

FINANCIAL PLOKTA

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September 2002



Could this be what Glasgow will look like in September 2005? Our **Travel** correspondent reports.



Our Senior Market Analyst reports on the latest trends in the FANAQ index. See the **Personal Finance** section for the full report.



Britain's nuclear arsenal continues to grow. In **Lifestyles**, we visit the peace campaigners who have been picketing London Road in Reading for the past decade.

MARKETS

FANAQ Index reaches new lows

The FANAQ index has now fallen to below 2200, a level not seen since the dark days of 1980 immediately following the Season '79 debacle.



Bonds in decline

The Bond market has proved far from immune to the financial turmoil that is sweeping fandom.

Bond Prices (Hong Kong Exchange)	
Sandra	234
James	17
Basildon	112
Harry	Trading discontinued

Forgotten Futures markets reach saturation

According to the latest figures from LIFFE (London International Forgotten Futures Exchange), there are now enough *Forgotten Futures* CD-ROMs in circulation for every household in the UK to have three copies.

GROaT falls again

The Gopher Reward Token has now fallen below parity with both the US dollar and the Euro. It is trading at \$0.97, meaning that it takes four GROaTs to buy a pint of beer in the average convention hotel.

Worldcon Disaster

With site selection now imminent, there seems to be no hope left of averting a Glasgow Worldcon in 2005

By our Oman Correspondent

The apocalyptic vision of another UK Worldcon draws ever closer. With no competing bids, there now seems to be little likelihood of averting a UK victory in the site selection at ConJesse.

The malaise and depression that will inevitably accompany such a victory seem set

to drive UK fanac markets, already trading at their lowest levels for years, to new depths.

Evidence is increasing that the bid committee may have repeatedly told US voters that UK fans think the Worldcon is 'not a bad idea'.

We tracked down Vince Docherty, the Hiberno-Omani-Dutch CEO of UK in 2005 in London. And in Glasgow

And in Shepperton. And in Basingstoke. On each occasion, he was only too ready to answer any questions we might have. We asked him to comment on rumours that the bid committee would shortly be forced to file for moral bankruptcy. "Nonsense," he replied. "Our business plans are all fully disclosed on our website".



CEO Docherty

Will Cabal join the Ego?

Decision near on economic tests

By our Fanac Correspondent

We may soon know whether or not the *Plokta* Cabal will be joining the Single Fannish Currency, or Ego, which is now in wide circulation within fandom.

The Cabal's analysts have laid down five conditions which will have to be fulfilled before they will consider holding the promised referendum.

The Tests

1	Convergence of beer consumption
2	The effect on the size of <i>Plokta</i> meals
3	The impact on <i>Plokta</i> production generally
4	Whether it will provide unlimited free childcare
5	<i>Plokta</i> winning a Hugo, you bastards

Some of the tests are likely to prove problematic at this time, specifically numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, and we do not anticipate that the Cabal will be entering the Ego in the short to medium term.

Corflu stocks reach new lows

Known reserves of Corflu fall to eleven years

By our Twiltone Correspondent

Known exploitable reserves of corflu have now fallen to eleven years' supply at expected consumption levels, despite exploration in the new Haverfordwest basin.

Fandom clearly faces an unprecedented situation in the near

future as supplies dry up completely.

Research into alternatives continues, despite such setbacks as the great Tipp-Ex disaster of 1997. However, without a technological breakthrough it seems that we face a future full of typographical errors. So no change there, then.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Fans fear for their retirement

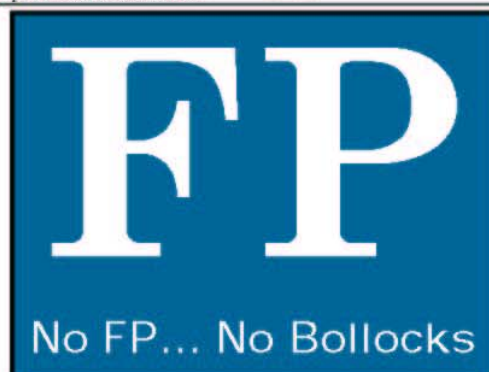
Following falls in egoboo markets worldwide, fans who had accumulated sufficient egoboo to retire from active fandom are having to reconsider. **Page 17**

Derivatives

Robert Jordan, Terry Brooks and David Eddings all have new books due. **Literature, Page 21**

Commodities

Banana Wings are tipped as a buy following their recent re-emergence in the marketplace. **Page 10**



This is issue 27 of *Plokta*, edited by Steve Davies, Alison Scott and Mike Scott. 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 if possible, please), contribution, editorial whim, or for a credible write-in alternative to Glasgow in 2005.

Steve Davies

Alison Scott

Mike Scott

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The cabal also includes Giulia De Cesare, Sue Mason, George the cat, Steven, Marianne and Jonathan Cain

Plokta is a vaguely Croydon fanzine

Art by **Sue Mason**

Photos by **Chris O'Shea** (Vince Docherty on the cover; Wag & the second John Meaney on p.7), **Paul Treadaway** (p.2; Wheelbarrow race & Bollywood on p.7), **Steve Davies** (Hugos on the cover; p.4; p.6; Skull, Corsetry & the first John Meaney on p.7), **Mike Scott** (Bug & Marianne Cain on the cover; Sue and Farah & the third John Meaney on p.7), **Austin Benson** (Alison on p.7), Some guy from the V&A (p.10)

Addresses of Contributors

Sue Mason

Giulia de Cesare, as for Steve Davies

Kip Williams

Alasdair Hepburn

Now in glorious

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Steve has been assimilating culture while he's between jobs, and he also visited the recent Dale Chihuly exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Alison is baptised into the Cult of Livejournal

Editorial

MUCH to our surprise, we survived <plokta.con> Release 2.0, a convention in which Alison was baptised into the Holy Roman Church of Bollocks and Chris O'Shea saved the day through having far more superfluous technology than us. We do have lots of photos, and we've liberally strewn them about this issue. Our undying thanks go to everyone who took photos and downloaded them into our end-of-con slide show. Especial thanks to (once again) Chris O'Shea for not complaining too much when we went and uploaded a selection of the con photos to our website without telling him.

Thanks also to everyone who worked on the convention in any capacity and appeared on the programme, and to those photographers who have allowed us to use their photos in this issue of *Plokta*.

Meanwhile, it's Worldcon time again, so Alison has sunk into her traditional Labor Day sulk. This goes along the lines of "I wonder if I could make it to the Hugos if I sold the kids into slavery? Maybe Steven could look after them while I fly out to California?" And as usual, it ends up with her deciding to watch the Hugos by webcam. After all, it's not as if we're going to win. Of course, in real life, she's finally been promoted and is now, without a shadow of a doubt, a fully fledged mandarin. We're planning to wrap her in tissue paper and put her in Marianne's Christmas stocking. Unfortunately, she's now too important for the likes of us and is off ruling the country for the Department of Unemployment, instead of editing *Plokta*. You may notice a certain absence of Alison from this issue, except on the opposite page.

Steve, on the other hand, is still out of work, looking for a new job as a computer consultant. This seems to involve a couple of hours surfing the net each day, followed by sunbathing or exploring the countryside. At least it keeps Alison in her job.

Many of you will be receiving this issue at the same time as number 26, or even before it. We're sorry about that. The reason is basically that Alison is crap (*Wah!*) and has not yet mailed the previous issue. Of course, there's no guarantee that she's going to mail this one, either, so if you're getting this issue as part of a jumbo package containing numbers 26 through 53, we can only apologise some more. Anyway, that's why there is no loc column this time, since distressingly few *Plokta* readers have psychic powers sufficiently well developed that they can loc a fanzine they have not yet received. Of course, if you do have psychic powers, we're happy to receive locs on any issue at all. Next week's share prices would also be gratefully received.

We have a follow-up to the SMS-and-Eira wedding from a few issues ago. They have now produced a baby, who went nameless for a disturbingly long time. All is well now, though, as they have taken their cue from *Plokta* and named him MOOSE (for Male Offspring Of SMS and Eira).



Steve and Giulia have just got back from WOMAD (World of Music and Dance) having been cajoled into going by Jaine and Dave Weddell. Despite Giulia's fears ("there'll be crowds of people and nothing to eat except brown rice and lentils...") it was great fun and both the music and the food were wonderful. Look out for the Mexican cyber-mariachi band in future.



Finally, some of you may have noticed that this issue is a little more colourful than usual. After arguing for years about how much it would cost to have colour photos in the fanzine, Mike has bought himself a second-hand OKI colour laser printer on eBay. Assuming that it doesn't blow up or **start printing the individual letters in random colours**, we'll be trying to make this our standard means of reproduction. Alison and Steven please note that this is now the *only* approved *Plokta* method of reproduction. Of course, holograms would be nice....

BOLLOCKS

Fear and Loathing in Las Plokta

We were somewhere around Basingstoke when the drugs began to take hold. I remember saying something like "I feel a little angst-ridden, maybe you should write..." And suddenly there was a terrible roar all around us and the post was full of huge locs, all swooping and screeching and diving around the fanzine, which was going about a hundred miles an hour with the top down. And a voice was screaming "Christ, who left the door to the fan room open again!?"

Then it was quiet again. My co-editor had taken her jacket off and was pouring beer on her head to facilitate the alcohol absorption process. "What are you yelling about?" she muttered, with her eyes closed. "Never mind," I said. "It's your turn to edit." I hit the save button and aimed the Great White Fanzine towards the shoulder of the highway. No point mentioning those locs, I thought. The poor bastard will see them soon enough.

"We need to add a couple of lines to this bollocks."

The Marriage Of True Minds

On Steve's Live Journal, he has a link to a little questionnaire that lets you find out how compatible you are with Steve. Having always been a sucker for these things, I filled it in and was given the following result by the cool folk at similarminds.com: "you are 86% similar, you are 83% complementary." Oh, I thought, jolly good, maybe I did do the right thing after all when I gave up my entire life in Tasmania to come here and live with him.

I told him this when I got home from work that evening, expecting at least some small gesture of affection from my staid Englishman in return.

"Humph," said Steve. "I was 97% compatible with Simon Bisson, actually."

Well, I hope they'll be very happy together. Meantime, I'm going to give Mary Branscombe a call and see if she's doing anything next Saturday night.

—Giulia De Cesare

Game Over

I WAS in London for a job interview and after it finished I found myself with a little more time than expected. So I decided to go visit the computer games exhibition at the Barbican. Now, I've wasted years of my life playing computer games. I like adventures, RPGs, strategy games. I discovered computers at university, spent hours in the basement playing startrek and adventure on the big DEC 20 mainframe. Later I had my own computer, a Sharp MZ80A, then I got a real PC, an Amstrad 1512 (I phoned Tim Illingworth and said "I've got a 10Mb hard disc, I'll never be able to fill it..."). I've played a lot of games since then, but they were all for the PC with its limited graphics. Still, it did play stuff like *Ultima* and *Lemmings*. Nowadays, of course, games come out first on the PC with its vast user base, superior flexibility and ever-improving graphics quality.

The Barbican is still the Barbican. As is traditional I got lost in the non-Euclidean corridors while trying to navigate around a private function and ended up battling my way through a Xavier Veilhan exhibition. Literally battle through, since the main pieces on show were a life size red rhino and a forest of giant felt columns. It was like living in *The Carpet People*.



Finally, I found myself in a part of the complex that I've never been in before. Undoubtedly a parallel universe. A universe in which I was clearly an alien from the outer darkness. Straight from an interview for a senior consultant position, I was wearing smart suit, expensive raincoat and short hair. Even the small proportion of people who, like me, were revisiting their ancient youth were long-haired and wearing T-shirts. Damn! Sold out at last! Of course

everybody else was less than 10 years old and clutching clipboards. There's something terrifying in discovering that your nostalgic memories are now the subject of some kid's history project.

I paid my £11 for a 2 hour ticket, designed to stop small boys spending the whole day in there playing, and plunged in. Just inside the entrance, was a genuine PDP-1 which may or may not be the one on which the game *Spacemar* was developed, but which looks a lot like the actual machine, so that's alright then. Next to it was the game itself, playing on a Vectrex, a machine I always thought to be entirely vapourware. Oh, and a *Pong* machine and *Space Invaders* and *Missile Command* and *Galaxians*... all the arcade machines that successfully sucked small change from my pockets when I was young. Not that I was ever actually any good at them, never managed to hardwire my reflexes in the way that some people could. Also, it's a bit hard when you have to cope with the risk of collapsing with epileptic fits, as I once did while playing *Battlezone*.

Next came the room of crap consoles. I've never bothered with consoles. It doesn't look like I missed very much. However, it definitely seems like whoever set up the show was deeply in love with them. They appear to have got a somewhat skewed view of the computer games industry as a result. Several of the explanatory notes around the walls don't agree either with my memory or with my copy of *History of Electronic Games*. I mean, I don't remember the PC not having any games at all. What was it I was playing with then? Moreover, many of the games on display here and elsewhere in the exhibition were displayed in their console incarnations with silly, unusable controls. *Populous*, a game I played extensively on the PC and which at the time made full use of the PC's keyboard and VGA graphics, running on a Nintendo with shoddy graphics and trying to emulate a full keyboard and mouse on a crummy gamepad with half a dozen buttons. They did the same with *Sim City* which I hadn't realised had ever been ported to Nintendo. They shouldn't have bothered, it was appallingly bad, not the all-consuming addiction it was on PC. They did the same with *Elite*, that classic BBC Micro game, rendering it completely unplayable. There were a few games on display that they didn't have a hope of ruining like this. Like *HHGTTG* where I played through to the arrival of the Vogon fleet, just for old time's sake.

There were puzzle games, question games, racing games, platform games, lots and lots of pseudo-arcade games with sounds of bombs exploding, bleeps and boops, graphics chips screaming as their 4-bit capabilities were taxed to their utmost. Flickering screens, with even more flickering sprites bouncing across them. Uggh. What there weren't were any noticeable number of the games I'd spent all my time playing. No RPGs, no exploration games, hardly any strategy games, only one adventure game, no *Ultima*, no *Wizardry*, no *Empire*, no *Myst*, not even *Doom*... it was a great disappointment. In fact these guys couldn't even *spell* role-playing ("roll-playing" if you must know). They did have a lot of *Tomb Raider* bits and pieces, including development notes and draft artwork, but that's not a game I've ever found sufficiently interesting to actually play.

After going round twice, becoming more and more disappointed, I realised that there was a cunningly concealed upper floor. This had a few more interesting bits, though it was still very focused on action games. There were some displays on computer music, on the cross-fertilisation between cinema and games, some multiplayer games (again a poor selection), old magazine covers, handhelds and weird hardware like 3D goggles. There were some costumes (produced by a professional designer, not by fans), something pathetic on real-life applications of games (city planning using the *Quake 3* engine) and possible future directions like virtual reality. I was unimpressed. You mean I paid for 2 hours of looking round somebody *else's* history?

So, as an exercise in nostalgia and revisiting my misspent youth, it didn't really work out. However, the exhibition bookshop did have a very good selection of books on the subject. This included the really excellent book *High Score! The Illustrated History of Electronic Games* by Rusel DeMaria and Johnny L. Wilson. Unlike Game On, this does actually cover the games I was interested in, devoting pages to game companies like Origin and ID as well as covering the consoles in more than sufficient detail. Do yourself a favour, give the Barbican a miss and buy the book instead. And if you've got a 10 year old kid doing a history project on video games, asking "what did you do in the console wars, Daddy?" tell them it wasn't like that at all, huh?

—Steve Davies

This is Spinal Crap

OOH, me back's killing me. This has been my lament for years now, me and just about any one else in the IT business. Add to that a serious obsession with fanfiction (thanks, *LOTR* movie) and it seems like I spend all my time hunched over a keyboard. Hey, just like Steve. They say married couples get more alike as time goes by. Steve, of course, doesn't do anything as frivolous as write slash in the evenings though, oh no. He plays serious, grown-up computer games like *Morrowind* and *Baldur's Gate*, and he blogs.

So, anyway, I was frequently getting to the point that my neck and shoulders were too rigid to let me turn my head, which is a bit of a problem when you try to change lanes while doing ninety-five miles an hour along the A329(M). And it bloody hurt, too. The downside of working in IT. The upside, however, is private insurance. While moaning about this at work one day (ghod, I've become a whinging pom), two other people mentioned that they had been seeing physiotherapists for similar problems and the company was paying. Well, sauce for the consultant is sauce for the trainer, and one of them recommended the physio in the village, a two minute agonised stagger away. OK, I exaggerate a bit, the stiff neck doesn't stop me from walking.

First session, the nice young lady I saw had me sit on a table and try to move my head and arms in various ways, which I did. She tsked.

Oh?

You mean, your head's supposed to go *that* far round?

Mine hadn't in years.

I had a nice massage and left, feeling better.

A couple of weeks later, I was back, even worse than before. I saw someone different this time, another nice young lady, but she was much more insistent on finding out just what the heck I was doing to myself. She knew about my job from my notes, but I had to admit I spent pretty much all of my waking hours typing on a laptop while sitting on a comfy sofa. Gosh, just like I am now, in fact.

Oh, she said, poking about among my immovable vertebrae, what a shame you have to work such long hours.

Oh, it's not work, I said. Um. I have a group of friends and we spend a lot of time lounging about on comfy sofas with our laptops and our broadband, wireless internet connection...

Why?

Well... it's fun. Actually. Um. We run conventions.

I explained what a convention was.

We do a fanzine.

I explained what a fanzine was.

We put it up on the net.

I explained what... no, she did know what the internet was, but I could not explain why it was actually fun to spend days lounging on a comfy chair with a laptop etc. Not to someone whose idea of weekend fun was eighty mile bicycle rides, anyway.

She gave me a lot of firm advice about my posture and how I should be sitting if I insisted on spending hours hunched over a laptop. Needless to say, comfy sofas did not come into it. Oh, no. Straight-backed chairs, knees at a right angle, not languidly stretched out, head *up*, shoulders *back*... I sat there thinking all I needed was a Victorian corset to complete the image.

Aha! She had the answer to that as well.

I walked away from their office and back to mine with posture that Queen Alexandra would have approved.

So, do physiotherapists these days peddle a nice line in Victorian corsetry?

Well, not exactly. It's all done with gaffer tape.

Ok, I exaggerate a bit. Elastoplast. And much more efficiently than the corsetry we were producing at Plokta.con, too. A simple X marks the spot. And if you spend three days taped up like that, it don't 'arf improve yer posture, guv.



Now I just have to get rid of my inclination to talk like Eliza Dolittle. I've got her poise down pat.

—Ginlia de Cesare

BOLLOCKS

Jeepers

Years of observation suggested to me that there were two different sorts of consultants in the computer industry, those who drive sports cars and those who drive 4-wheel drives. And then there was me. I always went everywhere by train, or occasionally got lifts in various people's cars. I've never been a happy driver, having learned late on account of having epilepsy. I acquired my parents' old car, a racing-green Mini with probably the worst automatic gearbox ever designed. It was cramped, had a bad habit of stalling and was so low slung that I couldn't see where I was going. As a result, the car just sat in the garage gathering dust.

When I started looking for a new job I decided I couldn't afford to be a non-driver in the current economic climate. So I took a couple of refresher lessons and started looking around for a car. Giulia wasn't supportive. She grumped about it being a waste and I'd just leave the car sitting about like the Mini. I didn't think so; all I needed was something which would make driving fun, which would encourage me. Which meant, well, either a sports car or a 4x4.

Sports cars are nice, but colleagues have given me lifts in various sporty BMWs, Saabs and TVRs over the years. And then there was Simon and his Lotus Elise which really wasn't designed for passengers. Doing 98 mph in a prone position with no visibility about 2 inches from the surface of the road, just isn't me. I'd rather be where I can see what what's going on. I decided that I was a 4x4 person. Anyway, we always had Land Rovers when I was a kid in Arabia. So I went out and bought myself a Honda CR-V automatic. One of the websites I looked at described it as a girly 4x4. Fine by me. It's great fun to drive. I've been zooming around little country lanes, exploring darkest Oxfordshire to my heart's content. And despite comments of the "well it's very nice but I wouldn't want to take it off road" variety, I have taken it up really rough tracks onto the Downs with only tractors for company.

Of course, now I'm happy driving, I keep wondering if I should trade it in for something where I can put the top down. A sports car would be nice.

—Steve Davies

BOLLOCKS

Un Po' di Bollocks

Hi! My name's Giulia. I work for a software company, training DBAs in our CRM software. A long sequence of insignificant events brought me here. But somewhere out there, somewhere down a different leg of the Trousers of Time, is another Giulia. This Giulia's parents never left the old home town to emigrate to Australia. This Giulia stayed in her little village all her life, married a nice local lad—some second cousin or other—and had five or six bambini. This Giulia always wears an apron and a light dusting of flour. She has let her hair go grey gracefully.

I know she's out there because, every now and then, I feel a tremor in the psychic link between us.

I feel her call to me most often if I am cooking. Not cooking just for me and Steve, but making big, substantial meals for the Cabal. Her spirit flows into me and makes me do things like wipe Jonathan's nose or speak kindly to Marianne. When those things happen, other members of the Cabal look at me strangely.

This is not the Giulia they know. This is the Other.

Her influence lasts at most for a few hours, long enough to prepare a huge meal and clean up immaculately after.

But she is getting stronger. She is starting to manifest in our world. And, insidiously, her presence here predates mine. One day, when she is strong enough, she will be the original Giulia, not me. She dates back to 1827, when she made the first commercial pasta in Italy. With a train of twenty four horses pulling twelve carts, she travelled 600 kilometres across Italy to build a factory where the best flour could be found. They don't make them like her any more. I can feel her contempt for CRM software reach across the centuries.

She is out there.

And this is her sign.



—Giulia de Cesare

Coming Back To Take Over The World

If it was clothing, then it would be a favourite, but long forgotten, jersey found in the back of your wardrobe when busy looking for something else. Having pulled it out from its hiding place, you hold it up. It still seems almost as good as new. You try it on. It fits, surprisingly well since it is so long since you last wore it. And then, because winter is approaching, you decide to keep wearing it. At first, the warm feeling wearing it again gives you is comforting. In fact, you are reluctant to take it off, because of this warm feeling. Gradually, you lose track of how much time you spend wearing it, and how little time you spend wearing anything else. Soon, the jersey starts to act like something out of a horror movie, and starts to take over your life, its arms becoming tentacles to smother all resistance, and to ensure that you never even think of wearing anything else again.

Welcome to *Boomerang*.

Boomerang, for those who haven't already encountered it, is a cable channel, that shows cartoons. Nothing new there. Except that, instead of the modern dross like *I am Weasel*, *Ed*, *Edd 'n' Eddy* or *Cow and Chicken*, it shows what everyone always thinks of as cartoons—*Looney Tunes*, *Dangermouse*, *Scooby Doo*, *Tom and Jerry*, and so on. In short, the best of the MGM and Warner back catalogues. Don't let these moving images fool you. *Boomerang* is set to take on the world. The world will roll over and let it win.

When we moved up to Glasgow, the TV reception in the house was lousy. An aerial installer stated that this was because the aerial was out of alignment, and anyway, the transmitter was out of line of sight over the hill. This meant that, to get any kind of picture at all, we needed a signal booster. Round about the same time that the booster gave up the ghost, there were some severe winter storms that knocked the aerial out of alignment again. The options were clearly: to pay again to have the aerial adjusted, and also to buy a new signal booster, with the distinct possibility that we would have to repeat this process every year or so; or get cable.

We got cable.

From time to time, channels would come, and channels would go. We were even offered a free upgrade to digital cable, which came with more channels. Life went on pretty much as usual; we got to watch the news, and other programmes with a distinct grounding in reality.

And then, it happened. *Cartoon Network*, which seemed to have stopped showing any decent stuff, to the extent that the boys were not bothered whether we kept it as one of the channels we were subscribing to, started

advertising a new channel, called *Boomerang*. Some time later, it appeared as one of our channel options. The boys are now reluctant to watch anything else. This is beginning to wear us down, as there is not, in fact, as much *Road-runner* and *Scooby Doo* as you might have thought. I think I've seen them all. Seen some of them twice, at least.

And then came Helicon 2. The TV on offer in the Monterey Hotel included all the usual ones, a sports channel seemingly selected at random, a news channel, and... *Boomerang*. Maybe, the fates were smiling at us, as the picture went just before the start of the 72 hour *Looney Tunes* marathon. This meant that we could at least prise the boys out of the room to do stuff.

That, though, was just a minor skirmish in the world domination stakes. Shortly after coming back from Jersey, we were up at Allison's sister, who has cable for the same reasons that we do. The boys were watching *Boomerang*, not surprisingly, when the adults wanted to watch something else. Anything else. We chose *The Simpsons* on Sky One as a first step towards rehabilitation into the real world. This time, however, the *Boomerang* generals were waiting to launch their master offensive, and suddenly, Sky One became *Boomerang*. We checked. No one had changed channels. We tried a few other channels. They had become *Boomerang* too. Even *Cartoon Network*, which had spawned *Boomerang*, had fallen, in an echo of *The Return of the Jedi*:

"You killed my father!"

"I am your father!"

We tried some more channels. The lucky ones kept their own picture, but the sound had been invaded by *Looney Tunes* (Actually, it did give some bizarre viewing, watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with *Road-runner* and *Coyote* as a soundtrack, but that's beside the point). The unlucky ones had succumbed, to their last horizontal scan line.

This seemed like a good time to abandon the cable setup, and just pick one of the five terrestrial channels. We turned over from the cable channel. It made no difference at all. Even on standard BBC 1, all we got was *Boomerang*. This was unnerving; while one cable channel swamping the other cable channels is almost plausible, the idea of one cable channel swamping *all* other channels does not bear thinking about. It was then that we saw through the evil plan for world domination of all media. All those episodes of *Pinky and the Brain* on *Animaniacs* were just the initial softening up.

"What will we do tomorrow?"

"Try to take over the world."

—Alasdair Hepburn

Convention Report

THE sun beat down, the beer ran out (several times) and a dismembered corpse was found in the park next door. We enjoyed <plokta.con> Release 2.0, and we hope you did too.



Alas, poor Tobes... was unable to make it to the convention

We took advantage of the sunny weather and fans' natural athletic tendencies and high levels of physical fitness to hold a Sports Day.



Sue Dawson and Farah Mendlesohn compete in the three-legged race



Wait till we get to the compost heap



John Meaney, our guest of honour, seemed to enjoy himself.



Even though we made him wear the silly hat



And perform physiologically unlikely stunts

The bin-liner corsetry workshop was a big hit.



Caro and Melusine in need of more gaffer-tape

On Saturday night, we held the second coming of the Cult of LiveJournal, which is definitely *not* a satanic cult that is extending its sinister tentacles throughout British fandom.



Blog what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law

Sunday night was Bollywood night, and congoers got into the spirit.



Kate Solomon, Anne Wilson, Kari, Phil Nanson and Michael Abbott

The hotel ran a ducking stool as part of its own Jubilee celebrations, and when the hotel manager got fed up, Alison gamely stepped in.



"You couldn't hit an elephant at this dist..." (continued on p. 2)

A Treat for Both Eyes



THEY'RE vanishing. The once-proud View-Masters, tops in scenery, fairy tales, and TV adaptations, can still be found here and there, but no longer do their mighty displays promise the world and all its brightest imaginings in three dimensions. Hardcore dedicated toy stores still have a few racks, and it's interesting to see what still gets put out. Mostly Disney films and spinoffs, showing that the Mouse factory is probably the only thing keeping the slide factory open. The only place you can find scenic sets any more is at the actual scenes they depict, if you're lucky.



1. A long time ago in a galaxy far away

I miss the good old days, when everything would show up on a View-Master. Movies, TV Shows, Cartoons, and Scenery may be enough for the modest audience they have now, but once on a time, and for longer than many people realize, they were at the forefront, if not the center, of popular media, in one reel: seven pictures, with terse captions that would fit in a thumbnail-sized window. For instance, here are the captions (pictures would violate copyright) for the View-Master adaptation of *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.

1. Setting out to search for treasure.
2. High hopes!
3. "You saved my life!"
4. "Gold! We're rich!"
5. "We'll divide it up—MY way!"
6. Bang! Bang!
7. It was all for nothing.

This admirably conveys the movie experience in a nutshell. Combined with the rich, three-dimensional color slides, these were sometimes more popular than the works they presented. Another classic, *Citizen Kane*, was here presented in color, without the jarring camera work that set many critics off, and without any apparent relation to Hearst. These factors combined to make the View-Master version more profitable than the movie, in the first year:

1. "Kane's last word was 'Rosebud.' Find out what that means!"
2. Bernstein recalls young Charlie Kane.
3. "We're moving to New York." "NO!"
4. "Sorry, son, I don't know about Rosebud."
5. Flashback: Kane divorces to wed his bimbo.
6. Kane dies alone, surrounded by servants.
7. The servants burn his sled—Rosebud!

Of course, it wasn't just movies and radio shows that were fodder for the culture mill: novels and short stories were a rich source of material (as well as a source of income for many Hollywood extras, whose ability to look good and hold still made them a good choice for starring in prose adaptations). Here's 1984, by George Orwell:

1. Winston fixes up old newspapers.
2. "I'll rent you a private room, sonny."
3. Winston sees a girl and falls in love.
4. "No one can see us here, darling!"
5. The landlord is a spy for Big Brother!
6. "Say 2+2=5, or we'll torture you with rats!"
7. Winston comes to love Big Brother.



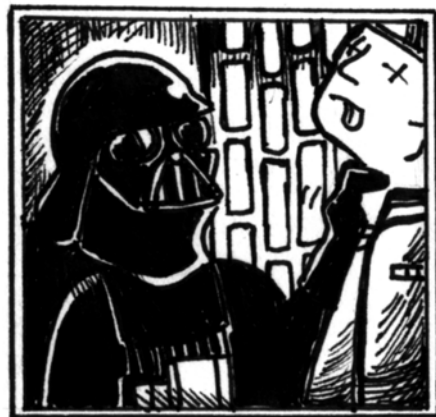
2. "Obi-Wan Kenobi, you're my only hope"



3. The Cantina

Surprisingly, some large works adapted quite well for the new medium. Ayn Rand is said to have enjoyed this adaptation of *Atlas Shrugged*:

1. "I built a railroad by myself."
2. "Give us your new metal, Rearden!"
3. Grabby second-raters take everything in sight.
4. But where have all the smart guys gone?
5. "Hank! Come with us to a new life."
6. Eddie can't make the engine work.
7. "It's like heaven—with cigarettes!"



4. "Aaaaargh!"

Plays, too, were sources for one-reelers, like T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*:

1. Will no one kill this troublous priest!?
2. Tempter #1 advises: "Just have fun!"
3. Tempter #2: "Play along, and get rich!"
4. Tempter #3: "Be a martyr for the glory of it!"
5. "No, no and No!"
6. Three knights stab Becket and return to King Henry.
7. "Dead? You idiots!"



5. The duel

This version of "It's a *Good Life*" inspired its use on *The Twilight Zone*:

1. Since little Anthony destroyed Earth, Peakville is all that's left.
2. "Think happy thoughts, or Anthony will kill you!"
3. "That's bad." "No! You mean it's *good*!"
4. It's Dan's birthday party!
5. "My birthday was ruined by that little freak!"
6. Dan's twisted body is sent under the cornfield.
7. "It was a Good day!"

Long before the sequels or the movies, there was this version of *Dune*, by Frank Herbert:

1. "We have a fine home, young Paul."
2. Paul is tested with the Gom Jabbar.
3. "Your father's dead! We have to leave the planet!"
4. Paul rides a wild worm in the vast desert.
5. Paul leads the Fremen to victory.
6. "This is for my father, Baron Harkonnen!"
7. "He is the Kwisatz Haderach!"



6. "Use the Force, Luke"

A valuable collector's item today is the one-reel version of *2001*:

1. A mysterious monolith makes the apes evolve.
2. The "Discovery" follows a signal sent by the object.
3. HAL 9000 kills everyone, except Dave.
4. Dave deactivates HAL!
5. The Monolith shows Dave some pretty colors.
6. And more pretty colors!
7. Dave becomes the highly-evolved Star Child.

Kubrick's movies lent themselves, on one level, to conversion, with their concentration on a few scenes, instead of many different ones. For instance, *The Shining*:

1. "It's quiet here—I'll work on my book."
2. Jack meets some ghosts.
3. The Elevator From Hell!
4. Jack goes nuts: "Honey, I'm home!"
5. Timmy's friend answers his psychic plea—
6. —and gets the axe!
7. Jack freezes to death in the maze anyway.



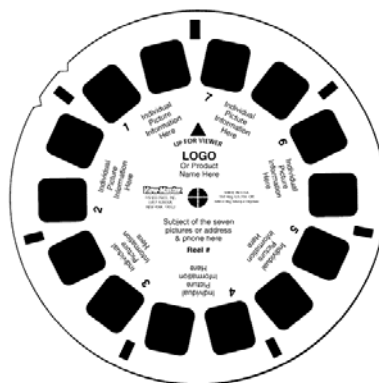
7. BOOM!

They were still making these at least as recently as Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*:

1. Arthur works in an insane, boring bureaucracy—
2. —and dreams of flying high above the clouds.
3. He sees a beautiful girl at the Buttles' house.
4. He's in love, but she runs away.
5. He accepts a promotion in order to look for her.
6. He finds her, but brings disaster to them both.
7. He 'escapes' his tormenters in a last fantasy.

Well, obviously, I'm a collector, and I tend to ramble on and on about these things, once an essential item in popular culture, and now they're bent, scuffed, and marked up to ten bucks or more (sans sleeve) on various flea market tables. Surely, I'm not the only one who's permanently vision-impaired from staring through those distorted plastic lenses, hour after hour, while my young chums were out drag racing and picking up loose women.

—Kip Williams



BOLLOCKS

A New World of Fun and Adventure

We broadened our horizons last weekend. How does that saying go? For every new food you eat, you add a day to your life? Well, if every new sight also adds a day then we saw enough to offset any amount of bad karma. Hey, pass the Marlboroughs. No, seriously, we went to WOMAD. That's World Of Music And Dance to the uninitiated, which we were, despite the fact that this annual knees-up happens about a mile from our front door. And it was great fun. Formation fairies in frilly tutus, a field of flags, the Romanian Synchronised Skirt Twirling and Knee-Slapping Ensemble. Enough vegetarian food, silver jewellery and Indian clothing to make a green and pleasant bit of Berkshire implode into a pagan alternate universe of scorched dusty land where dreadlocked natives got seriously sunburned and ran squealing after the water tractor, massed African dancers in grass skirts pounded the stage, looking like little, upended dish mops in the distance...Oh, yes, there was music. Did I mention there was music? Amid the vast bazaar there were also three sound stages, the largest one bracketed by speaker towers not much smaller than NASA's Vehicle Assembly Building.

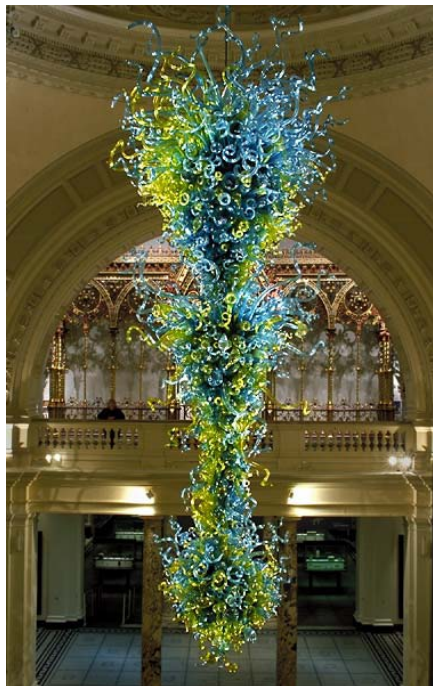
These are the main reason why, in previous years, we have found the sound quality to be perfectly adequate from inside our house. With all the windows closed. But actually being there did add another dimension to the WOMAD experience, and I don't mean just feeling that you had been swallowed up into the Ultimate Casbah. You got to see the musicians. You got to see the strange things they did. We watched the Mexican "Los De Abajos," translated by irreverent and resolutely mono-lingual English minds as "The Lost Badgers. They were a large group, they played with great verve an enthusiasm and an abortion-inducing bass backbeat. And every now and then they all jumped up and down on stage in time to the music. Even the ones holding instruments. Even the one on drums. To heat-hazed eyes it looked as if the entire drum kit was jumping up and down with him, in perfect time. I believe it's called "pogo-ing," m'lud.

—Giulia de Cesare

Demon With A Glass Chandelier

Imagine, if you will, an alien space monster. Green, amorphous, a forest of tendrils and tentacles doubtless hiding a cavernous maw able to swallow heroes, or even their entire spaceships, at a single gulp. Now imagine the same monster, hung up by its tail and mysteriously transmuted into glass by the power of the Galactic Patrol's vitrification ray. This gives you an idea of what the Chihuly chandelier in the foyer of the Victoria and Albert museum looks like. If ever there were prizes for "artist most likely to be an alien in disguise" then Chihuly has to come pretty far up the list with a good chance of taking the gold.

When I learned that there was going to be a special exhibition of Chihuly glassware at the V&A, I thought I ought to go along and see what else the man could come up with. Since I'm currently a "gentleman of leisure", I went into London early before going to the monthly SF fandom meeting at the Florence Nightingale. For those of you who have never been there, the V&A is one of those Victorian redbrick gothic piles. Originally intended as a design showcase, it ended up with an amazing variety of exhibits from jewellery to plastercasts of Roman pillars 12 feet across and 45 feet high. And in the entrance hall, the Chihuly chandelier.



So I admired the chandelier, paid my entrance fee and wandered in. It didn't seem like much, a few display cases in the middle of an area lined with medieval stonework, some sketches, that's all. Of course what was in the cases was pretty bloody breathtaking. There's nothing

that looks quite as good as properly lit glass and this was just stunning. Bowls and strange shapes with glowing edges, things that looked like seashells on LSD. There are pictures of some of this stuff on the web, try looking there, paper can't hope to reproduce the effect. Above the display was what Chihuly calls a Persian ceiling with light shining through multi-coloured pieces of glass. However, there didn't seem to be a great deal of it.



I wandered off and came across a temporary exhibition of Hitsuzendo Japanese calligraphy. This is the Zen discipline of achieving enlightenment through writing. Not something that's likely to happen to the *Plokta* cabal, though if anyone knows of a discipline for achieving enlightenment through excessive internet use.... In the middle of the show were two pieces that just leapt off the paper and hit you with a brick between the eyes. They made everything around them seem pale and

uninteresting. Going closer and looking at the labels, I found that they were by the Japanese master swordsman, Yamaoka Tesshu, who painted them shortly after he achieved enlightenment. Just looking at them was enough to show that something unbelievably powerful had happened to him. They seemed to shout power, self-realisation, delight. The man could say more in one brush-stroke than a whole museum of artists. It actually made it hard to look at the rest of the display; the eye just kept being drawn back to the Tesshus.

Eventually, I dragged myself away from the calligraphy and went back to the Chihuly exhibit for a last look. About this point, I suddenly noticed what looked like another piece of glass in an adjoining gallery. Wandering over, I realised that this was indeed another Chihuly. And what was that over there? I went through a door into the inner courtyard of the V&A. It's open to the air, with grass and shrubs and a pond. Atop the pond was a twenty foot fountain of fire, made of glass. Among the shrubs were things like glass seals. In the grass were spikes and shapes of glass. Everywhere there was glass. How many people, I wondered, had just walked by and never noticed it was there? Or is it just that I have a bad habit of not noticing things?



—Steve Davies