landing position. Then finish with a mime of striking the harness box to release and slip out of the harness before the parachute drags them over the ground.

By now I have spotted the joker of the bunch, definitely freckle face. "You first Cadet, two-footed jump from the top of the benches, land roll and release just as we have demonstrated." I thought as much, a star jump and an exaggerated crumpled heap on the mat. "Oh dear Cadet you have just broken your back. Too bad there are no medics standing by at this field, you will have to stay there until the session has ended. No don't try to move, you will make your injuries worse." He looks in a suitably uncomfortable position. "Right, the four of you detailed to the benches take them up to the other end of the court, and you put two more mats by the benches."

They are not bad lads when they put their minds to it. In fact they are all making a good effort at what probably seems to them a pretty silly exercise. Just one more interruption. "Excuse me Corporal, John doesn't look very well." Yes, the smoker does look decidedly seedy. "Help him to the toilet, it's through that door on the right."

As far as I know the ATC groups that came to our camp were not connected, but I never had a moment's trouble with the next group.

Cardinal Cox
 58 Pennington, Orton
 Goldhay, Peterborough,
 PW2 5RB

My father was a commando in WW2, judo instructor. In the same bunch/brigade/unit/thingy that John Gardner (sometime Bond author) was in. Dad don't remember him, but there was another 900+ blokes there as well. When I lived in Bedford, bloke in flat downstairs was a Pole. At the start of WW2 he'd walked to Italy, then

went to Switzerland. There he was recruited by British Intelligence to blow the occasional thing up in France. When the Swiss wouldn't let him back in one night, he stayed in France and worked for the Resistance. His tales were a little different from the war films. They tried to put off any French person from joining as they were generally a liability. And instead of having the weapons/ammunition dropped in by plane, they bought them all from corrupt German soldiers.

Gail Courtney
 Gail@woodwarrior.demon.
 co.uk

Giulia, you are not alone. My Kiki gives me 'cat kisses', and even tries to shove her nose up my nostrils. Okay I've usually been eating smoked haddock soup, but...

I have gathered anecdotes from several cat owners about the unhealthy obsession our felines have with earwax. Especially when hungry—no Q Tip is safe, (or even reclining, sleeping human).

Sarah Prince
 sarah@ssprince.com

Inspired by Sue's gut wobbling in Volume 7 No. 2 I thought I should photograph the Wobbly Moose when I drive by it on Wednesday, but then to my surprise found that it has a rudimentary web site:

<http://www.thewobblymoose.com/>

I couldn't find the Canadian trucking company with a moose logo that I'd seen on the highways and found once on the web, but in searching turned up these:

"This is a Volvo with the moose bars on the front"

http://www.bankstruckpictures.com/grellis_eastern_cdn.htm

Flick
flick@internet-fairy.org

Max wrote a letter—and someone else replied—about mishearing the lyrics to some song or other as “loc to Dr Plokta”. Unfortunately, it being something heard of the song she was talking about. And the only tune that my brain could come up with to fit those words was:

Loc to Dr Plokta
He’s an evil man of mystery

From his base in London
He’s plotting to change history

Some day, maybe Mike will with
the fight
Then the time streams will not be
alright

So when you’re reading Plokta
Keep an evil genius happy

Lloyd Penney
pennys@allstream.net
1706-24 Eva Rd, Etobicoke,
ON, CANADA M9C 2B2

I am a typical fan in that the amount of exercise I get in a year is about the same as what an athlete might get in a busy morning. That’s not going to improve with the state of my knees. The car accident we were in is now two years past, and my left knee feels like it’s going to collapse. It has gotten better with judicious sampling of glucosamine-chondroitin capsules, but still doesn’t feel quite right.

This is Spinal Crap... Ooo, Giulia, have we been introduced? We sure have been now... I’ve been on fanzine panels at local cons, and I bring copies of *Plokta*,

File 770, Mimosa and more, the usual Hugo-nominated stuff on paper, and I hold them up, and say, “These are samples of fanzines.” And other, bring out solid reams of paper Cerlox-punched and bound, full of sordid fanfic, and say, “No they’re not, these are.” My measly little zines are traded back and forth, while the big zines are \$25 or more. Obviously, what I have to offer are third-rate, there’s not even any fanfic in them! Discussions? Articles, artwork and letters? Who’d want that stuff when you can have all the Cerlox-bound *MarySues* you could ever want? I don’t do those panels any more, and it’s mostly because few local fans know what a fanzine is any more.

Colin Greenland

Miss Clarke is delighted to see her portrait in your periodical, if a little disconcerted that you’ve beheaded her mother and her sister while putting it there. Her agent will be in touch about the jokes you pinched from Chapter Five.

WAHF: **John Berry**, **Captain Ed Owen** (“I stumbled onto your site by accident while doing a Google search for ‘This Is Your Captain Speaking’”), **Terry Jeeves** (“The Jeeves piece had me puzzled. Can I sue?”) and **Jackie Duckworth** (“My mother renewed one library book continuously for about fifteen years.”).

Treacle Sandwiches

“WELL, you didn’t eat your dinner so you can’t have any ice cream. If you’re hungry, have a treacle sandwich.”

Everyone looked at me blankly, except Jonathan, who was clinging to Steven and, in an attempt to be appealing, muttering “I’m hungry! I didn’t like dinner!”

“Yes, you did, dear,” Alison replied, “It was one of your favourites. Wouldn’t a Golden Syrup sandwich be a rather nice treat?” (The last addressed to me, rather than Jonathan....)

No, not Golden Syrup. Treacle. The black stuff.

That’s what I used to get if I’d refused to eat my dinner at Omar’s house and then complained of being hungry. It always struck me as being perfectly logical, possibly because I’d been exposed to the idea at a young age, or possibly because it was Omar’s suggestion, and she was by far my favourite grand parent. Much better than Granny Rat Bag, at least, although I will concede that she was a better cook.

But I was very rarely stuck with treacle sandwiches, mainly because Omar used to cook whatever I told her to. In fact, I was so thoroughly

spoiled by her that I wouldn’t swear that treacle sandwiches weren’t her idea of a treat, or at least her attempt to recreate something that she used to get as a child in lieu of a treat.

Granny Rat Bag was, in my considered opinion, a far inferior grandmother. One only had to compare the number of times that she had been convinced to play on the climbing frame in her local park (none, in living memory. Plus it was a far inferior park, mostly consisting of a near-vertical hill with formal gardens in it, surrounded by mills and depressing terrace houses) with the frequency with which Omar could be convinced to do the same (at least twice a week, once at each of the local parks, each of which contained near-infinite areas of woodland, full of places to play hide and seek). No contest.

On the other hand, she was a much better cook, provided that you understood that you would get the same daily menu each week and, if you didn’t like it, you didn’t even get the offer of treacle sandwiches. About the only concession was that, if you were me, you could have potato hash instead of pie and, if you were my sister, you could pick the bits of kidney out of the potato pie. I

never really minded the kidney, although that did once have the unfortunate side effect of causing my mother (after she, slightly surprised, said “You like kidney?” and got an affirmative reply) to one day present me with an entire plate of kidney for dinner. Nice.

Granny Rat Bag did, also, have the advantage of having sweets in the house. Lots and lots of sweets. And biscuits. And home made cakes, and pasties. And about twice as many regular meals as anyone else, including tea, dinner *and* supper. Omar’s stock of treats and cooking abilities very much reflected being brought up to be a good pioneer wife. Although she could occasionally be persuaded to make fudge, or coconut ice, her usual idea of a sweet treat was a date scone, which was just about the only thing that she could cook, and hot drinks for children only went as far as hot water with a spoon full of honey in. This is why I remain uncertain about whether a treacle sandwich was meant to be a treat or a punishment. After all, they are sweet.

Having considered his options, Jonathan decided that perhaps he wasn’t, on balance, all that hungry.

—Flick