

P L O K T A

The Journal of Superfluous Technology

July 1996 — Volume 1, Number 2

Plokta comes to you from Steve Davies and Alison Scott. *Plokta* is an acronym, which should be decipherable to anyone with sufficiently superfluous technology. It's also an innocent little fanzine, thrust upon an uncaring world at an early age. It is available for letter of comment, trade (2 copies if poss, please), contribution, two pints of beer, baby paraphernalia, or, of course, superfluous technology. Send them to

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or email to plokta@vraidex.demon.co.uk. May contain geeks. Partners in crime include Steven Cain, Giulia de Cesare, Sue Mason and Mike Scott. Thanks to Pam Wells for proof-reading, Martin Easterbrook for his joke.

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Fillos by Sue Mason (5,6,13), Brad Foster (3,10), Teddy Harvia (9) and Ian Gunn (2,12).

Editorial

Reaction to Issue 1 seems to have been generally favourable. Our main problem is that Andy Hooper thinks we're probably either a group of neos or a hoax. Now since Steve's first contact with fandom was about 1975 and Alison's was 1983, and the Plokta cabal between us have well over a century of fannish street-cred, the only logical conclusion is indeed that one or more of us is a hoax. Steve is safe; Andy reckons they met in the Intersection Newsletter room while he was attempting to drag Tom Becker away to dinner. Alison was once described as being *zaftig* in a Locus Worldcon review (she spent the next six months trying to find out what it meant, and has been trying to live it down ever since) so that rules her out. Sue should be a hoax—you remember there was a tick-box on the cover for "You have been shagging a member of the Plokta cabal"? It was amazing, while we were addressing Plokta, the number of pubic scalps Sue has dangling from her, er, belt. How she ever has time to actually get out of bed and do all those incredible fillos, I do not know. Of course Mike Scott (Alison's ex-husband) is doing his best trying to emulate Sue's record by cutting a swathe through American fandom, so that counts him out too. Which leaves Steven Cain (Alison's other half) and Giulia de Cesare (Steve's other half). It's going to be a difficult decision...

John Dallman complained about our three-column layout (tough! we like it) and the positioning of the staples. Tell me, John, *is* there a hyphen in anal-retentive?

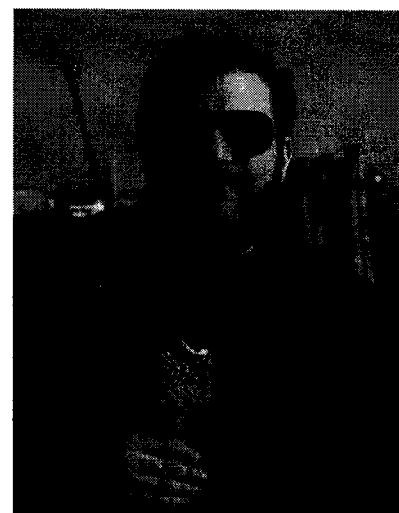
Brad Foster complained about the DTP on the grounds that he actually had to read the fanzine to find out if it was any good. We thought at first that he was upset at having wasted his time, but he seemed to like it after all.

Meanwhile, Robert Lichtman sends us a fanzine from a time when "...at least one of you was still in grammar [*primary - Ed*] school". We seized it, thrilled at getting a 70s fanzine; but it turned out to be from 1991.

So, are we neos or Neolithic? Answers on a pocsared please.

Farber Day

It was Pam Wells' fault. She came back from Corflu determined to bring Gary Farber, Usenet BNF and ex-Worldcon eminence grizzly, to Novacon. So on July 21st we're holding a garden fête at 13, Lindfield Gardens, Hampstead as a fund-raising event. More details of this momentous event follow. If you're in the area, why not drop in and make a fool of yourself for a good cause? And if you're in the US, isn't it worth a small donation to get rid of Gary for a while? If you want to send us a dollar cheque, please make it payable to Roger Robinson.



Gary Farber
Felix mine, I'll lick his...

FARBER DAY

Grand Garden Fête

Raising Funds to Bring Gary Farber to Novacon. Sunday July 21, 13 Lindfield Gardens, Hampstead, London NW3, 2pm till Dusk. Our exciting games and activities will include:

- ◇ Twinkie Tossing!
- ◇ Astral Pole - Are You Double-Jointed?
- ◇ Erotic fruit eating contest
- ◇ Fling a Flan for Farber - Paste Pam for Phun and Profit!
- ◇ Many exotic food products. Some from America!
- ◇ Bake Stall!
- ◇ Soak Alison with Sponges!
- ◇ Twister!
- ◇ Grand Auction! - Please donate some suitable old tat!
- ◇ Pin the Ptail on the Psheep!
- ◇ Live Electronic Link Up to Gary!
- ◇ Fannish Punch & Judy!
- ◇ Tombola!
- ◇ Live music from the Farbettes (bring your own earplugs)
- ◇ Treasure Hunt! Collect your own set of limited edition fanzines
- ◇ Have your photo taken with Gary!
- ◇ The Farbolymphics - Now Featuring Fruit and Vegetables!
- ◇ Bring a Condom for Gary - Prize for the Weirdest Condom!

...And Many More!!!!!!



Full report with pictures in the next issue of *Plokta*...

All Welcome Admission Free Indoors if wet

- Q. So who is Gary Farber, anyway?
A. He's a US fan and denizen of the Usenet newsgroups rec.arts.sf. fandom and alt.fandom.cons. He's also done loads of fanzines, been vice chair of a Worldcon and is a really cool bloke; but he doesn't have enough money to finance a trip over here.
- Q. So, who's behind Farber Day?
A. The entire "Bring Gary Farber to Novacon" campaign is being orchestrated by Bridget Hardcastle, Alison Scott and Pam Wells.
- Q. Why?
A. Because as well as all that other stuff, he's also a terrific flirt.
- Q. Isn't this what TAFF's supposed to be for?
A. Yes, but we don't see a problem with a bit of free enterprise fund raising as well. Besides, Gary lost a TAFF race before any of us were born.
- Q. How do you plan to make money if admission to the fête is free?
A. Because we intend to charge you for everything else, of course. Bring lots of spare change.
- Q. How much money do you need?
A. Quite a lot—about £500. Bring lots of large notes.
- Q. So how do I get there?
A. Tube to Hampstead or Finchley Road, then use an A-Z or the maps on the station wall. If coming by car, you can park on the street, ignoring what it says about residents' parking - this only applies Monday to Saturday.

Early entries in the erotic fruit eating contest...



I've got a lovely bunch of coconuts



The fruit, the whole fruit and nothing but the fruit



"Ravening maenads" (© D.Langford)

Sue also did us a picture involving erotic use of a cucumber, but it was too tasteless even for *Plokta*.

Con? What Con?

Steve was editor of the Intersection newsletter "Voice of the Mysterons". Not everything went according to plan...

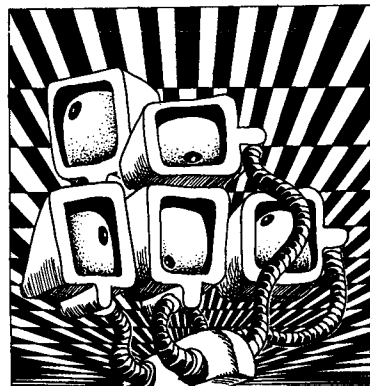
Wednesday: Arrive at con, find that no-one knows where our rental computers are. Nobody knows where the paper is and nobody knows where anything else is. However, Chris from Gestetner has arrived and shows us how to work the duplicator. He keeps trying to sell the features of the machine and I keep telling him that I sweated blood persuading Intersection to pay for a Gestetner instead of getting a copier for free from Xerox. He leaves us the phone number of someone who'll come out and fix it if anything goes wrong, Bank Holiday or not.

Go and hunt for the other supplies. Discover vast quantity of paper in secure store. Mike Scott and I form ourselves into a horde of gophers and carry it upstairs to the newsroom in the manner of ants. No stencils or ink. I go hunting and discover find them in the film programme (the obvious place really, wonder why I didn't think of that earlier?) along with... two computers! Go and ask Ops if they are mine. Ops tell me that Gytha is looking for me to tell me that she can't find my computers. Eventually return to Hall 2 and find the computers being hauled away. But not to the newsroom. Discover from Richard the Rampant that, yes, these are my computers, but they have to be electrically tested. It appears that when they tested a random rental machine, it failed the test, so now all the machines have to be tested, as well as all our own gear. Fortunately, I brought a lot of spare power leads, just in case.

Set up and arrange newsroom despite an almost complete absence of tables. Find two tables from Hall 4 (they don't *really* need that many tables for kaffeeklatches, surely? And despite having ordered five, we haven't got any). Eventually the first machine comes back from testing so we can start work at last.... It's the crappy 8086 I brought only for use in emergencies and it doesn't run anything remotely usable. At last we get one of the rental 486s back. It's got Windows but has no mouse...try spare mouse...it doesn't work...plug in ancient trackball thrown in at last minute...it works! Start to install Office. Turns out to be wrong version of Office. Try floppies. Turn out to be upgrade only and it won't install.

Panic. Go hunting round convention for copies of Word. Eventually get one from Wim van der Bospoort's laptop. We're up and running, but wait... I load in the template and there's no sign of our font. To hell with it.

Start entering text for Wednesday issue of VoM, it's about 6pm now and we're all getting frazzled, but I'm determined to get an issue out tonight. People keep coming up with new stories that absolutely have to go in and so we keep reducing the size of type and stripping out the silly filler stories that we prepared in advance. Eventually, we try and do a test-print. We attach the rental laser-printer and discover that it's leaving a streak down each page and we can't change the cartridge. Try other printer. This one seems to be using some obscure emulation and just produces pages of gibberish. We go back to the streaky one. We look at the printout and realise that our watermark number isn't there. By now, it's about 8pm and we were supposed to be going out to eat at 7pm. We don't have a number, we don't have our typeface, we don't have a masthead but we do have a lot of text. We say "Sod it!" and print (removing the streaks from the printout with Tippex fluid).



©Brad W. Foster 1996
a typical rental computer

Nine pm. Issue 0 hits the Concourse and the VoM editorial team head for Mr Singh's India in a heap of frazzled nerves. Can we keep it up for the whole con?

Thursday: In the light of day and following a dubious night's sleep on the 24th floor of the YMCA, everything seems a lot better (even if the lift has stuck on the 25th, due to being full of Croatians, and we have to carry all our luggage down 24 flights of stairs). We go back to the newsroom, find and install the missing font, set up the assorted computers so

everything is accessible, Chris O'Shea fixes the problem with the watermark numbers, Mike Scott fixes the problem with the printer emulation and we abandon the streaky printer to its fate. We still don't have a masthead picture so Mike goes looking for Sue Mason who does one on the spot and we size it to fit using the photocopier. Just in time, because shortly afterwards, the photocopier starts churning out black sheets and we have to call the engineer. But the Gestetner is still chugging away happily (having done about 5000 sheets as opposed to the 50 sheets that the photocopier's done)!

We start to do our first real issue and run into our first real problems. We do have some volunteers and these rapidly divide into the essential (like Jan van t'Ent, Kathy Westhead and Tom Becker), the occasionally usable, and Robert Sacks, who unfortunately puts everybody's backs up by whirling in and apparently trying to take over.

We manage two issues on Thursday and set the tone for the whole con. Basically, I eat, drink and sleep in the newsroom, occasionally getting away when it's not my shift. The shift leaders run their shifts and help out on most of the other shifts. We keep having to pad stories out because the long articles submitted by people like Robert have to be cut right down to make them at all readable. We also have to chuck out a fair proportion of stories because they are either too cryptic, too insulting or just totally uninteresting. At this point we're running a system based on PostIt notes—we attach a PostIt to each story and put the scrap of paper it's on into a tray, when we use the story it goes into another tray—which does have some major disadvantages.

Distribution is proving to be a problem. We decided to go for boxes with "News" in huge letters on a fluorescent pink background. If I was doing this again, I might see what I could do with the idea of distribution racks—the problem with boxes is that they sit on a table and aren't visible through a crowd.

Friday: Get to newsroom late and am told by grinning staff member that they have solved the Robert Sacks problem. Still don't know what they did, except that we don't see Robert again all con and I am now on Kevin Standlee's blacklist (maybe he was hoping Robert would stay in the newsroom for the weekend).

Things seem to be going smoothly... and then various members of the committee start taking me aside and whispering contradictory stories about John Brunner's health and what we can and cannot print. I'm also handed two separate party reports for the previous night (I've never really seen the point of party reports and I wasn't going to bother) so since Dana Siegel is there being useful, I run hers. Big mistake. It appears that (i) she's been rather derogatory about some parties which, it appears, just isn't done in Worldcon newsletters. But also (ii) Scott Bobo and Kurt Baty have committee approval to supply party reports to the newsletter. Deep sigh. Promise Kurt and Scott that I'll run their reports in future, apologise to Dana and make mental note to blame her if anyone complains about the review.

Then Martin Easterbrook turns up and hauls me away to the SFWA suite and breaks the news. John Brunner is dead. Things get very emotional for a while and then we discuss what to do. This isn't something we'd even thought of planning for. We decide to do a short announcement so we can have it out in the SECC before any rumours start flying around. We also agree that we will do a proper memorial edition the next day. Martin and Vince want me to do the announcement in secret, but there's no way to keep something like this hidden from the rest of the newsroom. I bind them to secrecy for the next half hour, lock the newsroom door and we get to work. We make it just a short announcement, with the *Romeo and Juliet* quote at the foot. I also decide to use the VoM logo so people know this is official, but remove the masthead cartoon as being out of place in a formal announcement. Then we distribute by hand, with the board's assistance, to as many places as we can reach. I think this was the best solution and I think we did a good job. The only problem we had was that someone with more feeling than sense takes it upon themselves to go around removing all copies of the previous issue in which we announced that John was sick in hospital. I nearly hit the roof, check with the board that this hasn't originated with them and prepare to reprint that issue. Fortunately, we find the missing newsletters under a table in Security and redistribute those instead. (This still annoys me, months later. You don't destroy newspapers because they refer to someone who's since died, do you? You just print the news in the next edition).



Steve working hard...

Saturday: The newsroom is packed with people typing in stuff for the John Brunner tribute. It quickly becomes obvious that we're going to have too much material and we're trying diplomatically to get all these famous authors and BNFs to restrict themselves to a single paragraph. We're also trying to get a morning issue of the newsletter out at the same time and we're so short of real copy that we're reduced to lists of videos and dubious gossip. A member of the team, who shall remain nameless, scrapes the bottom of the barrel and fills in the final hole with a couple of lines on how we were so late getting out the Friday night issue that we missed the free booze at the publishers' party. Everyone's so relieved about finishing that it doesn't really register that the story is headlined "Scum! Scum! Scum!" since we're pre-occupied with ripping bits out of the Brunner tribute. In the end, we manage by an amazing feat of layout to get all the pieces intact into the Brunner Special, albeit at a much reduced typesize and not in the order that we had been trying for. Everybody totally exhausted and emotionally wrung-out. We go to press. We distribute. Everybody very happy with Brunner tribute. Then we learn that the publishers... No, let me rephrase that. One editor has seen that piece of last-minute filler and been so outraged that she is threatening to walk out of the convention and leave the bill for the publishers' party to be paid by the con. Several people say that it might be worth it, but we agree to apologise in the next issue of VoM. We do.

According to our schedule, for the Saturday night issue we have to include the Masquerade results and the site selection. The site selection's not that much of a problem, Kevin Standlee turns up with the figures early on—except that Kevin tells us the figures are unofficial until the next day's business meeting. We run it anyway, putting in lots of "allegedly"s and "from a usually reliable source"

into the story. The Masquerade, on the other hand, is a problem. We send a couple of newsletter people down to be in the audience and try to arrange to get the results from the MC or the judges. However, the usual masquerade confusion messes everything up and we can't get hold of anyone to give us an official list of prize winners. Eventually we have to put together a list and hope it's right. We make a couple of minor errors but mostly it's correct.

Sunday: Today we're doing the spoof as well as the usual three issues. Fortunately, we've mostly sub-contracted the spoof to Alison Scott and Steven Cain so it's not nearly as frantic as Saturday. Yes, everything's going OK... until we get told that the publishers are refusing to accept our apology in Issue 7 and want a really serious grovelling apology or else they're going to go away and never come to an SF convention ever again. Serious debate follows on whether or not we actually need the publishers. After all they are an incredible amount of hassle to deal with and most convention attendees wouldn't miss them. It's not as if it was someone important like the agents or the bookdealers, anyway. Still, we agree that we'll try running another apology and Jan offers to go and grovel personally (for which I am forever in his debt, really I should have gone and done it). Amazingly, this seems to work.

The system for submitting stories has now completely broken down, so we invent a new one which works much better. We run off a hundred or so submission sheets with boxes for who submitted the story, when it was submitted, when it expires etc. and we attach one of these to each story instead of a scrappy PostIt. Everything suddenly becomes organised and efficient. We really should have been doing this from the start; life would have been ever so much easier. Since we also insist that anyone submitting a story writes it out on the sheet, we're getting better source material because it's forcing them to do a re-write.

So today, we have to print the Hugo results and what I want to do is have them ready at the doors as the audience leaves the ceremony. Mike Moir took a lot of convincing before he would agree to give us the results in advance but eventually he saw my point of view after I swore a terrible oath that I would keep them secret until after the ceremony or see my figgin placed upon a spike. Just before

the Hugos, Mike comes to the newsroom and gives me three sealed envelopes (one for us, one for Locus and one for Science Fiction Chronicle) each containing a disk and a printout. He leaves and we lock the doors and wait for the ceremony to start. Tension mounts. Eventually we reach the agreed hour and break the seal on our envelope. Nothing really surprising. Alex takes the disk, sticks it in the drive... and all hell breaks loose. The memory-resident virus checker starts screaming its head off, I punch the eject button on the drive closely followed by the off-switch. I dig the anti-virus stuff out of the box of bits and we check the hard drive. Clean. We check the floppy. Virus detected in the boot sector. Oh shit. We start to type in the results from the printout. Then it occurs to someone, what about those other two sealed envelopes? So we open the other envelopes, check the disks (both clean, by the way) and reseal them with me signing my name across the seal together with a brief note saying "opened for virus check". Be still my trembling heart. And we go to press not a moment too soon because the

Hey! That photocopier sounds just like a mimeo...

ceremony is nearly over. We do a short run of 500 copies and take them out still slightly wet, just in time to catch the first people leaving the hall. Phew! Go and watch fireworks while trusty Jan prints the other 2500 copies. Oh, and I explain to Mike Moir how the other envelopes came to be opened, and circulate a general virus warning to all areas of the convention using computers.

Monday: After all that, anything would be a relief. Things go swimmingly, Dave Kyle comes upstairs and is complimentary about VoM as are a number of other people. Ah! Egoboo! Actually, nothing beats the feeling of distributing a newsletter and having hordes of people descend on you for copies and go away laughing at the jokes you've spent several hours agonising over. We were only going to do two issues today, but we end up doing the usual three, anyway (even if we do have to include a big picture of Samuel Delany to fill up space). Jan even has time to do some reprints of early issues for people who missed

them. Of course tonight's is the last issue...

Tuesday: Oh, come on, we've got to do an issue today. If only we can get to the newsroom before Gestetner come and take their machine away. So we do. We even get it out before Kurt and Scott come around with their dead dog party report (which I've still got lying around somewhere, come to think of it. Shame to waste it...). I think we're the last area to clear out of the SECC, but everyone seems to appreciate having a post-con issue. Chris from Gestetner turns up and is more than mildly boggled when he discovers that we've run the machine well past its next service point over the weekend. I tell him that any time Gestetner want a testimonial I'll give him anything they want and personally I want that machine's babies. The photocopier (may it rust in Hell) broke down twice and ended up doing about 600 copies, max., mostly fan repro and resizing fillos. The Gestetner on the other hand has never faltered and has provided an endless supply of sensawunda from fans coming into the newsroom and saying "Hey! That photocopier sounds just like a mimeo..."

Then he wheels the duplicator into the lift and, for us, the con is over.

Fyffe of the Month



The Fyffe award, as you will remember, is given to a person who advances the cause of Science Fiction. This month, the Fyffe goes to Jo Fletcher, SF editor at Gollancz and all round good egg. Famous for her ability to take a joke and all that.

Ask Doctor Plokta

Dear Doctor Plokta, Re *Convenient*: "Prime numbers of people for a committee include 1,2,5 and 13." I feel obliged to point out that 1 is not a prime number. Yours helpfully,

Steve.Brewster@bristol.ac.uk

Doctor Plokta replies: Plokta is the journal of superfluous technology, but in the interests of superfluous pedantry, I should point out that the editors were using the other meaning of the word prime. Besides, one of the Plokta cabal made the same point as you while we were proofreading issue one, and was promptly suppressed by the officers of the court, like the guinea pig.

Dear Doctor Plokta, What is the recommended way of dealing with the piles of surplus technology—large piles of software; floppy disks; hardware components (including an MFM hard disk of 18Mb)—that accumulate in the living space of those afflicted by Superfluous Technology?

Chris Walton
rainbow.bridge@dial.pipex.com

Doctor Plokta replies: Superfluous technology is supposed to accumulate in the living space of those sufficiently blessed. Obsolete technology, on the other hand, can be sent to Tom Abba, 34 Friezeewood Road, Ashton, Bristol, BS3 2AB, who breaks it into bits and gives it a new lease of life in fine works of art. That's what the Plokta cabal does with all of their 486s, 14,400 modems, IDE hard disks, mono laser printers, and so forth.

Dear Doctor Plokta, I was in my executive suite at **The Scottish Can** at 3 o'clock in the morning when I heard a bleeping tone. After checking my digital watch, my mobile phone, my pager, my laptop computer, my Psion organiser, my alarm clock, the bedside phone, the television, my wallyphone and my pacemaker, I realised it was the fire alarm. Luckily it was a false alarm. If this happens to me again, what should I do?

martin@reading.sgi.com

Doctor Plokta replies: If you carry a portable smoke detector around with you, it will alert you to the presence of a real fire. By—er—bleeping.

The Alien Within Her

It's possible to buy a wide variety of books purporting to tell you how to be a pregnant woman. None of them do, of course, but never mind. Several of them, however, suggest keeping a diary, a journal, of one's deepest thoughts and feelings as one embarks on this great and momentous undertaking. Piffle, I thought; but then I changed my mind, when I realised I could get a fanzine article out of it. Or six. I have several books suitable for keeping a pregnancy journal; the particular one which springs to mind is a blank book illustrated throughout with pictures of unicorns, and intended for teenage girls to use to write their secrets in. Unicorns have deep associations with fertility and child-bearing, and I feel this would be most suitable. A fine fountain pen, and I could produce a beautiful artefact.

But I don't suppose the writing would be up to much. The problem with fountain pens, and artistic journals, is that you can't revise infinitely in the way you can with the word processor. It's unromantic and somehow unmotherly, but nevertheless much more efficient. And one's deepest thoughts and feelings tend to be much less entertaining than the random collection of anecdotes, history, innuendo and lies which go to make up most of my writing. So this is the first part of a pregnancy journal. And I shall report episodes of it in *Plokta* periodically, and add to it until I'm in a position to add the much promised hideous birth report.

When I was little, I was given my mother's diaries to scribble in. And I was always disappointed that in the months leading up to my birth, there were none of *her* deepest thoughts and feelings as she embarked on this great and momentous undertaking. Instead, there was just a little note in early July saying "Baby!" Even the date was wrong. I wonder now what she felt; was she worried and excited and confused in the same way I am? Not to mention sick as a parrot. I've never thought of my life as beginning at

conception, or ever considered what my mother was thinking of in late 1964 and early 1965, when she was pregnant. But when you're pregnant, you're always thinking—the baby's heart is beating now, or it's learning to suck its thumb, or whatever. And so some extent, I think it would be nice to leave something tangible for Pod about these things. So that, then, may be a suitable use for the fountain pen and the beautiful book; and I can edit everything dodgy and unsuitable for children out of my word processed



notes first. Probably won't leave much.

Having decided to start a family, Steven and I then waited until we'd been on holiday to India, and had finished taking the anti-malarial drugs after we returned. And then it was Eastercon, and being a major convention and a stress situation, of course my period arrived (This seems to be a uniform trend. 200 women in the Radisson Edwardian, and they all come on at once.) So I counted forward from that until I was probably fertile, and spent the weekend at home, mostly in bed, like you do. I didn't think it was very likely to work first time out, though. And a couple of days later, we made love again, and I was suddenly struck by the thought that this was pointless. Which was strange, because I'd been having sex regularly for a goodly number of years, and I'd never thought it was pointless before. And then I knew.

After that, of course, a wide variety of exciting pregnancy symptoms kicked in. My breasts were sorer than they'd

ever been. They are, of course, famously large and famously vacuous, but they'd never been large, vacuous and excruciatingly painful before. They hurt all the time, and became larger, heavier, and more painful on a daily basis. I also developed sudden exhaustion. At work, at home, in the car; I'd be walking round Sainsbury's or discussing development of policy strategy and yawning constantly. I'd arrive home from work and go straight to sleep. This wasn't helped by the fact that I went off coffee completely. This seemed thoroughly unlikely to me. After all, I'm the woman who buys

her coffee from a little mail order coffee house run by ex-Californians who roast the coffee to order and despatch it by first class post the same day, selling only single estate varietals, the caffeine-containing equivalents of single malts. But all of a sudden, I found I couldn't be in the same room as freshly ground coffee. Very peculiar.

Just before I found out I was definitely pregnant, I went to Bob Shaw's wake and got plastered. We drank for many hours, had a riotous evening, caught a night bus home, and I was

horribly sick in a local gutter. I worried a little. Surely this sort of thing couldn't be good for a putative baby?

We started to call the baby Pod; a good, all purpose name; suitable for both sexes and redolent of the space alien we both knew I was bearing. And of course, a pun; *Podkayne of Mars*. I've discovered since that baby names of this kind are often carried on for a long time; until, in fact, the baby is old enough to assert their independence and object. And we wrote about Pod in *Plokta 1*, and sorted out an e-mail address. You can't start them too young, after all.

At the same time, we started discussing proper names. It's very tricky, you know. You need a name that's pleasant, and goes well with the surname, and can only really be spelt one way, and isn't too peculiar or too common. It should not have any unfortunate resonances, like Candy Cain. You need to ensure that all elderly relatives are happy with it, and

none of them think it old-fashioned or (worse) trendy. If you name the baby after any relative, all the others will be offended and will act as the wicked fairy at the christening. And meanwhile, everyone keeps asking you if you've chosen names yet. We've both got very good at keeping a straight face when we tell them "Oh yes; if it's a boy we're calling him Peregrine Eustace, and if it's a girl then Griselda Esmerelda."

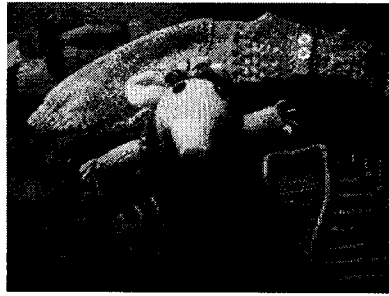
I cut down on the drinking, and tried to eat healthily. This worked well for a few days, and then I started finding myself getting sick. Throwing up at random times and places is no fun; especially when it comes on without warning. Feeling sick all the time saps the spirit, and vomiting over the Head of Policy Group is a poor career move. The worst of it is that this all happens before anyone in the office knows that you're pregnant, so no-one makes any allowances for you or understands why you're regularly turning green and rushing to the toilet. So I found myself putting all my energy into work to keep my area going, leaving no enthusiasm for anything else whatsoever.

You would not believe how little booze this is.

As for not drinking, I rapidly tired of a life of temperance. One or two units of alcohol, once or twice a week, they said. You would not believe how little booze this is. And ignoring the guidance didn't seem to help; whenever I tried drinking any more, I was very promptly horribly sick, in the manner of Rupert Bear.

The reaction of my friends was interesting. Those with children weren't remotely surprised, and those without were astonished. I think there's a tendency to be broody mostly around people who've already got children. Now that I'm pregnant, I've noticed this in reverse; friends who I've always thought of as staunchly childless have started telling me about their agonising about whether and when to have kids. The other weird thing is that pregnant women appear to emit a hormone which gives other mothers a compulsion to knit things. Pod's already had six little jackets and a Clanger from Sue's mum, and I've been promised babygros with spaceships on them. As Pod is due in

January, knitwear seems like a good idea to me, and I'm encouraging this trend.



Superfluous Tricotology

I found I was expected to start reading terrible magazines. You may never have looked at baby and parenting magazines. They're all rotten. They don't have any answers to the key questions first-time mothers have, ie:

- ◇ Is my baby healthy?
- ◇ Exactly *how* painful is labour going to be? and
- ◇ What am I supposed to do with this baby, anyway?

Instead, they're completely full of articles about "How to choose a carrycot" and "Stretch marks—kill or cure?" The last one I bought had "Do fathers prefer boys or girls? We discover the TRUTH!" Which of course turned out to be that fathers dote on whichever sort of baby they end up with. What a revelation. The worst of it is, I keep buying them. This is because my normal sort of bimbo magazine really has very little to offer the obsessive pregnant woman. "59 ways to spice up your love life" is of infinitesimal interest to someone who gets violently queasy at the mere thought of bonking.

The books you can get are much better. I discovered loads of things I never knew about babies. Did you know that babies' intestines are initially formed outside the body because there's no room for them inside? I've had Saturday nights when I felt like that, of course. I'm reading vast amounts of stuff, largely in an effort to find out the answers to the three unanswerable questions above. As far as I can tell, the answers seem to be:

- ◇ Probably
- ◇ Astonishingly, but it's a *good* sort of pain (FX: Skeptical)
- ◇ Muddle through, everyone else does

The best book I've found so far is Dave Barry's *Babies and Other Hazards of Sex*. Staggeringly funny, mostly

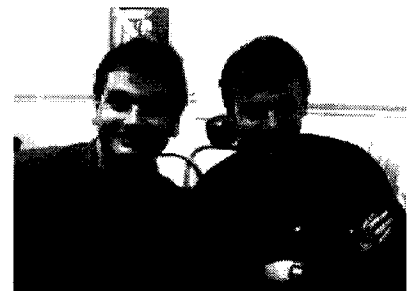
because it's all quite clearly the literal truth. Stories of hundreds of people looking at you in a shopping mall as if you were an evil child molester, merely because your toddler is screaming. And why is your toddler screaming? Because you refused to let it eat a half-devoured pizza crust which somebody has abandoned face down in an ashtray full of fag ends and sand. Strongly recommended, even if you're not planning to have kids any time soon.

The weirdest thing is the fact that nobody official has examined me, or tested me, or pronounced me pregnant. I told the doctor I'd done a home test, and he said, well, that's fine, you're pregnant then. The midwife visited me at home, and has given me all sorts of coupons for free baby products and so on, but hasn't actually done any tests of any kind. I keep thinking, but what if I failed to count up to two properly when I was counting pink lines?

They promise me that nearly everyone feels better by the end of the first trimester, which will have passed by the time you're reading this, and point out that morning sickness can be a lot worse than I've experienced (not that this helps). So hopefully next issue you'll get great tales of how I'm blooming, I've decorated the nursery, sorted out the entire house, am doing appropriate exercises twice a day and am mountain climbing in my spare time. Don't hold your breath.

—(AS)

Separated at Birth #2



Tweedledum

Tweedledee

A reader writes: I couldn't help but notice the uncanny resemblance between Mr M__S__ of C____, and Bloody M__S__ of C____. I wonder if, by any chance, their father had a bike?

Home Shopping Channel

Steve Jeffrey offers the following suggestions for increasing the superfluous technology in your life:

The Sonic Molecatcher (advertised in an *Innovations* catalogue near you—or your feet, if you open the Sunday papers and shake out all the extraneous bits over the carpet).

[I'm astonished that Steve hasn't mentioned that the sonic molecatcher advertises its ten inches of throbbing reverberating mole repellent—Alison] [That's never ten inches! —Sue]

Also the 'Glow in the Dark'-eyes cutout cat-on-a-stick, service as the perfect lawn accessory and bird scarer. Except I have visions of a group (cluster, parliament or whatever—unfortunately the *Dictionary of Collective Nouns* is at Maureen's, where for reasons best left unspecified we were looking up wombats—and beavers—this being all Mark Plummer's fault), anyway, a wossname of crows standing about wondering why someone has planted a cat that has come off a poor second in a fight with steamroller in the middle of their lawn.

And Robert Lichtman adds:

I must attempt to top your gadget of the month with one I saw recently: a pepper spray canister cleverly disguised as a pager. It tempted me for a moment.

However, *we* think the superfluous item of choice for this month is the wood veneer Microsoft Natural keyboard, as mentioned in *Wired* 2.06UK.

Gardeners' World

Report of the first expedition to Alison's garden.

Day 1—Giulia discovers a mysterious door at the side of Alison's house. Beyond lies a dense and impenetrable forest. Royal Society decides to launch an expedition into the uttermost recesses of the dark continent. *Plokta* cabal co-opted.

Day 2—Party lost in impenetrable jungle of bindweed. Steven Cain has not been seen since the start of the expedition and we have given up all hope. We decide to try and follow the

trail of used batteries left by Alison's digital camera.

Day 3—Discovered ruined city, inhabited by a lost white race, behind the rockery. We are attempting to destroy the bindweed as best we can, but it grows again as fast as we uproot it.

Day 4—Rescued Mike Scott who had been captured by natives and left as a sacrifice to the bindweed. We seem to be being followed by a tribe of hairy ape-like creatures, who swing through the shrubbery giving their hideous cry of "In-ger-laaaaaand!"

Day 5—We have come upon a path that we hope will lead us back to the house. Our leader is raving from lack of alcohol. We cannot go on much longer.

Day 6—We are lost. The natives are coming. The drums! The drums!

Day 7—We find the barbecue. Expedition eaten with hickory sauce.

Dr. Plokta's Fanzine Reviews

Apparatchik #61 (Andy Hooper, fanmailAPH@aol.com, The Starlitter Building, 4228 Francis Ave. N. #103, Seattle, WA 98103, USA & Victor Gonzalez, Gonzalez@tribnet.com, 403½ Garfield St S., #11, Tacoma, WA 98444, USA; UK agent Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Off Clarke's Lane, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX)

A reasonably well word-processed zine, though Victor's address is written "403 1/2 Garfield St. S.", betraying either old and non-superfluous software or a deep inability to use Windows Character Map. The illos and logo appear to have been inserted by cut-and-paste, rather than something more modern and more trouble.

Reproduction, on our copy, shows the tell-tale signs of the *Critical Wave* photocopier. While Andy and Victor are contactable, UK agent Martin Tudor has no email address, so you'd better send your subscription requests directly to Andy and hope that he can get in touch with Martin using smoke signals or something.

Superfluous technology rating:
☆☆ (out of ☆☆☆☆☆)

Waxen Wings & Banana Skins #2 (Claire Brialey, 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA & Mark Plummer, 14 Northway Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 6JE)

Despite the subtitle (Stuck on the Hard Shoulder of the Information Super-Highway), this is a much more technological effort. Nice use of drop caps and right justification displays their nifty software at the expense of trivial details like legibility. The illos have little jaggies to reveal that they've been scanned, and that Mark and Claire only have access to a 300 dpi printer. It looks as though the *Plokta* review copy was individually run off on the laser printer, the reproduction method of choice for geeks. And then Claire blows it all with an anti-Internet diatribe.

Superfluous technology rating:
☆☆☆☆

The Bleary Eyes vol. 5 (John Berry, 4 Chilterns, South Hatfield, Herts, AL10 8JU & Ken Cheslin, 10 Coney Green, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 1LA)

Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. I suppose we should be thankful that they used an electric typewriter. Electro-stencilled from typed and cut-and-pasted originals, then run off faintly with creased stencils on bog roll, except for one page in the middle which appears to be photocopied from a duplicated original, doubtless because the stencil died before they'd quite finished the print run. Makes an Amstrad PCW seem like the height of style. As for email, you'll be lucky if they're on the phone.

Superfluous technology rating: 0

Reading Matters #10 (Tibs, gaga50@udcf.gla.ac.uk, 1/L 30, Falkland Street, Glasgow, G12 9QY)

Now this is more like it. TeX source code distributed by email, to be run off on the recipient's laser printer in the comfort of their home. Provided you have, and can configure, TeX, of course, but who doesn't? Dr Plokta's fanzine of the month (though this is the Easter 1994 issue, making the award a tad late). Besides, anyone with a privately owned NeXT station is a practitioner of superfluous technology at whose feet we can merely worship.

Superfluous technology rating:
☆☆☆☆☆

Lokta Plokta

[Comments from the editors in italics and square brackets like this]

Teddy Harvia

701 Regency Drive, Hurst, TX 76054-2307, USA



I happen to like the angster from Leeds. *[But which angster? There are so many to choose from. Besides, there's so much angst about, we just wanted to have fun...]*

Robert Coulson

2677 W. 500N, Hartford City, IN 47348-9575, USA

The idea of the Energizer Bunny appearing in England is not so much ridiculous as horrifying; can Armageddon be far behind?

I never wore a tie to work. My only work-related tie-wearing came when I was the tech writing department (all of it) for Honeywell's Wabash, IN factory, and was sent to a writers' conference in Minneapolis headquarters. The chief engineer told me this, instructed me to wear a tie, and finished with, "And don't take the tie off as soon as you get on the plane!" So I suffered. Conference itself didn't amount to shit, of course, but I got to meet some Minneapolis fans in the evenings. (Conference organizer apologized for not having anything scheduled in the evening. I told him that was all right; I'd go see this girl. "Have you ever been in Minneapolis before?" "No, but I know this girl who lives here." He was very polite to me for the rest of the conference.) Ties are unfannish. And definitely not me. From the article, I guess I could say not wearing them was a safety measure.

As I recall, Russia fought the First World War under the Julian calendar, which is perhaps why they did so poorly; they didn't fight on the same days as the Germans. They didn't change until the Communists got in—

and immediately did much better in the Second World War. It pays to be up to date.

Ian Gunn

PO Box 567, Blackburn, 3130, Australia

Walter sounds like he might be kin to a few of the fixtures in my office—

There's Henry, known as the Statsman for his habit of meticulously recording cricket statistics. He's so retentive that he presses his pen firmly on anything he writes, going over it several times—thus making his timesheet (and those beneath it) a curly mess of inscribed numbers.

Then there's Bob, known as The Boring One. His main topic of conversation is the American Civil War, though he will drone on for hours on any other subject from cartoons to Nazi Germany. His dull grey cardigan is moulded to the shape of his body because he wears it *every day*, even on the weekends (the day he told us how he spent the whole weekend painting the spare room, I noticed paint splatterings on the cardigan... they're still there). The cardigan's fob pockets are where Bob keeps his loose change. They have now stretched down below the hem of the garment and dangle there like some bizarre Masonic regalia resembling twin scrotums (I guess the plural is really "Scrota", yes?).

Bob is a complete technophobe. He is convinced that the Internet is overrun with pornographers and hackers draining bank accounts, I'm sure he believes that if you install a computer in your home, when you turn it on it floods the room with child pornography. He keeps telling me that They're Going To Ban The Internet (whoever "They" are). I tried telling him that this would be the equivalent of closing down every library and publishing house in the world on the grounds that someone, somewhere, once printed a saucy magazine, but the only voice he will listen to is his own. Sigh.

Years ago, when several female fans we knew were writing slash zines, a friend and I decided to put out a pseudonymous hoaxzine full of slash stories based on cartoon characters. It was to be called "Moving Parts" but it only got as far as a cover design, one story based on Inspector Gadget and a vague idea about Thomas The Tank Engine doing some serious shunting with Percy. Frightening isn't it?

[Alison - reminds me of my Mr Benn slash... "Mr Benn tried on a naughty French maid's outfit. 'I wonder what sort of adventures I'll have wearing this?' he thought. Suddenly, the shopkeeper appeared. 'You'll be needing these,' he said, handing Mr Benn a whip and an orange. Mr Benn found himself in the Palace of Westminster Madam Sin...]

And while on the subject of cartoon character slash, this also gives us a chance to publish our photo of astonishingly cute Clanger/Kanga slash.



Steve Jeffrey

44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon. OX5 2XA, UK

Superfluous Technology: My brother works in PC support at AEA. Apparently there was a call out from a guy who complained the cup-holder on the front of his computer had broken off. "What cup holder? Is this some stick-on promotional thing?" "Oh no. It's part of the PC, but it's broken off now" "Can you describe it?" "Well, it's this little tray that slides out. It's got NEC 4x written on it..." Collapse of support party in fits of giggles. Pillock's been using his CD ROM tray as a coffee cup holder...

"Who put the c**t in Scunthorpe?" as the old joke goes. *[Cunt, shurely...Ed.]* We may never know now the Grauniards of the Moral Minority at AOL have decreed it too rude to be allowed on the net. Have they noticed a large number of county addresses with the dreaded word s*x embedded towards the end? Will we be a nation remapped through the electronic ether into Essex, Middlesex... What will they do about Beacon's Bottom, Nether Wallop? Thank god they aren't involved in AutoRoute.

Shredded Walt: We had a guy with this sort of tendency in the lab. Only it wasn't an office shredder but a laboratory two-roll mill for compounding plastic and rubber sheet. *[Ugh...]*

I though the whole thing on the calendar reforms fascinating. I sort of recall there were supposed to have been protests and riots in the street

demanding "Give us back our twelve days". Bit of a pisser for anyone with a birthday in the period.

Brilliant picture of Shiva McMurray, God of Wallyphones.

[Yes, we thought so, too; and here's one of Swami Headlong, Guru of biochemistry, bladder abuse and bedlinen.]



A fun zine. I liked it. Thanks a lot.

[Steve, obviously under the mistaken impression that we're neos, has sent us a Care Package of things to help integrate us into fandom; viz. two Ansibles and an ad for a leather and latex emporium in Liverpool.]

Mae Strelkov

4501 Palma Sola, Jujuy, Argentina

So PLOKTA's "less worthy than Attitude and less informative than Ansible." Never having seen an Ansible I'm no judge, but less worthy than Attitude, aren't we all, somehow? *[Ah, never seen an Ansible? Quite by chance, we seem to have two spare copies. We'll send you a Care Package. Hope you like leather and latex, too...]*

Can't discuss pinball machines, email, etc. Wanna have a treatise on *The Trees And Fauna Of The Wilds Of Jujuy*? How many pages should it be? Is book-length okay? *[Hmm. Superfluous Ecology... we'll think about it.]*

As for holding a *Convenient Convention*, we just might, realsoonnow. Son Tony (our seventh and last) plunged briefly into fanzine fandom (chiefly in Australia) in his boyhood and had fun. Then in due course marriage and parenthood and raising pigs (up to 200 but they sell faster than we can raise them) filled his time. Tony kept wishing to meet fans face-to-face, have them swarming here. One applicant (in the USA) took us seriously and wanted to come, and I had to warn him, "Bring your own pup-tent".

What's happened is Tony's father-in-law bought a partly finished hotel building cheap in Palma Sola and

asked, "Would you like to finish it and run it?"

The hotel will be for small parties of tourists anxious to study the flora and fauna of our wilds above our place in this valley... Do you like bird-watching, perchance? Flower-gazing? Patting tapirs on their snouts as they try to take a bite? We've a pet we rescued from a neighbour's dogs last Christmas. She's a huge tank-like dear, by now. We got her so young she still had her copper stripes and, to comfort her, Vadim used to let her suck his finger. *His finger!* Please, no wisecracks this once. Now her teeth are *huge!* People are cautious near these animals who get angry easily.

As for hotels with between-floors servants' quarters and secret stairs? I saw such an archaic rooming house years ago in Buenos Aires. Yes Bob Shaw would have seen the weirdness of such architecture! How we'll all miss him. I loved his books.

Abigail Frost is eldritch? *[That's one word for it...]*

[Mae also sent us a very nice piece of multi-coloured hecto, but unfortunately our technology is insufficiently superfluous to reproduce it. Of course, if she sends us 250 copies next time, you'll all get one.]

Brad W. Foster

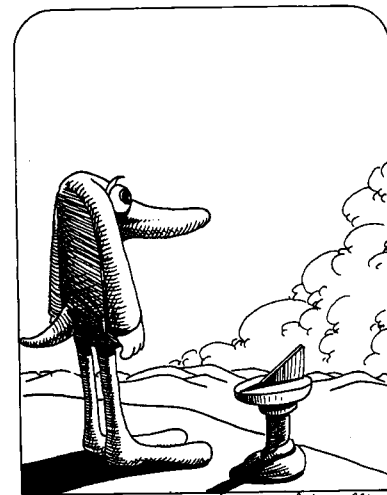
PO Box 165246, Irving, TX, 75016

I see that I showed up on your mailing list because a message from Mars told you to open a Chinese fortune cookie that contained my address, plus something about stones or pebbles... gravel?

Oh, *grovel!* Hey, I like a good old fashioned grovel as much as the next person! So sure, here are a couple of weird bits of fillo art. Your layout has the look of something done by folks who like to reduce things to fit the space, so I've selected two I think might hold up to reducing, though feel free to run them as close to full size as you wish, okay?

Really fooled me when this first arrived, it doesn't have the "look" I've come to associate with British fanzines. *[Wot, no dodgy stencils?]* Much more neep-neep desk-top-pub. Nothing *wrong* with that, of course, just a bit nerve-wracking when zines like this show up. Used to be something that looked this slick came by, you could be pretty assured it might be worth reading, as not everyone had access to the kind of

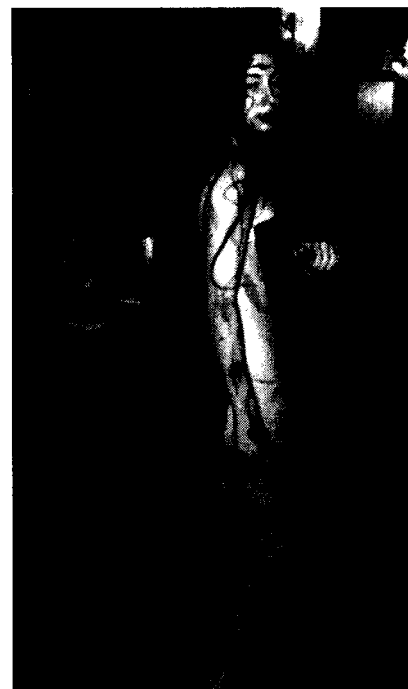
technology to produce that look. Now just about any nimrod can lay their hands on basic formatting programs, so I still have to go through the effort to read the zines, and can't make snap decisions on quality based on purely external design, sigh, the world is getting *ssooo* difficult to just skim through!



Fillo art heavily reduced to fit the space and slightly skewed to show we're not perfect...

Keep on pubbing, this stuff is wonderful!! *[Phew! So that's all right then.]*

Now on Paul Barnett's copy we added a "A member of the Plokta cabal is deeply attracted to your daughter" box. Perhaps the following photo of Jane at Evolution will make things a bit clearer:



Jane Barnett wearing rather less than her Dad would like.

Jane Barnett

17 Polsloe Rd, Exeter, Devon,
EX1 2HL

Dear Plokta, please send photo of relevant member of editorial cabal.

Well, here it is (down, Sue!)



John Dallman

jgd@cix.compulink.co.uk

The three-column format is excellent for a newsletter, but doesn't show off longer pieces to best effect. Putting the staples further apart would not have hurt either. *[Actually, on reflection, perhaps it has an en-dash.]*

Do not take orders from Pam Wells (re back cover). Once you do this, you will find yourself dragged off to strange conventions, volunteering to produce fanzines, re-building her computers, working your scanner to the bone, receiving hundreds of fanzines every week (very few of them edible) and generally Having Your Life Altered. Novas and Hugo nominations are the good side, but I must testify that it would be easier to win a Nova by publishing one two-sided fanzine and buying everyone at Novacon four drinks. It might well be cheaper, too.

David B. Wake

dbwake@cix.compulink.co.uk

Many thanks for the marvellous missive—I see it as a blindingly shining example of the strong and ever growing recent resurgence of fanzine fandom climbing, nay soaring, to ever greater heights of splendiferous achievement both broadening and deepening, while at the same time redefining, what it is that fanzines are all about. *[Gosh!]*

Chris Walton

rainbow.bridge@dial.pipex.com

The story about AOL is so grotesque that it would be funny if it were not tragic. We have only just started to use the Internet, but I've already encountered the blue ribbon and am in total sympathy with the declared

aims of that organisation—not something I had ever really thought about in any detail until the Channel 4 censored season a few years ago and the Rushdie affair. It is very easy—for me—to be complacent about these things until they are shoved in my face.

I found Every Office Has One a both vivid and strangely sympathetic portrait of a limited individual. It made me reflect (not terribly fruitfully) on the limits that define and constrain us.

Superfluous Chronology: A magnificent piece. Only two comments on it—the claim to world record status for 46 BC is fairly parochial—what about the Mayan calendar? Secondly, the description of the difference between the Catholic and Protestant countries is largely accurate, except that for this purpose the USA is regarded as a Catholic country.

Allen Baum

baum@apple.com

Alison: Congratulations on the baby! I think your timing is a bit wonky though—you just spent all that time & money on getting a bra that finally fits—and now you'll have to do it all over again. I'd be talking to horror publishers if I were you & I was doing a birth report to rival Helena's. (Actually, if I were having a baby, I'd be talking to the Weekly World News or something, I expect).

Not being in touch with everybody very well since I've moved back to California, it was a bit unclear to me whether Steve Davies or Steven Cain was marrying Giulia. I think I've got it sussed, but.... *[we hope we've got it sussed, but sometimes Alison gets us all confused.]*

Steve: "not everybody has a local area network in their study" No? Hmm, I guess things really are different in Silicon Valley...

I'm very impressed that somebody could actually, in a fanzine, in a somewhat coherent manner, explain where 4004BC came from.

I'm now all fired up and ready for some serious con-running now that I have all the ingredients (except for Blu-tac which is nigh impossible to find here) for a *Convenient convention*—though I think it might not be so charming if translated into American. Binliners sound classier than trashbags; gaffers

tape sounds much higher class than duct-tape, etc. etc. etc.

About those flashing lights—ask Steve (Cain) about juggling under strobes some time. Verrry weird. I'm not sure you'd be able to tell if you were having an epileptic attack. *[Oh, yes you would—Steve.]*

Jim Trash

(jim@scream.demon.co.uk)

I'm loccing your zine because:

- ◇ God told me to do it
- ◇ D. West told me not
- ◇ There was an R in the month
- ◇ There was no R in the month
- ◇ I wish to have sex with your laser printer
- ◇ It's there
- ◇ I require the address for Attitude
- ◇ In a million years none of this will matter
- ◇ Nobody stopped me
- ◇ I wanted to see if I could spell Superfluous Technology
- ◇ It's still legal to do so
- ◇ I'm too drunk to know any better

I thought your zine was:

- ◇ Good
- ◇ Bad
- ◇ Indifferent
- ◇ A little chewy
- ◇ Moving
- ◇ Existential
- ◇ Spotty
- ◇ Bigger than a Mars bar
- ◇ Fictional
- ◇ Riddled with pox
- ◇ Wrong

And As A Result Will Be:

- ◇ Writing to my MP
- ◇ Consulting my spiritual advisor
- ◇ Covering myself with whipped cream
- ◇ Changing my position
- ◇ Resigning my position
- ◇ Attempting a rather difficult position
- ◇ Visiting the doctor
- ◇ Moving
- ◇ Incapacitated

With:

- ◇ Best wishes
- ◇ Kind regards
- ◇ A herd of elephants
- ◇ Cellular blankets
- ◇ Fond farewells

We Also Heard From:

Jackie Duckhawk "Muffin (due 25 July) sends a big kick of good luck to Pod. I wish he wouldn't, I'm sure I've got bruises on my insides, the little sod.", Terry Jeeves "Many thanks for the copy of PLOKTA (what does it mean?)" [Good question...], Colin Greenland "SCI-FI FANS GET BOMB SECRETS FROM ZINE—Police quiz two", Nina Watson "Dear Pod, I was surprised to learn of your existence, since I had thought your mother generally favoured children roasted or fried", Harry Andruschak (tales of how hard it is to find alt.sex.masturbation on AOL), and Robert Lichtman "This isn't a letter of comment, and can't turn into one."

Mischievous Science

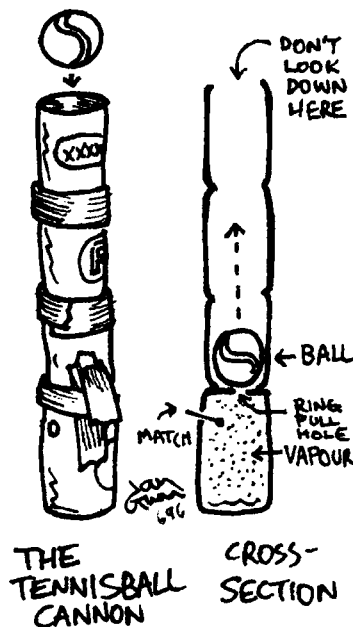
From our Australian correspondent, Ian Gunn:

BOILING BOTTLES: When rinsing plastic soft drink or juice bottles, half-fill with hot water, quickly pour it out and invert the bottle on a smooth surface. Sounds like bacon frying, and worries cats.

TENNIS BALL CANNON: You will need a can opener, a tennis ball, four beer cans, gaffer tape, methylated spirits and long barbecue matches. I don't know if Euro-standard beer cans are big enough but they need to be of larger diameter than the ball, obviously. Remove the tops and bottoms of three beer cans, then tape

Try grapes in the microwave for a real light show

them into a tube. Tape this onto the end of the remaining can so that its ring-pull hole is inside the tube. Punch a small hole near the top of the side of this can. Insert a small quantity of methylated spirits (you may need a funnel). Put the ball in the tube and, with your thumb over the side hole, shake the whole thing vigorously to cause the spirits to vaporise.



Place on ground and carefully insert burning match into side hole. DO NOT USE INDOORS. It might be an idea to use a match as a wick in the hole and to retreat to a safe distance.

And from our Californian correspondent Allen Baum:

How could you leave out the pop-tart blow-torch? Or the pickle lantern? The liquid oxygen barbecue starter? (all thoroughly documented on the web). You also might try grapes in the microwave for a real light show.

One of the favorite pastimes of my, um, past is a hot air balloon made with a candle and dry-cleaner bags (I don't recall if they exist in the UK—they are extremely thin, clear plastic bags about 2 feet across and 4 feet long). In any case, they make extremely good excuses to call in UFO sightings on a clear summer evening.

And finally, a real simple one. Take a 2 liter plastic drink bottle. Fill with crushed (crushed because...how else will you get it in there?) dry ice (which I'm assuming you can get somewhere), less than 1/3 full. Screw on the cap tight—quickly, and stand waaaay back and cover your ears.

None of these compare to emptying a large propane cylinder into a dry well and (figuratively speaking) throwing in a match, of course. [But the Plokta editorial team cannot recommend this, you understand.]

Retreat!

We went to my brother Martin's housewarming recently. He moved into his new flat about 6 months ago, but only just finished getting the bookshelves and the sofa recovered. Of course, he hung all the pictures ages ago.... Anyway, Giulia was a bit concerned about being invited to Martin's for Sunday lunch and was suggesting that we should take some food or something. Martin is not in the least interested in cooking so we weren't sure what to expect. In the end it was just as well we didn't bother. He had the whole thing catered, which, given the minute size of his kitchen and the impeccable decor of the flat was probably the most sensible decision.

Martin and I had just the day before acquired a new nephew (we've delegated all the messy childraising to our sister Alison—not to be confused with my esteemed co-editor—since this way we get to be wicked uncles) so he opened the jeroboam of champagne that he had stashed away. We also drank another two cases of champagne which I estimate works out at about a bottle each for the 25-30 people there. This is just so you can get some idea of what sort of person Martin is: the 18th century flat in an expensive area of London, the catered party and the crates of champagne laid on for all comers.... The fact that he went into insurance and makes pots of money in the City, while I went into computers and scrape a living in the provinces may have something to do with it too. I'm just not used to parties where I recognise people from their photo in the paper. Not all of the guests were in this category, however. A number of them were people who Martin had met recently when he was on a "retreat" that he had been sent on by his company.

When I heard that my brother had been on a retreat, my first thought was that he had got religion. But why would a major marine insurance company be sending people on a retreat? Well, I'll explain the routine for these retreats and all will become clear. They get up early in the morning, eat a breakfast of mind-enhancing things like yoghurt, do an hour of yoga and then meditate... on how to make more money. There are group exercises designed to make you happier about earning more, and hence spending more. Like, they go round

the group saying, "How much would you spend on clothes? How much on a holiday? How much if you took a group of friends out to dinner? Now imagine spending twice that, three times that. How do you feel? Doesn't it feel good?"

I was utterly boggled! People go on courses to learn how to spend money? Personally, I've never had this problem; it all goes on this superfluous technology.

But this set me to thinking. On the one hand we have this fannish expertise in running events. And on the other hand we have 60 people prepared to pay £5000 each for the privilege of spending a weekend being told how to get rid of their surplus money. I think we can work something out here. We might even be able to pay for the next run of *Plokta*. (SD)



Fannish Hints and Tips

Good spelling is important. Do not emulate the sad example of Pam Wells, who has spent her life pursuing erratic men.

Do not spend the weekend before your convention working. Change pace, drink beer, eat good food, and look forward to the delights of conrunning that await you. [NB: If your convention is called *Novacon*, then you might try changing the pace by working instead.]

Pay attention to justification in your fanzine. Blame everything on Ian Sorensen.

Punctuation is important. Great fanzines have been ruined by misuse of punctuation. Nobody now remembers Willis Walters, editor of the fine fanzines *Backslash* and *Em-dash*.

Staples are important. Do not try to produce a fanzine without a good supply of staples. The *Plokta* cabal recommends beer, strawberries, ice cream and chocolate. Make sure to eat these quickly, or John Dallman will complain that your staples are too far apart.

Always make sure that there is an artist on your convention committee. But first ensure she can draw moose.

Reproduction is important. If you want your baby to grow up healthy and well-adjusted, do not do it on the *Critical Wave* photocopier.

Truth Stranger than Fiction Dept.

After *Wrath of Ghu* made a wide variety of jokes about the safety of British moose at Easter, the *Independent* reported, on 30 April, that moose slaughtered in Saskatchewan have been found to be suffering from Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy, or Mad Moose Disease. Remember, we were there first.

Music of the Month

Having it Both Ways—Tom Robinson

The title refers to Tom Robinson's famous bisexuality, but also to the fact that the album is both an audio CD and also a CD-ROM. The CD-ROM contains lyrics, background information on the songs and the musicians, interesting pictures of hermaphrodites for Sue and a lengthy explanation of why Mr Robinson is an anorak. *Plokta* approves of this approach, which we feel represents a step forward for the pop industry. Unfortunately, we've been too busy playing with the CD Rom to actually get round to listening to the music.

Rat Inna Bun

In a fit of complete insanity, I agreed to go to the first Discworld Convention. 80% of the 800 attendees had not been to a convention before, and it was held in Sacha's Manchester, a hotel last seen hosting the execrable Wolf359. As it happens, the convention went swimmingly. The banquet, however... well, put it like this. The massed ranks of fandom, on discovering that they planned to hold a banquet on the Saturday night, had muttered ominously, "They'll only do it the once." The hotel had told the committee that they could have as many people at the banquet as they wanted, and the committee were taking bookings up till the Thursday night before the con.

It was, as predicted, a disaster. The chef had no trouble coping with 350 meals, but the staff took an hour longer to lay the tables than expected, and the service was worthy of the Broken Drum. We had a table on which everyone was having tomato and pepper soup, apart from a lady who'd asked for melon. The soup arrived, and

The fire-eater set fire to a chair...

we all waited patiently and politely for the appearance of the melon. Time passed. The tomato and pepper soup began to congeal, and no melon was forthcoming. The main course was silver service. The tray with our dinners arrived. Half the meals were served, and it went away again. I provided comforting stories about previous convention banquets, and reminisced fondly about the airline trays at *Conspiracy's* masked ball. Again, we waited patiently while our food froze over. Dessert was a pale purple frummery looking suspiciously like the blancmange that is always served for school dinners on Wednesday. It had the weight and texture of *Dune*, complete with wriggling six inch long gelatin sandworms.

The coffee was cold, the fire-eater set fire to a chair, and the after dinner speaker was Terry Pratchett. So, all in all, everyone had a wonderful time.

—Sue Mason

P L O K T A

We've sent you *Plokta* because:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> You have been insulted in this fanzine | <input type="checkbox"/> You named your child Griselda Esmerelda |
| <input type="checkbox"/> We're planning to insult you in a future issue | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We're desperate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> You have been totally ignored in this fanzine | <input type="checkbox"/> Although you've denied being scandalous, we don't believe you, and if you don't tell us we'll invent some |
| <input type="checkbox"/> You sent us a LoC! Wow! Neat! | <input type="checkbox"/> Sue's trying to collect the set... |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> You sent us your fanzine | <input type="checkbox"/> Andy Hooper thinks you're a hoax |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Send us your fanzine; George is out of cat litter | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We think Andy Hooper's a hoax |
| <input type="checkbox"/> You ignored us when we sent you Issue 1; we're not proud | <input type="checkbox"/> Sue thinks you would look good in fishnets and stilettos |
| <input type="checkbox"/> We're going to ask you to do something embarrassing | <input type="checkbox"/> You live in Scunthorpe, Cockerthorpe or Penistone and are having trouble getting laid wired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under hypnosis, we remembered that you owe us money from a previous life | <input type="checkbox"/> You are the Uberkrappenzimmermeister for Farber Day |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your name is Claire Goodall, Bridget Hardcastle or Pam Wells & we're still waiting for that article you promised us | <input type="checkbox"/> We could tell you, but then we'd have to kill you |

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