

PLOKTA of the CARIBBOU



Cursed to Pub Their
Ish until they return
every last Jan Hugo to
The Dread Pirate Langford



This is issue 30 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 a virtual snowboard that doesn't run into every single rock on the course

Steve Davies

Alison Scott

Mike Scott

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.

Art by Sue Mason (cover,
11), John Kovalic (2),
Global Consumerism (10)

Photos by Alison Scott (3,
7), David Dyer-Bennett (6),
Sarah Prince (10), Tanya
Brown (4, 5), Steve Davies
(3), Steven Cain (3).

Addresses of Contributors

Tanya Brown

Sue Mason

Giulia de Cesare, as for
Steve Davies

CONTENTS

3 Editorial

The Cabal

Good news for a change. There's a tiny clue on the cover.

4 On the Beach

Tanya Brown

Tanya reports on her summer spent sunbathing on the mudflats of Kent.

6 Minicon Report

Alison Scott

Does what it says on the tin.

8 How To Use The

Underground

Mike Scott

Up the Revolution! No, sorry, this is all about getting around London without being torn apart by angry commuters.

9 Lokta Plokta

We mailed the last issue a mere five months late, so there are fewer locs this time round. Send us locs. Send *more* locs. We need locs so that we don't have to write so much of the fanzine ourselves.

11 Pornographer

Accountants of Gor

Giulia De Cesare

Who's going to clean up this nasty mess on the balance sheets? That's what I want to know.

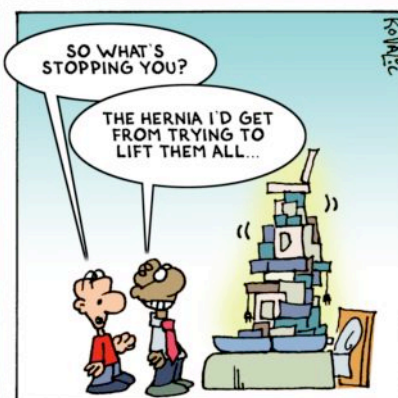
12 Good Housekeeping

Phil & Jill Bradley

The loc that ate Sheboygan got turned into an article.

DORK TOWER

BY JOHN KOVALIC



Editorial

YES, it's been a while. No, we're not going to say why. You'll all just have to wonder.

Our big news this time is that Sue won the Best Fan Artist Hugo this summer at Torcon III. She wasn't there to pick it up; turns out the Cabal picked up its first Hugo at the first Worldcon for years that none of us attended. The honour went instead to Mary Kay Kare, who had signed up to be Sue's acceptor; after all, she got to go to the party and Sue had said 'I don't have a cat in hell's chance of winning' [© Sue Mason, July 2003]. And Sue is the first Brit ever to win the Fan Artist Hugo. The Hugo itself nestles in the centre of a maple leaf, presumably made of maple. If you unscrew the rocket from the middle, the remaining stand looks suspiciously like a pair of moose antlers. It was lovingly brought home by Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey, and even graced the mantelpiece here at Plokta Towers for a few hours. A Hugo! On our mantelpiece! We are almost faint from the shock. Sadly, we forgot to take a photo, either of Sue or the mantelpiece.



Sue's Hugo

The reason that Sue wasn't at Worldcon was because she has now become a member of the property-owning classes. You should send your letters, fanzines, and requests for pictures of naughty elf boys covered with lemon curd to:

Sue Mason



It wouldn't be a proper home without an old pouffe

Joseph Nicholas helpfully commented that Lostock Gralam sounds like the hero of a period bodice ripper.

She couldn't help herself. Whenever Lostock turned his smouldering good looks towards her, she lost all sense of composure. But how could she, a mere kitchen maid at Gralam Manor, hope to win the love of the man known as the lust object of three counties?

Meanwhile, the Cabal's black cat quotient has been restored. Steve and Giulia have acquired Shadow, a black cat in his middle years who looks very like George—but whose personality is entirely opposite. Shadow is sweet-tempered and purrs a lot, and is sad when he's left alone, even if his food bowl is full. He was acquired from SF author Lianne Norman, almost by mistake. We were visiting Cambridge on a weekend intended to be devoted to a Buffy marathon with Kari and Phil. And, as you do, we got sidetracked and came home with a secondhand cat. Makes sense to us.

While Sue was moving, Steven and Alison jetted off to the South of France with a houseful of fans. The gite had a pool, allowing Steven to practice his favourite sport of Extreme* Candid Photography. Captions welcome.



**i.e. liable to get him killed.*

Meanwhile, LiveJournal continues apace, and remains unparalleled as a source of fannish gossip. The cabal are undergoing a variety of different diets; shame none of us thought about the *44 days sitting in a box* diet.

We've been inspired by *Calendar Girls* to produce the 2004 *Plokta Nude Calendar*. [That's quite enough of that—Ed.]

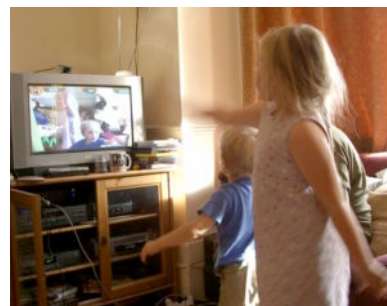
Finally, thanks to John Kovalic for letting us use the episode of his splendid comic strip *Dork Tower* that appears on the facing page. We saw it and we thought of us.

BOLLOCKS

Gadget of the Month

Every so often, Alison and Steven declare that it's Anti-Consumer month. For a month, they will eat cheap, healthy food, and buy nothing that is not necessary to their health and well-being. If this worked, they'd save a fortune. In practice, Anti-Consumer Month always ends not with a whimper but a bang, as the entire exercise is blown by the purchase of some shiny new electronic toy.

This time, the shiny new electronic toy is a Playstation 2. We know they've been around a while, but this one comes with gadgets! But we're not quite sure which of the cool toys we bought along with the PS2 is the gadget of the month. Are we most enchanted by the snowboard, which allows us to capture the feeling of flying randomly into trees, fences, rocks and snow ploughs? Or by the EyeToy, which lets Marianne and Jonathan see themselves on screen, and bounce all over the room waving madly at the computer?



Not Drowning But Waving

What these two controllers have in common is that they're both physical; you don't get to sit and stare at the screen but instead can only play by working up a sweat; exercising much-neglected muscles by Kung Fu or desperately trying to turn an Alpine style board. Therefore, they fit into Alison's master plan; she's going to write a book called *Lose Weight and Tone Up with Video Games!*

On balance we think that the EyeToy just has the edge. Anyone can have fun with it, and it keeps the kids out of trouble for hours. On the other hand, if I just try that last run one more time, I might get a bronze medal.

BOLLOCKS

7 Things You Didn't Know about Christina Lake*

- Christina Lake is a recreation paradise
- Christina Lake enjoys warm dry summers and relatively mild winters.
- Christina Lake remains one of British Columbia's best kept secrets.
- Christina Lake is known as the Oasis of the Kootenays
- Christina Lake is gorgeous blue with streaks of silver
- Christina Lake is less than hospitable to bikers.
- A long gentle descent into Christina Lake is the perfect ending for the day.

* Thanks to <http://www.christinalake.com> for helping us research this squib.

Whisky of Mass Destruction

We're not sure which is scarier. Is it that the US Defence Threat Reduction Agency was monitoring the Bruichladdich whisky distillery on Islay in case its equipment was reused to produce chemical weapons? Or is it that they were doing so by keeping an eye on the distillery's webcam, and sent them an email to complain when it developed a fault?

Take a look at <http://www.bruichladdich.com> and see if you can see any WMDs.



Bet She Keeps Her Tin Opener Handy

So there we were, sitting in a pub on the Leith shoreline with Lilian. "Casual sex is like canned tomatoes," she suddenly exclaimed. We looked quizzical. "It's not quite as good as the real thing, but it's more convenient and much less messy." Pondering this, we drank some more beer. "I always like to have some handy. You know, as a stopgap."

On the Beach

BEACHES are liminal zones, borderlands between land and sea; places where—for me at least—some of the mundane rules of life no longer apply. A trip to the beach is not simply about sunbathing, or swimming, or lazing, dazed by heat and light and wave-noise, though all of these are aspects of what I miss in the eight or nine months when British beaches are the domain of dog-walkers, fishermen and hardy souls in Barbours.



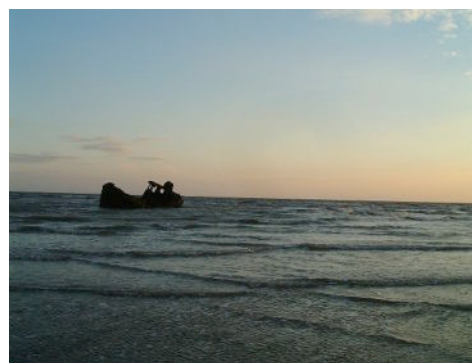
I went on a package holiday to Turkey once. The sea was bluer, the sand finer, the locals ever so much more annoying. Turkish beaches, being at the far end of the landlocked Mediterranean, have very little tidal range and a great deal more salt than I'm used to. The combination seemed static and primeval, and the sea felt dead (or possibly even Dead). The white sand was almost free of seaweed, and although we were warned against spiny black sea urchins, I saw nothing except the occasional glimmer of fish-scales at the limit of my underwater vision.

British waters teem with life, though compared with their natural state they're barren and empty. The last third of the tidal zone, the area which is underwater more often than not, is marked on breakwaters and beaches by a line of green: the algae and weed that grows here endures a twice-daily exposure to punishing heat and light. There are molluscs creeping across stone, wood and sand, and worms heaving mud and ooze into neat coils on the surface of the beach. Less permanent than sandcastles—not to mention those footprints in the sands of time so beloved of Victorian poets—these traces of little lives are wiped away when the sea rises again.

Inshore waters around Britain are home to many species. This summer I've felt baby plaice slide from under my bare foot, chased shoals of goby and pipefish at low tide, and been nudged by nameless, generic Fish. I grew up swimming in the Thames estuary, when there were still major cockle fisheries near Southend. At Leigh-on-Sea, the brilliant white beach is made of powdered cockle-shells. The fisheries were badly hit by

pollution and disease in the late Seventies, and it's common to find that the shellfish on sale at seaside stalls is half-frozen, imported from the South Coast or the Baltic. But there are still children (and adults) with shrimping-nets, catching crabs at the ends of the breakwaters and being disappointed by the discovery that shrimps are not, naturally, a delicious sunburnt-pink colour.

Prettiest of all (but beauty is in the eye of the beholder) are the jellyfish. Warmer summers have brought early swarms of Blue Sea-Nettles to the Thames, alive alive-oh, trailing their translucent tentacles halfway between the surface and the sea-bed. The ones that float on the surface are usually dead, though even these can deliver a painful sting. Live jellyfish use flotation bladders to control the depth at which they drift, though they're still at the mercy of wind and wave. Their bodies, almost colourless apart from the thick pale structures that look to me like bundles of nerves, have the density of seawater, and they stream gracefully like banners in the current.



I'm practically phobic about jellyfish, stinging or not, and I picked up some nasty stings in June while trying to overcome my aversion. It's a two-hour train journey to the beach, and I refuse to waste four hours of travelling simply because some nasty primitive invertebrate has drifted into the same bit of water as me.

And no, there is no point at all in going to the beach on a hot June day and not swimming. Not that I do nothing else on the beach. I'm writing this on my PDA's folding keyboard, hardly sand-jammed at all after a summer of being hauled out to write reviews, letters, fiction and the like, on beaches and clifftops around the South Coast. I've written longhand, huddled against a breakwater in Bognor; sent text messages ("Am on beach. Is it hot in town? Hahaha.") from the porches of weathered beach-huts looking south towards Kent; composed LiveJournal

entries lounging on the deck of a friend's yacht anchored in Cawsand Bay ... Sometimes I read, too. But reading is often too passive an option.

Maybe it's all the energy unleashed. A windy day at the beach—and especially a day at a long, curving beach like Rye Bay, with an onshore wind—means that thousands of tons of seawater (with its variegated burden of sand, seaweed, plankton, sewage outfall, flotsam, jetsam and message-bearing bottles) is being hurled around by Nature, ready to erode a few more millimetres of chalk cliff at Seven Sisters, or to push a shipwreck further up the beach, or to knock over a hapless, giggling surfer. (I'm not very good at this surfing lark yet). With all that power rushing past you, sliding around you, entirely impersonal and largely painless, it's easy to imagine being charged with energy like a chunk of amber rubbed against wool.



On quieter days, the surface is calm and smooth, reflecting back the sky or keeping its own, greener colour. (The summer sky's never so blue, to me, as when it hangs cloudless above a sand-greened sea). Only, underneath, the tide and the current—which may operate in opposition—pull and push at anything that isn't anchored, rubbing along your legs like a hungry cat, or pulling your feet from under you along with the sand you stood on. The tides in the Thames estuary are strong enough to carry away sections of pier and breakwater, let alone plastic dolphins and day-trippers on lilos. I grew up understanding how to compensate for current, tide and wind—and how to relax into the flow, give oneself up to the journey, as close to weightlessness as I'll likely ever get. Fighting the sea is a fool's game—even a small wave can cast you up on the beach hard enough to bruise, and you'll drown if a current pulls you under for more than a minute or so. Swimming across the flow of the tide brings you to land later: but land is land, and you're alive, alive-oh.

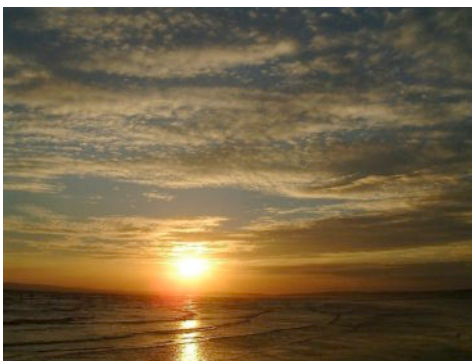
When I was a child, being on the beach any time after the start of the autumn term (the first week of September) felt like an Occasion. It was usually almost too cold to swim, but we'd go in for ten minutes, feeling



brave, and come out shivering. This year, the last week of September felt as though it might be the end of the beach season. We headed for Camber, where the long curve of Rye Bay warms the water as the tide comes in over sand-flats. When we arrived the sky was leaden, and an ill wind whipped the waves into breakers, all frothy white against the sort of sea that James Joyce would probably have described as snot-green and scrotum-tightening. Sand blasted along the beach above the tide-line, and the car park was almost empty. Quite a change from the height of summer, when tens of thousands of people—caravanners and holidaymakers from Pontins, as well as trippers—thronged to this beach to seek respite from the heat. It's often up to ten degrees cooler on the coast, and there's almost always a breeze. There's so much space at Camber that the beach was never too crowded. The first few metres of the sea were dark with people, but after that the open water stretched out to the horizon.

There were no crowds this time. It might have been November. And yet the water was probably no more than a degree cooler than it had been in August. And when the sun came out and lit the water like emeralds, it was gloriously hot. I went home with skin patched red with sunburn and streaked white with salt, hair as knotted as kelp, eyes dazzled, sand between my toes.

I wonder sometimes if it's the sun that I miss more each winter, or simply the glorious summer-green sea.



—Tanya Brown

BOLLOCKS

Superfluous Consumption

What with Steven and Alison buying virtual snowboards, Sue buying a house, Steve buying the bits to build a new PC and Giulia buying the Western World's bead surplus, readers may have got the impression that we have cash flow problems. Nothing could be further from the truth. After all, as we mentioned to the bank's representative when he called around to grovel, "If one has an overdraft, one has a problem. But if one has a hundred million pound overdraft, it's the bank's problem, so what are you going to do about it?" Fortunately, we have Dr Plokta who is the picture of financial rectitude and who will doubtless be able to rescue us from the dolehouse in our later years. Unfortunately he'll probably then put us to work in his plans for world conquest. In the meantime, Alison is going to try giving up latte again.

Cute Things They Do

I had no choice but to put this in the fanzine; Marianne won't let me tell the tale any more and shuts me up when I do.

We went to Parent's Night at Marianne's school. For those who aren't in the UK, this provides an opportunity for parents to find out what their daughter has been up to for the entire year, in the five minutes allowed by the teacher. Marianne has just finished Year 1; she's six. "Oh, she's very capable, nice, well-behaved, well-socialised," said Mrs Wells. We beamed with pride. "And she knows a lot about the world around her." Just the sort of thing a parent wants to hear. "She clearly learns a lot at home". We were beginning to worry now.

"For example, we were studying the creation stories of different world religions, in religious studies." Oh, dear; what did she say? "And she put up her hand, and said 'Excuse me, miss; I don't have a religion. When are we going to talk about the Big Bang?'"

How to Have Fun without Visiting Hinckley

MOST people have recurring dreams. In one of mine, I'm at a convention in which the hotel has a secret floor where there's unlimited free beer. Of course, in the dream I never know the access code for the special lift. Instead, I am cursed to wander round the con, excluded from the good time that everyone else is having.

"Let's go get free beer!" announced Patrick Nielsen Hayden. I dutifully followed, with Steven and the kids trailing. Someone explained it was on the 13th floor. "But American hotels don't have a 13th floor", I protested. "Yes," explained Patrick. "All you have to do is find the special elevator which goes to the 'Penthouse' floor between 12 and 14, and then tap in the secret code 'one-nine-seven-three-poundsign'; it says 'access granted', and you can get to the unlimited free beer." "Yeah, yeah," I said. "And then we show them our decoder ring..." "No, there really is a code," said Patrick. Just as it began to sink in that they weren't having me on, the doors closed on my stranded family. "There's a secret code!" I cried as we left them behind forever. So when we arrived at the secret thirteenth floor with unlimited free beer, I immediately had to leave to rescue my family. Turned out that they didn't need rescuing at all, because unlike me, they were *paying attention* when Patrick told them the code word. We set to drinking the unlimited free beer; every pint of which helped defray the crippling cost of our airfare. Somewhere around the third pint, I began to realise that this weekend was different from an Eastercon.



Patrick demonstrates the Secret Headgear

Back in the wierdly futuristic lift, I experimentally tried typing in the code. 'Access granted', said the lift, in a scene from a dozen bad futuristic thrillers. A little frisson of future shock ran down my spine.

"The Brits never understand the free beer," said Geri. "They always think we'll run out. But we never run out, no matter how many Brits come." Ah. I wondered how many Brits ever go to Minicon. "Well, we've had up to a dozen." This felt like a challenge.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. You should know that there are Two Great Reasons to Take Small Children on Long Haul Flights. First, you no longer risk running out of reading material; you aren't going to be reading anyway. Second, nothing else will ever feel quite as bad ever again.

The richest country in the world, and one of the most technologically advanced, has an immigration system rivalling India's. Non-residents arriving in the US have to fill in one of a selection of multi-coloured forms, depending on whether they have a visa, want a visa waiver, or are in transit. Nearly all EU residents need to fill in the green form; which is badly designed so that most people fill it in wrong. It's also essentially unchanged over the last decade, through a time when forms in general have improved out of all recognition. In this case, the airline had no green forms. So they gave everyone white forms for people who already have visas, and told us to fill those in instead.

When we arrived in Minneapolis, the resulting piece of grit caused the wheels of bureaucracy to grind to a shuddering halt. At the point I joined the queue, I had no thought of overthrowing the US Government during my trip.

Having left Britain just as it was gearing up for a heatwave, we arrived in Minneapolis just as theirs was ending. Our first view of the wide open spaces of the Midwest was a panoramic electrical storm, with driving rain and lightning in all directions.

We loved Toad Hall, which is a comfortably-sized, well laid-out house with loads of original features; apparently just like hundreds of others in South Minneapolis. Geri Sullivan is planning to sell; when we heard what it was worth, we contemplated a scheme where we do

a buy-to-let, but buy a nice house in South Minneapolis rather than a grotty flat in London; install a fan as a tenant on a cheap rent, on the understanding that we get to keep the use of a couple of rooms and visit for Minicon. Every corner of the house is stuffed with cool bits and bobs to look at and play with, too.

The next morning I woke at 4, and crept downstairs in the dark to play on my PowerBook. The kids woke up at 5, and I suggested that they could play provided they were as quiet as church mice. But at six, they called again, and said, not unreasonably, 'we're starving, Mummy'. So I turned on the lights and found a big stack of invitations for Geri's dad's eightieth birthday on the landing, along with a paper roller, and a note saying "A Treat for the Folding Fairies—in case any are around this morning". So I folded the flyers, while Marianne & Jonathan explored the less valuable end of Geri's PEZ collection. Geri emerged briefly to make sure we were ok, so I grabbed her by the scruff of the neck and asked her to show me the coffee machine. And oh! the water filter. It's huge. It sits on the shelf above the coffee machine and has a tap. Turn the tap, and the water pours straight into the reservoir of the coffee machine.

All the beautiful, weird and interesting things in Toad Hall, and I find myself faunching after a water filter.

"We're having a Time Traveler's Ball," explained Geri, 'and we thought, 'Wouldn't it be great if there were dance cards?' But we obviously don't have time to do dance cards, but I thought 'Alison is staying; she might like to do us some dance cards.' "How could I resist? I jack in my PowerBook to the mighty power of the Internet, and I'm away, though short of inspiration. Eventually, I find someone who's illustrated time travel using an old picture of multiple clocks showing the same time in different time zones, and think how cool it would look with key moments in history instead; and the world suddenly starts spinning and I fall into Photoshop time. Many hours later I emerge, blinking, to discover that all my friends are asleep and Toad Hall is surrounded by an impenetrable hedge.

When we arrived at Minicon, there were people working setting up in the con suite, and people drinking in the bar.

A tough choice, but we went to the bar, where we found Jo & Sasha, Walton, Emmet O'Brien, Jim Young, and a lot of people we didn't know. Jo started to introduce them, and we suddenly realised that we did know all of them after all; either online or because they get *Plokta*. As more people arrived, we realised that we knew nearly all of them as well. The atmosphere was that of a Novacon rather than an Eastercon. I mean, except for the smoke, of course. "Tom Womack's not here", explained Jo. "He emailed to say that Eastercon was nearer than Minicon, but he couldn't think of one single other thing to recommend it." I realised that I had been vaguely wound up for weeks about the fact that I wasn't going to Eastercon; and as soon as I sat down in the bar with a few people I'd known for years either in person or online, that tension evaporated.

Sue was guest of honour at Minicon. They asked her if she wanted hot and cold running elf boys. She thought they were joking, so was delighted to meet the adipose-challenged Mishalak. Spotting an ecological niche, he obligingly rooted through his closets for the sort of stringy vests that Foxy is so fond of wearing in Sue's pictures, and he turned up at Sue's guest of honour speech ready to audition for the role of Column Divider (non-Norwegian).

The Time Travelers Ball Under The Stars was held in the geodesic dome at the very top of the hotel. A little configuration help from Erik Olson, and the Plokta cabal were online,

hitchhiking on the bandwidth of a dozen respectable Minneapolitans with little regard to their security. A geodesic dome turns out to be the very best place to take a pile of stereo photos, too. Later, I set up the stereo viewer and ran Minicon stereo slideshows on the laptop.

"Tor are sponsoring Torcon," explained Patrick. "Tom Doherty was enchanted by the idea of a Worldcon called 'Torcon', and asked for their sponsorship options. When they sent them, we went for the super-duper platinum-plated one. Everyone is going to have a con badge saying 'Torcon—brought to you by Tor Books'." Visions of Conspiracy flashed through my brain; but in fact, Tor is the only publisher that could possibly get away with this.

I am not sure that Minneapolitans understand the British psyche. Evidence of this is provided by Brits

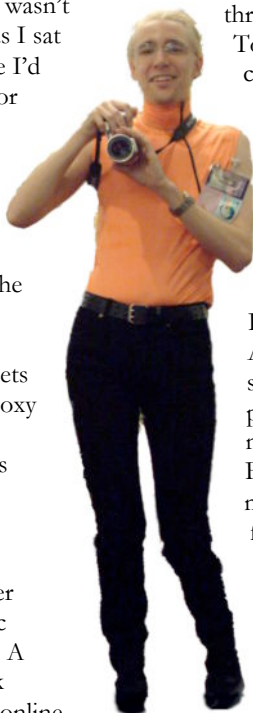
Pub—offering 'genuine British food and ambience'. After a moment of genuine shock as I contemplated the possibility that someone might think that genuine British food and ambience might be a meritorious aim for a pub, I realised that they Didn't Really Mean It. Which is a good thing, because otherwise we would have been obliged to go in pissed as farts, eat all the pickled eggs

and curly sandwiches, and then bare our arses, throw up in the gutter, and head off in search of a curry.

After Minicon, our remaining time in Minneapolis was a social whirl. Minneapolis has only one world-class tourist attraction; the largest indoor shopping centre in the world, the Mall of America. *My God, it's full of moose*. So we spent our days acquiring moose tat for our home and making pilgrimages to the immaculate radiance of the Apple Store, and our evenings at a succession of parties. We particularly enjoyed the impromptu 1909 karaoke session around the player piano of Dean Gahlon & Laura Krentz. I had never realised how much karaoke owes to player pianos; the words are printed on the piano rolls, allowing the player and audience to sing along. Furthermore, I'd assumed you could only sing music hall, but no; they make new piano rolls. Sue and I worked our way through all Dean & Laura's Jim Steinman rolls, including "Total Eclipse of the Heart", "Paradise by the Keyboard Light", many great tunes from the shows, and a host of other ear-piercing delights. Meanwhile, Jonathan expressed a desire to operate the piano wholly inconsistent with his size and strength.

As we drove towards Minneapolis airport, a plane flew in front of the car. "Look at the plane, Marianne!" we cried. Marianne looked sombre. "Either that plane is very big, or it's very close to us."

—Alison Scott



Kate Yule, Gaptoothed Marianne, and Rachael Lininger show off the stereo nature of the dome (cross your eyes until the two pictures are superimposed).

How To Use Public Transport in London

[This ~~rant~~ article first appeared on Mike's LiveJournal (<http://drplokta.livejournal.com>), but we felt it was necessary to expose it to a wider audience.]

Note 1: These rules apply to London. There are different rules in other places.

Note 2: Many of these rules do not apply to the disabled and their companions, including those disabled by their extreme youth. Rather than insert multiple exceptions, here is a blanket exception.

1. Stand on the right on the escalators. This does not mean that you stand in the middle and reach across to the right-hand hand-rail—if you're not getting friction burns on your right hip, you're too far to the left. Your luggage, shopping bags and other chattels have to stand on the right, too. If you want to stand next to your friend and talk, take a cab. You should aim to acquire a severe phobia of standing on the left of any vaguely staircase-shaped object.
2. The Theory of Relativity tells us that there's no such thing as a privileged inertial frame of reference. This means that people walking slowly have to look out for faster people coming up from behind just as much as people walking fast have to look out for slower people in front. Fit wing mirrors to your glasses. Or walk faster.
3. They're called slam-door trains, not push-the-door-shut-lackadaisically-with-your-little-finger-trains. There is a reason for this. And if you don't shut the door properly, try again, don't leave it for someone else to do.
4. Master the Way of the Ticket Barrier. Aim for the finely-tuned mental state and subtle wrist action that let you insert your ticket, take it back out and walk through the barrier without breaking step. Using an Oystercard is cheating, and is thus highly recommended.
5. The magnetic strip on the ticket goes at the bottom. If you try to put your ticket through the barrier with the magnetic strip at the top, it will be automatically incinerated.

Meanwhile, several large men with baseball bats will drag you into a back room, beat you up, ban you from London Transport services for life and then throw you out into the street. Well, probably not—but I can dream.

6. Look at the platform you're standing on. Do you see the dense throngs of people around the entrance stopping anyone else from getting onto the platform, and the acres of empty space further along? Does this strike you as a good use of space? Is there anything you could be doing about it?
7. Stopping is bad. Even I will concede that it's sometimes necessary, but before you stop, take a good look around, identify the patterns of traffic flow and find somewhere to stop that's out of the way. London Underground don't help matters by situating all of their maps in locations carefully chosen to maximise the blockage caused by people stopping to read the map. So carry a pocket map. Or if that's too much trouble, just memorise the entire Underground map. Tomorrow, you can do the London Connections map.
8. The social contract calls for people trying to get onto the train/tram/bus to let people get off first. But the other part of the social contract calls for the people who want to get off to be standing by the door when it opens, so that they can jump off with indecent haste. If you're still sitting down when the people start to get on, then you've missed your stop, and you're going to have to wait for the next one.
9. The seats aren't there for your comfort and convenience, they're there to get you out of the goddam way. Sit down if there are any free seats. If you don't like sitting next to strangers, take a cab. A limited exception may be made for people going one or (at most) two stops who can find a good place to stand that's not in anyone's way (even if the platform is on the other side at the next stop).

10. If you can't drag all your luggage with one hand, you have too much luggage. If you can't carry your luggage up a flight of steps, you have too much luggage. If you can't put your luggage into an overhead rack, you have too much luggage. ~~If you're American, you have too much luggage.~~
11. Keep your knees together when you sit down. If your gonads get crushed when your knees are together, you should probably be wearing briefs instead of boxers. Or if female, you should see your doctor immediately.
12. The one place where stopping is not acceptable, under any circumstances, is anywhere within ten metres of a ticket barrier. Get your ticket ready before you enter the exclusion zone radius. Assemble your party somewhere else.
13. There may well be a queue at the bottom of an escalator, waiting to go up. You will notice that the right-hand side of the queue moves rather slowly while the left-hand side is much shorter. This is because if you join the left-hand side, you will have to walk up the escalator. If you join the left-hand queue, then squeeze over to the right to stand rather than climb, it is socially and legally acceptable for the person standing behind you to stab you in the back with their pocket-knife.
14. You probably think that you can integrate your back-pack into your body image so that you don't bash people with it or thrust it into their personal space when standing on a crowded train. The evidence suggests otherwise. Take it off and put it down.
15. If you're going to busk, you must permit people who find your music to be actively painful to take money *out* of your hat as compensation.

Dang. Three years living in London, and I appear to have gone native.

—Mike Scott

Lokta Plokta

[Alison's study is a disaster area again. So we have probably mislaid some locs received in the post. Email is safer, but we'll pick up the remaining paper locs for next time.]

Eddie Cochrane
eddiec@cobrabay.org

Exhausted by 48 hours of coughing and high temperatures, having not stepped further than the doormat where I happily found *Plokta* 29, I was clearly in an impressionable state having read Giulia's article "The Other White Meat". So as I lay there in my sick bed, watching an old *Starsky and Hutch* episode because I couldn't be arsed to put in a video, I couldn't help but interpret the entire show as understated Slash. Mind you, I have a strong suspicion it was written that way. Still, I'm fairly sure my mind has now been warped.

However, Giulia was very perceptive about Jim Steinman's songs. "Paradise by the Keyboard Light" is indeed an amazingly prescient paean to the 17" Mac PowerBook and the whole album it is from can be read as a diatribe against Microsoft. Firstly the dissatisfaction with Windows scripting languages "bat Out Of Hell", the ever crashing MS Office components, "You Took Word Right Out Of My Mouth", the interminable time spent watching an hourglass, "Heaven Can Wait", the disappointment at having bought into the slogan "Where do you want to go today?" only to find all roads lead to MSN, "All Revved Up With No Place To Go", the poor standards compliance of IE, "Two Out Of Three Ain't Bad", the joyous enthusiasm on getting a 17" PowerBook, "Paradise By The Keyboard

Light", only to discover you can't access your Hotmail account, "For Crying Out Loud".

Kari
ambariel@ntlworld.com

Most honoured Cabalians. The Uphall Road household can confirm the early existence of the Frankie and Benny's Restaurant in Leicester. Indeed, fifty percent of the human inhabitants (i.e. me) were amongst the first persons to check it out back in the distant days of nineteen hundred ninety six. Ah, me: the old century... You see, it happens to be situated on one of those just-off-the-ring-road-entertainment parks that seem to be springing up everywhere (and especially, for reasons that elude me, in Northampton. Never spend Friday night in Northampton city centre. Just don't. Take it from One Who Knows). In particular, its close to one of Leicester's newer cinemas, to which eighty per cent of the female academic staff of the Department of History, University of Leicester, were wont to repair of a Wednesday evening to absorb important cultural happenings (especially those starring George Clooney). Afterwards, we used to go out and eat: Frankie and Benny's arrived at a very useful time, and Elizabeth and I became semi-regulars for several months. (Miscellaneous fandom may at this point object that I claimed that 80% of the female staff went to the pictures on Wednesdays, but that two people—Elizabeth and me—cannot sensibly represent 80%. Three solutions present: firstly, there were more of us to start with, but some went home after the film. Secondly, that my

arithmetic is off [plausible, given how bad my arithmetic famously is]. Thirdly, that the remaining female staff member was less than one person. As anyone acquainted with university logic will immediately know, the third answer is the right one. At the time, Leicester had three women in the history department. I was 100% theirs. Elizabeth was also 100% theirs, but additionally was 100% property of the American Studies department. Marilyn was divided on a 50-50 basis between History and Archaeology. The men were all single user.) Anyway, we liked F & Bs: the food was well served and perfectly nice, and they made **great** cocktails...

Meanwhile I've been applying Giulia's method of slash conversation generation around the house, and am rapidly coming to the conclusions that Phil and I just don't have the right kind of conversations. Take this morning's, for instance.

Me: How did you sleep?

Phil: Intermittently, but heavily.

Me: Oh, why?

Phil: Assorted cat, mainly.

Me: Well, you shouldn't have shut her in the bathroom. She woke me up [at 3 a.m., typist] scrabbling to be let out, and then she was pleased to see us.

Phil: Incoherent mutter.

Me (warming to the theme): And then, having woken me up by forgetting Mooncat, you kept me awake by snoring.

Phil: I am a bit bunged this morning.

Me: Fnurt. (Footnote 1: this is a noise of general disdain, coined by our late beloved Caspian cat.)

As a slash element, this is pretty much a non-runner. Take elves, for a start. Elves, I am fairly certain, never, ever snore, not even when they have a stuffed-up nose. They may snuffle delicately, but never at volume. It wouldn't be elegant. And then, I'm sure they wouldn't shut the cat in the bathroom, either. Think of the mess she might make digging up the fine silk hand-woven rugs. Think of the danger of making a prat of oneself tripping over her in the dark. No, I bet elf bathrooms have cat flaps. Turning to Hong Kong gangster movies, we get something like this:

Tai Tin-Yee: How did you sleep last night?

Chan Ho-Nam: Badly. [Flips hair, tries to look brooding.]

Tin-Yee: [warily] Oh, why?

Ho-Nam: Too many rival triads.

Tin-Yee: [retreating, and putting on running shoes] Well, maybe it wasn't ideal to lock them in the bathroom, Nam-go.

Ho-Nam: Growling noise.

Tin-Yee [placatory] Oh, dear, you **do** have a cold, don't you? I did wonder when you kept snoring... I mean were having breathing difficulties last night. Should I go and buy some very expensive herbs for you? Or maybe a nice massage? [Reaches door. Starts trying to unlock it.]

Ho-Nam: Grrrr... I do NOT snore... [Launches self at Tin-Yee. Punch-up ensues.]

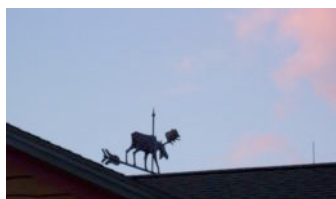
Maybe not. I just don't watch/read the right things, clearly.

We were very sad to hear about George. Having lost Caspian at New Year, we sympathize. Cats get hold of one's affections and curl up there. Kittens, on the other hand, get hold of the hem of one's skirt and surf on it down the staircase. Yes, we have a three-month old addition to our household and life is very furry.

PS This loc has used the entire allocation of brackets for *Plokta* 8.2. Editors please take note.

Sarah Prince
sarah@ssprince.com

This is from the superhighway rest area closest to my home northbound (I-87 in northern New York). I don't usually stop there, being nearly home, but on a recent trip was sleepily dragged from one rest area to the next, sleeping an hour or two at each. I woke at 6am to see this weathervane.



Karen Johnson
kaji@labyrinth.net.au

I must confess that I am not an organised person (hence non-loccking habits and non-zine publication) and when somebody mentioned the Flylady to me I thought it was a joke. But I checked it out and eventually I too became a Flybaby. Under the Flylady's influence I discovered that our house contains flat surfaces known as tables,

which can even be used to eat at! I always thought they were meant to be extra large shelves :) The only problem with her emails is that since I'm Australian, I get a message saying 'Are you ready for bed yet?' at about 1pm. I'm organised but not *that* organised!

Pamela Boal

Help please! I have sent three e-mails to Greg P advising him that I have a large box full of zines for the Memory Hole. Alas no reply. Is he still operating the Memory Hole? *[No, he's decided that there's insufficient desire for old fanzines]*

Terry Jeeves
erg40@madafish.com

Large shopping complexes? I hate them, they are just crammed with all the big high street name stores and none of the small, one man back street places where you go for old books, DIY tools, junk and antiques. You can't buy half a dozen 4" bolts or a 1950 pulp mag in the big complexes.

John Berry

I was absolutely delighted with the latest issue—beautifully presented, colour illos, sparkling articles and a brilliant lettercol. For once I was able to read a Joseph Nicholas letter without breaking into a sweat—he is *so* perceptive with his modern art observations. He should pursue his 'Male Orgasm' presentation—he could win £20,000.00!!!

Re Giulia's comments re the layout of the qwerty keyboard remind me of the theory I heard about many years ago. Over a century ago when salesmen were ranging over the USA trying to sell typers, they learnt to rattle off

'typewriter' very speedily to potential buyers—it was all they could type, but it was on the *top row* and thence easily able to be bashed out in a split second, thus amazing the hicks in the small towns.

The whole ambience of *Plokta* reminds me so much of bashing out *Hyphen* fifty years ago—really witty & humorous with complete concord of cabal.

Mark Plummer

I sort of get used to this thing of yours for only crediting the author of a particular *Plokta* piece at the end of the article. However, I find that it helps to know who I'm reading before I start, simply so that I can get the right authorial 'voice'—well, except when you're talking techie when, frankly, it doesn't matter all that much.

So my usual approach is to read the title—say, 'The Other White Meat'—and then glance down at the end to get the voice (Steve Davies) and then start again at the top.

'It is, as usual, Sue Mason's fault.... My possession of enough silver jewellery to sink a battleship and enough amber to refloat it...'

Umm, OK. Can't say I'd ever noticed this. Intimate piercings, perhaps? And I guess you can get away with a lot under a beard. Continuing:

'My brief forays into the world of Middle Eastern dance...'

Nor this. But there are those long *Plokta* weekends... you can't spend **all** the time playing with your laptops, can you? Actually, I suppose you probably can, but perhaps you also all have your own performance pieces to entertain the others.

'And my *Lord of the Rings* elf-slash habit...'

Oh, good grief, not another one. First Sue, then Giulia, now Steve. Really, I think I'd actually prefer more techie stuff.

'... what's a girl to do...'

Girl. Ah.

It seems I still need to get used to this thing of yours for publishing articles that are sufficiently short that they can end—and thus be by-lined—on the same page that they begin.

Ian Stockdale
ies@acm.org

I'm still tempted to try the Tate Modern, if only to see if Sarah Lucas' truly talentless drivel might have at least one trick up its (their?) sleeve. Notwithstanding the color of the paper, I'd also like to see if 'The Discussion' is still there. The only other installation using newspapers that I've seen consisted of piles of newspaper much like those found in our living room. There must be another approach to this problem.

Annmari Massing Olsen
Manager—Store <deleted>
Starbucks Coffee Company
(UK) Ltd.



As you are a valued Starbucks customer, I am writing to tell you about an exciting new arrival—our limited edition Gazebo blend. This is a unique, never repeated blend prepared from a selection of East African beans. It is produced in limited quantities with the summer in mind. This year's blend combines Kenya, Ethiopia, Malawi, Burundi, Tanzania, Zambia,

Zimbabwe, and Yemen beans to give fruit-like notes and a floral scent. It is a full bodied, spicy coffee that will go well with any seasonal dish, and it also makes an excellent iced coffee. I have enclosed a 50g sample of Gazebo Blend for you to try with my compliments.

We also have a full stock of our British range including Fairtrade and our Organic Shadegrown coffee from Mexico.

If you have any further questions or would like to place an order, please do not hesitate to contact me on the telephone number above. Thank you for your continued support and interest in Starbucks Coffee Company. I hope to hear from you soon.



Harry Turner

Partial blindness and a series of eye ops over several years caught up with me in the late 70s and forced me to abandon painting and exhibitions. When I retired in the mid-80s, I bought in supplies of paint and canvases, and indulged myself with several OU modern art courses, to discover more about the work of the Russian abstractionists of the early 20thC. But somehow I never regained enough enthusiasm to get started again.

However last month my eye was caught by an item in an *Observer* financial supplement declaring that one of my idols, op artist Victor Vasarely, once “the second most popular artist at auction after Picasso”, is now “all-but forgotten” and “his meticulous, geometric paintings change hands

privately for less than half [Bridget] Riley’s prices”—followed surprisingly by a hot tip for collectors that his work is now “ripe for investment”. Well, Bridget certainly seems to be doing well, with a big show due in London, despite the media’s preoccupation with Brit-art like Damien’s pickled corpses and Tracey’s unmade beds. (Most of the Saatchi careerists/celebs strike me as still lingering a long way behind Marcel Duchamp with their efforts...). So, as I increasingly feel a fannish relic, out of place in today’s fandom, maybe I should just concentrate on finishing off some of the long-abandoned canvases littering the studio and see where that takes me. If Sue can get hung in the National Portrait Gallery, I guess I should make the effort to appear in a few northern galleries... On the other hand perhaps I’d better

be realistic and just complete that much-interrupted *Now&Then* recycling project first; hopefully before the end of this year. (Wow, ever the optimist.)

PS—My days are haunted by this persistent thought:

Not long ago a friend expounded to me on the recently-minted concept of “time bankruptcy”. He himself was time bankrupt, he admitted. You are time bankrupt when the amount of things you have acquired which you have to process—mainly books and opera recordings, in his case—cannot possibly be read or listened to in the time you have left to live.—James Meek writing in the *Guardian*, 15 July 2000

We Also Heard From:
Susan Francis (“Paradise By The Keyboard Light’ means nothing to me”), **Joseph Major** (sending moose stories) and **Marilyn Roane** (seeking information on *Flaming Youth*, the band beloved of Rob Jackson).

Pornographer Accountants of Gor

WELL, Pornographer Accountants of a Small Village Just Off the M4, anyway. I’m in work again, for the time being, almost without realising it had happened. One day, I was a happy housewife and wannabe author, inflicting early drafts of my “novel” on the rest of the cabal. The next day, I’m a database administrator, using the product I used to train to other people. The phrase “poacher turned gamekeeper” comes to mind.

I’ve had to buy an entire new work wardrobe. I like buying clothes, especially the sort you can wear on Saturday night at Novacon, not that they’d do for the current job. The dress code for women is somewhere between suits and neat casual. Sort of middle-aged skirt-slacks-blouse-

cardigan combo, an ecological niche until now completely empty in my sartorial environment. TK Maxx is my friend, pimping the likes of Nicole Farhi, Jasper Conran, Elizabeth Emmanuel and Liz Claiborne for £14.99 a go.

But I digress. Where was I... little village off the M4. It’s the biggest company I’ve ever worked for, big enough to have lots of different offices with all the different business groups and functions housed separately.

I’m in with the accountants. I’ve never spent much time with accountants, at least not accountants en masse, not even when I worked for Accountancy Personnel. They have intense conversations about billing and reconciliations and cricket. The cricket is just so they can then run detailed

analyses and put up A3 spreadsheets showing everyone’s batting averages, wickets and runs, with separate graphs for mean, mode and median.

Now, this company, which in the time-honoured *Plokta* tradition shall remain nameless, is in an interesting line of business: they supply movies to hotels. They like to think they’re in the movie business, piping digital quality, newly-released blockbusters to the, um, comfort and convenience of your own hotel room.

The office is decorated with movie posters which get changed regularly and I happened to be walking through reception recently when the latest shipment was unrolled. I saw the one featuring Kate Winslett’s new movie about the Marquis de

Sade (slogan: “the pleasure is all his.”) Oddly, that one never appeared on the office wall and that was a mainstream movie. Shame because I wanted a closer look at the 18th century corset she was wearing, honest.

That was when I realised that they never, ever talk about the kind of movies that really get watched in hotel rooms.

I don’t know how long this job is going to last but I’m not getting too hopeful. It’s a bit worrying working for a company in total denial about their main source of income.

Maybe I shouldn’t have bought quite so many new clothes.

—Giulia de Cesare

Good Housekeeping Special

Phil: One of the delights of an Eastercon (presuming that the word hasn't yet been trademarked and I can use it in the context of 'that thing we do every Easter that relates to science fiction and stuff') is that Steve Davies sidles up to me, looks shiftily around to make sure no-one is looking and says out of the corner of his mouth 'Ere Guv—'av a *Plokta*. Just don't tell everyone, cos they'll all want one'. The result of this skulduggery is a feeling of half suppressed delight and excitement at being one of the few in the know, together with a feeling of anticipation—there'll be something good to do in bed tonight; reading the *Plokta*!

D'ya think that's good enough Jill?

Jill: Oh for heaven's sake! Why can't you just get on with it? And that's not what happened at all. Steve was wandering past us and said 'Do you want one of these?' and you said 'Oh, if I must!'

Phil: Yes, that is true, but my version sounds better. Anyway, I digress. Of course, there are other delights of an Eastercon, such as meeting up with old friends and so on. (Though it must be said, there were a few missing this year, such as the Scary Person.)

Jill: How many times do I have to tell you? Alison is nice, she's not scary at all!

Phil: Yes, that's what you say. However, I think she's scary. Very, very scary.

Anyway, to continue...

This con was however different, for 2 very specific reasons. Firstly, there were more children. Lots of them—all scurrying around, doing whatever it is that children do. Not having any, and it being sometime since I was one, I'm not entirely sure what that was, but they were doing it.

Jill: *Can't you just say they were playing?*

Phil: I don't think I remember a con where there were so many children. Playing. It's quite obvious that the subliminal messages during at recent convention panels on 'Whither the next generation of Eastercon organisers?' had worked way beyond the expectations of the SMOFs. Oddly however in most cases these children are not of the baby variety—they're older by several years. This either means that they've been born quite recently and force grown...

Jill: *Oh good grief...*

Phil: ... or they've been held in holding pens for several years, being primed with copies of Harry Potter books and so on before being launched on an unsuspecting Eastercon. Whichever—it was noticeable, and is, I suppose A Good Thing. The most amusing element did (as one might have expected) involve SMS and his son, who was crawling around the reception area floor. SMS was 'directing' him by pointing some radio controlled device towards him. This was something they'd obviously been practising (either for an upcoming entry in *Beyond Cyberdrome* or a *Masquerade* or possibly both), since it was very realistic. All too realistic in fact for the elderly woman who did her best to duck around the control beam so that she didn't cause havoc by getting in its way.

The second thing that I noticed was that we all seem to have got older. This is perhaps because we are getting older, so it's not that surprising I suppose. However, I think this was made more conspicuous since certain people didn't make Jersey last year, so rather than being a gradual annual event it was brought into rather sharper contrast. Certainly looking the mirror at the increasing grey hair ...

Jill: *And are you going to mention the larger stomach?*

Phil: *No, they don't need to know that...* I can confirm that we are aging, but at a rather faster rate than I've previously noticed. Of course, both things could be linked; there has probably been at least one research paper on the effect of children on hair colour, and if there hasn't, there should be. One can only wonder what will happen next.

Anyway, all of this is merely a precursor to my comment.

Jill: *And about time! Though if I know you, you're not quite there yet.*

Phil: *Well, I'm almost there. I'm going to tell them about The Move now.* You see, we're going to be moving in the near future from Twilight Towers near Heathrow to the delightful environs of—how best to put this? Essex. Yes, we're moving to Essex. This is not, I assure you because we want to move to Essex, because we don't. Oh no, not at all. Essex is not near conventions. Whoever heard of a science

fiction convention in Chelmsford, or Southend, or Thundersley or Lower Tarpots?

Jill: *Lower Tarpots? You're having me on! There can't be anywhere called Lower Tarpots outside of Texas. <consult_map>Oh. Fair enough.</consult_map>*

Phil: We're moving there for entirely different reasons, mainly to be closer to aged parents. It's not easy, let me tell you, since we have several limiting factors; we need to be near a train station, within easy driving distance of aforementioned parents, broadband access to the net and so on. Access to the net is the killer of course, since most estate agents don't really understand things like ADSL or broadband or computer. They tend to glaze over when you mention anything technical. They can just about cope with 'electricity' and so on, but more than that is beyond them. However, this is also by and by.

Jill: *For Heavens sake! Get to the point!*

Phil: In the process of tidying the house to get it into a fit enough state for potential purchasers to look around in comfort and to get some idea of what the place looks like, it's been necessary to dispose of a lot of junk. The current score stands at 25 black bin bags and one overflowing skip. That's just for the garden, the dressing room, the kitchen and the living room. The final tally will be much higher though, believe me. Consequently, I was amused to read in the item 'Needs A Skip, Vern' about a bit of rubbish with 'must reply by the end of December... 2001' given that we threw away a small packet of nutmegs with 'best before July 1994' stamped on the side.

2001? I'm sorry to say that in the untidiness stakes it appears that the *Plokta Cabal* are but mere amateurs.

Jill: *Is that it? Have you finally finished? That's not a letter of comment, it's a small essay!*

Phil: *Yes, but they'll edit out everything except the last paragraph.*

Jill: *Oh, that's alright then.*

—Phil and Jill Bradley