

"But Mum...!...Science Fiction is Grown-Up, Intelligent Literature of Ideas... Honest!"

Plokta is edited by Steve Davies and Alison Scott (paper version) and Mike Scott (web version). It is available for letter of comment (one copy is fine, we pass them over to each other), trade (3 copies if possible, please), contribution or baby wrangling.



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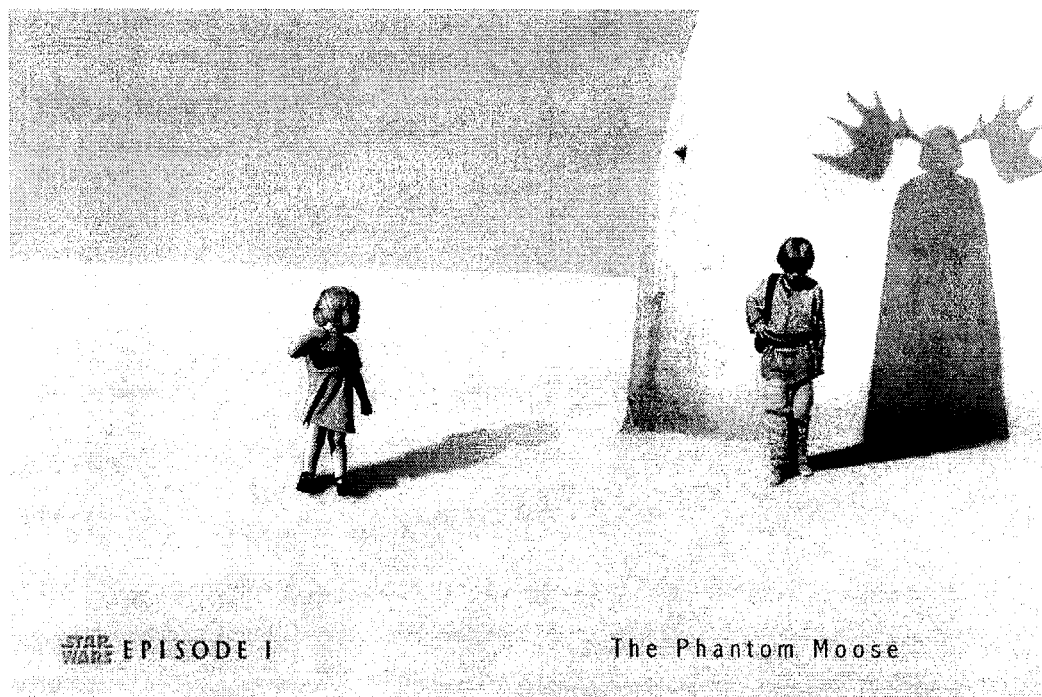
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You are strong in the Moose, young Anakin

Editorial

WELL, we have big news this issue. Sue has finally lost her technovirginity, and can be reached online at geekgirl@plokta.com. And you will not be surprised to learn that we were all delighted to hear that we'd got a Hugo nomination. We even let Marianne have her first taste of champagne.



You'll note that Mike Scott has been added to the editorial line-up, with responsibility for the web edition of *Plokta* (www.plokta.com). This reflects either *Plokta's* recognition of the growing importance of the Internet to modern life and SF fandom, or Mike's pathetic desire to make sure he gets to go to the Hugo Loser's party if *Plokta* is nominated again next year.

Many thanks to SMS for allowing us to use his superb picture *But Mum...* as the cover for our special Hugo-losing issue. As a professional SF artist, SMS has come to have certain expectations about how magazines will treat his artwork. Wishing to fulfil those expectations, we have been careful to take diabolical liberties without consultation. Dr Plokta just wishes he could take diabolical liberties with SMS's model. And Sue quite fancies the girl.

We need to apologise to people who tried to email us at plokta@plokta.com—an email address that simply wasn't working for a couple of weeks between the last issue and now. We're now recommending that you use locs@plokta.com. And you may want to resend anything that you're worried we didn't receive (but check the loccol first).

Also having trouble are the alien investigators at SETI@home. This nifty website allows you to harness the power of your ordinary home, dial-up computer to join in with half a million others and search for extraterrestrial life. Their homepage is at setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu. As the actual chances of finding aliens are pretty low, morale is being sustained by forming the searchers into teams. One of the teams is *Team Plokta*, so you can join up with friends of *Plokta* from around the world in searching for aliens. You will need to search for "team plokta" on their teams search page in order to find us.

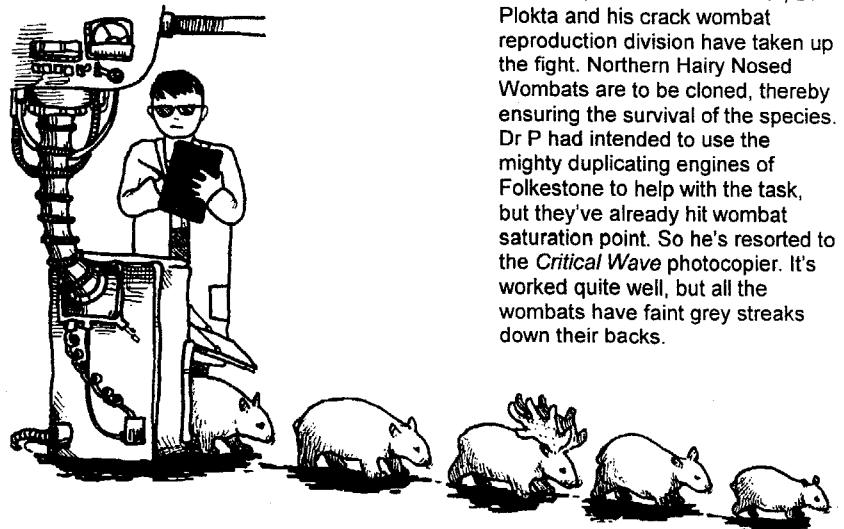
Trouble is, demand was so high for the site that they were too busy to make sure the data was going out properly, with the result that all half million users have been analysing the same 115 packets of radio telescope data. Never mind; we're sure they'll sort it out soon.

Speaking of Dr Plokta, we finally gave in and allowed him to install Linux on Marianne. He assures us that we will now find that she is fully compliant. We haven't noticed much change yet, though she does seem to be falling over less often. However, her potty training routine is still hogging resources. Dr P has made her source code freely available on the Internet.



We all enjoyed Seccon considerably; a small con with excellent company and all the wonders of Stevenage laid out before us like pearls before swine. It wasn't a very wild con though. Half of the committee confided "When we got the room booking forms back, about 90% of the membership had said 'Quiet Room Please'."

Thankfully, we have no more deaths to report this time, but Robert Lichtman is recovering from a serious car accident and Ted White has broken his hip in a fierce altercation with a marauding gingko. Our best wishes for a speedy recovery to them both.



BOLLOCKS

Gulled

The *Daily Telegraph's* property section on May 1 reported an unfortunate combination of superfluous technology and seabirds. A seafarmer resident who is using speech recognition software on his PC complains that whenever a seagull squawks outside his window, the word "Aldershot" is inserted into his documents.

Up the Walls of the World

Having trouble finding enough shelf space for all your books? *Plokta* has the solution for one lucky reader. Follow our advice and you'll never run out of bookshelf again. Yes, Sotheby's will soon be auctioning the Victorian bookshelves from the outside wall of the British Library round reading room. May it rest in peace. The bookshelves come in three sections, form a circle, and provide enough storage for more than a million books. The guide price is £5-10,000 or near offer: surely within the reach of many fans, or at least within the reach of an organisation such as NESFA.

Of course, they weigh about a hundred tonnes each, and require a circular supporting wall or they can't take the weight of the books. Buyer collects. I understand.

Send in the Clones

Plokta was delighted to hear that, following the success of Dolly the Sheep, scientists are turning their attention to the Northern Hairy Nosed Wombat. Regular readers of *Plokta* will remember that the wombat in question lives in Epping Forest, and due to its unfortunate habit of killing off likely mating partners, is due to go extinct sometime next Thursday.

However, at the eleventh hour, Dr Plokta and his crack wombat reproduction division have taken up the fight. Northern Hairy Nosed Wombats are to be cloned, thereby ensuring the survival of the species. Dr P had intended to use the mighty duplicating engines of Folkestone to help with the task, but they've already hit wombat saturation point. So he's resorted to the *Critical Wave* photocopier. It's worked quite well, but all the wombats have faint grey streaks down their backs.

A Beginner's Guide to Self-Mutilation

THERE are all sorts of things that they don't tell you about getting older. I mean, they might well have told me, but if they did I certainly didn't listen. I know they told me about not having very much time to myself, but I ignored them. And I'm pretty sure that they told me about the way that time passes more quickly as you get older. The last few years have gone in a flash and it's getting worse.

But nobody mentioned about whims. I think that as you get older, it becomes harder and harder to act on a whim. Oh, it is if anything easier to spend money on a whim. More money, fewer necessities, more feeling of what you need and want, less whimsical somehow.

Steven and I used to do quite a lot of whimsical things. One day it was sunny, so we took the train to Clacton on Sea. We carried with us a smallish picnic consisting of a bottle of Pimm's, a bottle of lemonade and two glasses. We had some suncream, but it wasn't nearly strong enough to cope with 2 people who'd just drunk a bottle of Pimm's and fallen asleep on the beach. And I hadn't brought a swimming costume so I had to swim in my clothes. Though, in truth, if I had had only a little more nerve I would have gone half a mile down the beach to the nudist bit and swam there. Which would have been much more sensible. And if I had realised just how cold and damp and sunburnt I would be on the train going back to London at the end of the blisteringly hot day, that is what I would have done.

Another time we took a day trip to Antwerp. We caught the train after work on Friday to Harwich and got the overnight ferry. Another train deposited us in Antwerp at seven in the morning, and we wandered from café to café drinking beer, playing pinball and watching the world go by until we had to take the ferry home again that night.

We do still try to leave chunks of life unplanned. The other week we cycled off in search of our local City Farm. We'd not been there before, but the Pod is two now and quite fascinated by animals. And city farms are a free resource for the underprivileged children of East London. So we strapped our own personal urchin into her baby seat and struck out along the London Cycle Network. Which is jolly good at taking you about twice as far as a direct route would, but not on any of the major roads.

If you cycle in London, then people explain to you at regular intervals how dangerous it is and how they wouldn't do it personally and how you must be mad to put a child on the back of the bike. This is because the roads they use, whether in cars or on buses, are the 10% of London roads with all the cars on. And the roads we cycle on are part of the 90% that aren't. In many cases this is because the road has been blocked halfway down, leaving a space big enough for a bike, but not a car, to get through.



Two staples or three, madam?

But I digress. The city farm has ducks and geese, and rabbits, and plenty of sheep and goats (with a ram called Rambo). Two impossibly cute Shetland ponies, and a calf. And a pair of large pigs. We asked what they were called. "The black one's Chops," said the girl helping out. And what about the massive sow, as big as a horse? "Oh, that's Babe." Babe snuffled and rolled onto her enormous belly. It was completely clear what had happened, and the little swineherd confirmed it. "Yeah, when she first came here she was only a foot long."

We cycled over to Tesco's and bought some lunchy stuff, and then sat in the park by the playground and ate it. Some kids played football around us, and Marianne joined in a bit. The gentle breeze cooled us down in the warm summer sun. "What month is this?" I queried, quaffing my Jenlain. That would be March. I blame global warming.

But all of this, while delightful, and while completely screwing up my preparations for Eastercon, didn't have the real sense of whim about it. I mean, taking your child to see some animals is sort of a sensible thing to do really, isn't it? And everything's like that now. One has responsibilities. Can't just do irrevocable things and hang the consequences.

So this morning I was wandering past a shop that advertised 'Ear Piercing While You Wait'. Normally when I see such a sign, I think "No, getting my ears pierced would be stupid, really. What about when I wake up and regret it?" But this time I thought "Cut the crap, my biological clock is ticking and I want to get my ears pierced now."

There is some history here. When I was a little girl, I wanted my ears pierced more than anything. I suppose I was about nine or ten. And my mother, in that way that mothers have, said "You can't get your ears pierced until you're sixteen". And I begged and pleaded, but it was no use. It was awful. I was convinced that all the other little girls had their ears pierced, and that I would be a social outcast unless I had mine done too. But my mother was unyielding.

So I decided to adopt desperate measures. Any normal girl would have nipped down the market when her mother wasn't watching and lie about her age. Instead, I turned to the encyclopædias in the school library in search of aversion therapy—and found tales there of weird native tribeswomen who hung heavy loops of steel from their ears. A little imagination allowed me to envisage all sorts of appalling accidents that could happen. And gradually the desire to have my ears pierced was replaced by a horror of putting odd bits of metal through my body.

But at some point over the last 25 years, the aversion therapy clearly wore off. And I didn't notice for a long time. Until this morning, when I was down the market. Steven and Marianne had gone on home while I finished off a few errands. When I saw the sign saying 'Ear Piercing While You Wait', I thought, "Hey, that's a good idea. Or, at least, a much better idea than dropping off your ears to pick up later." So I went inside and got my ears pierced. On a whim. An actual whim.

My mother was appalled.

—Alison Scott

“...And I Would Like to Spank Stephen Baxter...”

Seccon was not a particularly vice-ridden convention. In fact, the dodgiest moment came when Simon Bradshaw admitted to this lifetime ambition during the closing ceremony. Stephen Baxter, the guest of honour, was ready to oblige, but for some reason Simon preferred to hide under the table.

More vice was provided in the form of the rock opera *Fundament*, which Alison starred in and about which the less said the better. Come back Ian Sorensen, all is forgiven.



The Plokta cabal (and friends) march on Stevenage.

None of us was very impressed with Stevenage. If this town were a building, it would have won a major architectural award. The hotel was vaguely shabby and uncomfortable, had no good beer, and was in a part of town where McDonalds represented a culinary highlight—ie, the main shopping centre. It had also been used for Precursor. “I think this may be the worst hotel that I’ve ever been back to” said Patrick Nielsen Hayden. He clearly goes to a better class of conventions than the *Plokta* cabal. “I didn’t even have to throw any prostitutes out of this one,” said Sue.

Looking on the bright side, it was certainly cheap and the natives were friendly. There were some adequate restaurants, all of which were in the old town. We were particularly taken by the All You Can Eat Chinese restaurant, where you could eat anything off the main menu for a flat rate. The old town also had a number of interesting shops—chief amongst which was a cut price digital camera shop. Just the thing a top class convention town needs. Only Steve (and Alex McLintock) succumbed.

Guy Dawson entertained us all by wearing a divinely fondleable blue velvet suit. Sort of like a very expensive, Paul Smith, Nightcrawler costume. Alison and Lilian are shown below frisking him in search of his prehensile tail.



I’m pretty sure he’s carrying a concealed weapon
Meanwhile, Guy’s wife Sue had little choice but to hit the bottle hipflask.



Teresa Nielsen Hayden was determined to understand the way that the British do things. She is depicted below practising saying “Another pint of best bitter please.” After repeating this phrase at regular intervals through the entire evening she became quite fluent. So fluent, in fact, that she lost the knacks of holding her beer upright and walking down the middle of hotel corridors without bumping into both walls. Not to mention the floor. And ceiling.



“Now, Teresa, your starter for ten: Can you remember your room number?”

BOLLOCKS

Somebody Out There is Sadder Than Us

While out shopping in the Trafford Centre, we spotted the following actual proof that the *Plokta* cabal are not the most obsessive group of geeks on the planet.



“They certainly are sad,” says Captain Pedantic. “That should be ‘Other Stadia Available’”

Late Arrivals at the Fanzine Fans Ball

[We stole this idea from Dave Hicks’ Irish uncle Eddie O’Syncracy]

Will you please welcome the very worthy Mr and Mrs Tude, and their daughter Hattie. With them, from the other side of the Atlantic, are Mr and Mrs 770 and their son Phil. And, fresh from Lath Vegath, we have Mifter and Mithith Anac and their nephew Chrif. *[Furely fome miftake. Ed].*

Just getting out of their tiny Vauxhall are Claire and Mark Anawings and their rather thick son Ben. Struggling in from the frozen North, please give a warm hand for domino dynamo Mr Snaid, accompanied by his son Dai. Next to them are our Japanese American friend Mr To, and his small but perfectly formed son Ben. We predict great things from our visiting Sibyl, whose daughter Anne always seems to be in two places at once, spreading the latest gossip. Trailing in we have Mr and Mrs Romania, sniffing around with their knickerless daughter Sally, and tracked by the aristocratic Lady Kinsbum, with her pet Pekinese Snuff.

And finally, put your hands together for the eponymous Tobes.

BOLLOCKS

Sue's Legs— Separated at Birth?

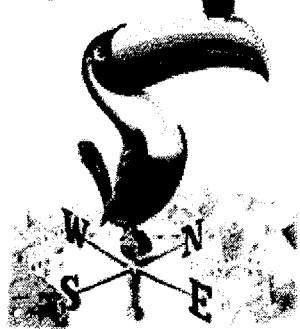
Sue brought various photos of her in mediaeval gear and other costumes for our delectation and delight. But we were most taken with this photo—which we think of as her *Freshly Shagged Milkmaid* pose.



Copyright Violation

We thought that the famous Gilroy Toucan ad below would be the perfect picture to illustrate the toucan article opposite. But the Guinness website (and in particular the Gilroy exhibition www.guinness-gilroy.com, from which this picture comes) is all hinged about with disclaimers, copyright notices and restrictions. My particular favourite was "The popular 'Guinness is Good For You' advertising slogan, used extensively from the 1920's until the 1960's was totally acceptable according to the rules and regulations of the time.

Lovely day for a GUINNESS



However, as it contravenes current rulings in several markets, Guinness Limited no longer uses it as a promotional or advertising slogan for the famous black beer in these markets, and it should not be taken as such."

Guinness is Good For You

I AM teaching my daughter about the nature of irrevocable loss and grief.

At the closing ceremony of Reconvene, Steve called Andrew Adams up to the stage. Andrew is the chairman of 2Kon, next year's Eastercon. Steve presented Andrew with a splendid inflatable toucan balloon. Long beak, legs, everything you'd expect a toucan balloon to be. Except no Guinness. But you can't have everything. Andrew remarked that he expected to be heartily sick of toucans by the end of 2Kon. Based on my Confabulation experiences, I would guess this is just about right.

Andrew wandered around the Adelphi with his toucan for a little while, but after a bit he gave it to Covert Beach to hold. And Covert dropped it. [Note: We are well aware that this is not consistent with the version of events given in Parakeet. This is to make Rob Hansen's careful documentation of fan history more fun.]

The toucan flew up to the ceiling of the Adelphi lounge. And there it stayed, waving slightly in the breeze, its string hanging down a little bit but still an immensely long way out of reach. It wasn't out of place. Conventions with balloons on the ceiling are traditional. Hardly worth remarking on. But if you're two, then this might be the first experience you've had with a balloon on a ceiling. A really high ceiling. And my two-year-old spotted it.

"Balloon on the ceiling Mummy!"

Everything Marianne says has an urgent imperative at the end of the sentence. We let them wash over us most of the time (except when it's "Want my potty Mummy!") And you should take them as read in this article. I explained that it was a toucan and that yes, it was on the ceiling because Covert had dropped it.

"Toucan on the ceiling. Get it down Mummy?" I explained that it would be hard to get it down, and besides, it was happy on the ceiling. Marianne seemed to accept this, but spent a lot of time looking at the toucan. It was a lovely toucan. Bootiful plumage.

It was still there the following morning, as the last embers of the Eastercon died away. There were only a few fans left now, drinking coffee and trying to summon up the energy to go home. And one leftover helium balloon, thirty foot off the ground. Marianne spotted it. "Mummy, toucan on the ceiling." Yes, dear.

"Mummy get toucan?" Oh, dear.

"I don't think so, Marianne. It's too high for me."

"Daddy get down toucan?" Daddy is taller, and it's great that my daughter is developing reasoning skills. But it's no good this time.

"It's too high for Daddy too. It's really too high for anyone. Eventually, it will run out of helium and fall down. But till then it's stuck." That lower lip began to

quiver and her eyes were just a little glassy.

"Toucan... stuck?" Hesitant this time. Yes, Marianne, it's stuck.

"I want the toucan."

Yeah, I know. But it's not coming down. Live with it. But Marianne was obsessed now. Nothing but the toucan, thirty foot out of reach, was going to make her happy. She didn't make a scene. She just sat sadly, telling everyone she knew that there was a toucan on the ceiling and asking them to get it down for her.

A little later I was chatting to Steve as the weight of chairing the convention was beginning to lift from his shoulders. The formidable Eileen Downey, general manager of the Adelphi, stopped by. We discussed the con briefly with her, and she pointed out the toucan. Laughing, I explained that it was causing my toddler great

hardship, how she couldn't understand that the ornate, unreachable Adelphi ceiling is harder to get balloons down from than all the others.

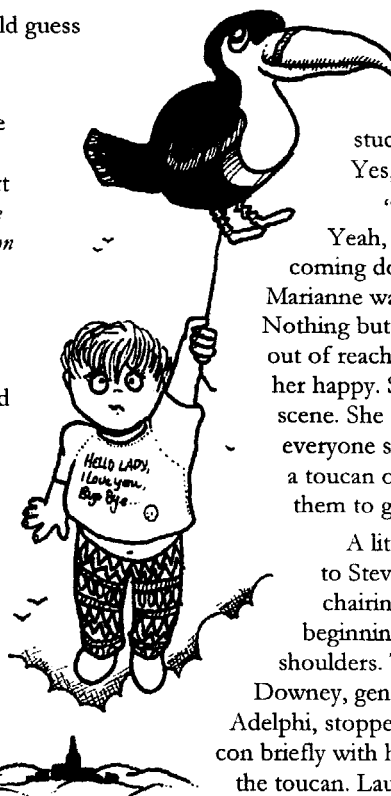
Something snapped in Eileen's brain.

"We'll get the big pole!" She dashed off with her customary efficiency.

"I was only making conversation..." I started. But it was too late.

"It's like a guided missile, isn't it?" I remarked to Steve. He nodded glumly. This had been the story of the weekend; the way to solve problems with the hotel had been to point the intercontinental ballistic Eileen at them. It was just a shame about the fallout.

Suddenly the sluggish room sprang into life. From every corner, denizens of the Adelphi appeared with a wide range of ceiling snagging equipment. One brought a ladder, another a roll of gaffer tape. A third had the big pole. He climbed the ladder right to the top, and reached up with the pole.



It looked very precarious. But it wasn't very near the ceiling. So they had to try to grab the string. Everyone was watching, and cheering, and taking photos. Marianne stared open-mouthed in wonder, eyes shining. The balloon grabbers tied gaffer tape to the end of the pole to make it sticky and waved it around a lot. Eventually, the highest man caught the string with the pole and pulled down the balloon. He climbed down with the rescued toucan and presented it to Marianne with a flourish. She was dumbstruck "What do you say, Marianne?"

"TOUCAN! Toucan! Man got my toucan down!" I gave her a Paddington Hard Stare.

"fankoo."

She was perfectly content. We secured the toucan to a large solid object and Marianne chattered away to it. But by this time it was lunchtime, and we had arranged to head off to a local Japanese café. We weren't going to let Marianne carry the balloon outside; far too great a risk. So we tied it to my handbag firmly and set off to the restaurant, with the toucan buffeting in the breeze. We arrived, got our table for six adults, a toddler, and a toucan, and had our lunch. Meanwhile, the wind was getting ever brisker, and it was quite blustery on the way back.

I suppose it was inevitable. A sudden gust caught the toucan, and it came away from its string. Not at the handbag, but at the point where the string joined the balloon. It sailed off, across the road and down the street, over the rooftops and away, far above the Adelphi hotel lounge. After the initial shock, I began to laugh. Until I spotted my little girl.

She was staring at the disappearing toucan, pointing at it and screaming at the top of her voice. This was a full-blown disaster, the destruction of a whole set of two-year-old ideals. And it wasn't even her

fault, as we'd taken the balloon away from her. We promised her another balloon and bought her some chocolate. She ate the chocolate in floods of tears. And we snuck away from the Adelphi, desperately hoping that Eileen wouldn't spot us. Arriving home, we thought that would be the end of it.

We were wrong. Marianne didn't want another balloon. She wanted that helium balloon. She wanted her toucan. She kept asking about the toucan, and telling us about the toucan. Whenever she sees a picture of a toucan, or a parrot, or any other large bird, or any balloon, she asks about her toucan. I tell her it's flown away, that it flew over the houses, that it's never coming back.

"Man got my toucan down." Yes, he did, from the ceiling. It was very clever.

"Man get my toucan down?" Well, no, Marianne, it's flown away.

"Toucan flown away in the sky?" Yes.

"Oh..." Sad but perhaps accepting?

Three weeks later her grandmother came to visit.

"Hello, Marianne," said Grandma.

"Toucan never coming back ganma..." said Marianne.

If you love something, set it free. If it flies away it was probably a helium balloon.

Postscript: Peter Wareham, on hearing that Marianne was sad about the loss of her balloon, offered to procure another identical toucan. But when we gave it to her, she was adamant that the first toucan had gone for ever, and that this was a new and quite distinct bird.

So the second toucan is now bobbing gently in the corner of the living room. Because it's a clone, we've called it Dolly.

—Alison Scott

BOLLOCKS

Somebody Out There is More Superfluous Than Us

Tibs wrote to tell us about Steven K Roberts. Tiring of the office grind, he built the ultimate portable workstation, pictured below.



Many years ago, he worked out that it was possible for a computer journalist to live an entirely nomadic lifestyle, using a bike and a vast amount of technology. The Behemoth is the culmination of 15 years of circumnavigating the globe on ever-more-superfluous pushbikes. A trailer contains the solar panel array that powers the various superfluous technology, and the four antennae that allow Steven to keep connected with the internet via mobile phone and ham radio. Handlebar keyboards allow him to write articles while on the move, and the HUD allows him to monitor the systems without taking his eyes off the road. And in many cultures of the world, the loud metallic voice saying "Do not touch, or you will be vaporized by a laser beam!" is entirely sufficient to ward off thieves.

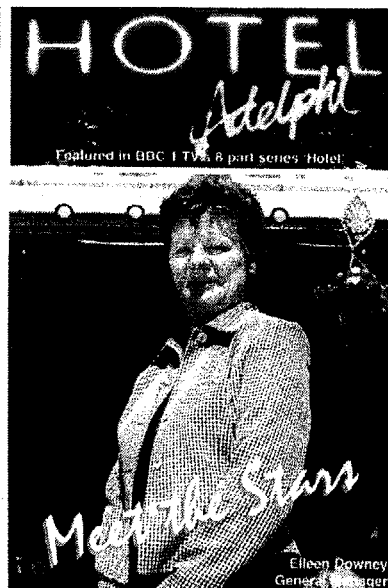
Unfortunately, once the bike was built and tested, the 580 pound weight and the vast range of complex systems took too much fun out of the mobile life. So, changing tack, he is now developing a pedal powered, fully communicating, trimaran. You can read all about it at www.microship.com.



Keith & Mark Porters



Chris Front-of-House & Reception Manager



Eileen Downey General Manager



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Shopping Habits of the Camiroi

It's the first of May and we're in Chester for yet another *Plokta* weekend. Mike and I are discussing what to do when Alison and Steven and Marianne eventually turn up from wherever it is they've got to. The sun is shining, the weather forecast is good and spring is in the air. Just the day for doing something athletic like walking the Sandstone Trail or, more to the point, sitting outside some local pub in the clean country air, drinking beer and watching other people walk the Sandstone Trail. Mike fires up the Internet and discovers that there's a computer fair in Trafford Park, only 45 minutes away. That sounds like a much better suggestion. But how to sell it to the others? Giulia asks, "Is that anywhere near that new super shopping centre? Why don't we go there instead and spend the day shopping till we drop?" Well, it is near the Trafford Centre. Just round the corner in fact. We could form two parties, one could go straight to the Trafford Centre and Mike and I could go to the computer fair and then join them later. Sounds like a plan.

Much later, Alison and her horde appear. "A computer fair? You sad, sad bunch of computer geeks. You ought to be out enjoying the sun!" "So you don't want to come, then?" "Of course I'm coming! Mike Steven, what's your name? Drive Sue, Giulia and Marianne to the Trafford Centre, we'll join you later." And so it came to pass.

It's a long time since I last went to a computer fair. There used to be extravaganzas like the Computer Shopper Show, which filled massive halls with hundreds of little stalls all selling marvellous bits of computer widgetry. They were great fun. I'd spend a day walking up and down the aisles, looking, buying, trying to convince salesmen that they should let me play with their system by being selective with the truth about my job. Unfortunately, they seem to have died out in recent years, the shows that is, not the salesmen. Now that I have a job which does actually demand keeping up with the state of the art, I occasionally go to things like the Windows Show and they are dull, dull, dull. Mostly dominated by Microsoft with a few other vendors doing demos and less than a quarter the size of the old days. The last one I went to I allowed half a day for and gave up after an hour, bored out of my tiny mind. Then there are a few computer fairs around Reading, but they tend to be small, usually held in an indoor basketball court or something,

and mainly exist to flog crap, virus-infested shareware at ridiculous prices. I didn't really expect very much.

What with the heavy traffic heading for the football, we eventually got to Trafford Park around two, with the fair closing at three. The unprepossessing building was that typically Mancunian compromise, a combination sports centre and night-club in the middle of an industrial estate. We paid our entrance fee and entered a dark and gloomy hall that seemed to be... well, it actually reminded me of the Victoria Bazaar in Calcutta. Larger than your average Worldcon dealers' room with hundreds of trestle tables all selling a chaotic mixture of hardware, software, firmware, bioware, tableware.... From a thousand screens flickered a thousand different computer games, speakers boomed out game theme tunes, demos of music software and simulated explosions interspersed with the traditional cries of vendors "who'll buy my fresh memory, lovely fresh RAM! Getcha monitors here, only 99 quid! Dirty CDROMs! Half-price lesbian lust CD with every 128-bit AGP 3D graphics card!" Around the tables thronged a vast crowd of teenagers, petty criminals and saddo geeks like ourselves. It was a real blast from the past. I could have spent my budget ten times over. Every table we passed had something tempting. Devices for picking up dropped screws from inaccessible places, adapters for obscure cables that just might come in useful some day, things to make Nintendo games run on PCs and vice versa.... I narrowly resisted getting a new mother-board and a case and a dozen other things, but did end up with the complete National Geographic on CDROM at a little over half the usual price. We tore ourselves away only after half the dealers had already packed up and left.

In a state of post-consumer shock, we drove to the Trafford Centre where we met up with the rest of the party by the simple expedient of calling them up on the mobile phone. "Where the hell are you? We've been waiting here for twenty minutes!" "We're just leaving Boots..." "You were in there twenty minutes ago, the last time you phoned!" "Well, we've only just got to the exit... it was Alison's fault."

This is after all the shopping paradise famed in the papers as 'The Mall That Ate Manchester.' It was... different. I've seen shopping malls before, in the UK, in Australia and the USA and this wasn't like any of them. Well, the shops were the same. They're the same everywhere, after all. It was clean and well laid out, which is rare in Britain, but not unknown. What was a surprise was the sheer over-the-top décor. As Alison called it, Post-Ironic. Not over-ornate because you're making a statement, but because you don't have any taste and that's what you like and you don't care who the hell knows it. It wasn't just the Egyptian temple toilets (available in at least 8 different sexes, in a nod to Raphael Carter) or the ocean liner food-court cum blokes' crèche with its giant TV screen showing continuous satellite coverage of the football, not to mention enough lifeboats to rescue everybody on the Titanic. It was just the sheer overwhelming weight of glass and marble and gilt and hand-painted frescos interspersed with portraits of famous Mancunians and fountains and more gilt and Corinthian columns with gilt capitals and statues and animatronic pythons.

Of course, I didn't buy anything. We walked the length of the mall from end to end, and back again on the next floor up. There were gadget shops and art shops and camera shops and food shops selling exotic delicacies, not mention great boring expanses of clothes shops and candle shops and travel agents and the like. There wasn't a single thing that did anything more than vaguely tickle my interest. The vast advertising budgets of a thousand international corporations broke like waves against a sea-wall of indifference and ebbed away defeated. You would have thought that this cathedral of consumerism would have left us gasping and wandering out with arms full of packages which we only dimly remembered buying. But no. 10 out of 10 for over the top ostentation and packaging, 0 out of 10 for successful sales. Maybe one of these days they'll come up with a shopping mall like the computer fair, that actually makes you want to buy things. And then I'll have to be careful to leave my credit cards at home.

—Steve Davies



Lokta Plokta



Locs

Roy Ferguson
royf@rmit.edu.au

I am pleased to inform you that you have received sufficient nominations in the Best Fanzine category for the 1999 Hugo Awards (for works published in 1998) to be eligible to be on the final ballot for the 1999 Hugo awards in this category for your work *Plokta*.

[Gosh. Er... Ta.]

Jae Leslie Adams
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Madison WI 53715, USA
Jacleslie@aol.com

Alison, as I don't recall having seen the Wombles, I am convinced you are making all this up. It is quite farfetched, the piece on "Common People". In fact it is only that what you say is so wildly improbable that persuades me that, perhaps, no, surely, it could only be the truth. I am so suggestible though that now I am going to begin remembering that in fact I have seen if not an episode at least some clip or reference, probably with documentary voiceover concerning some connection to the history of the Muppets. The black and white photo you have thoughtfully provided of the old fellow peering under his glasses gives me a visual cue and voila, a possibly bogus recovered memory, in vivid and colorful detail. No, that was probably Fraggles Rock. Oh well.

Vicki's thoughtful piece about millennial fever is a refreshingly long view, just the

sort of thing reading SF is supposed to cultivate more widely than it does. Putting PCs and keyboards into the class of household objects with bookshelves or teakettles, "things that we know how to make well, don't change much, and replace when they break", is perhaps a sort of design desiderata for the shorter term, but a nice stretch—just as far as our modern thought can reach. She doubts that these tools will still be in use a thousand years hence, but the interesting thing is that we simply don't know and the possibilities are open.

In connection with this I have been embroiled in discussions lately of whether handwriting as we know it will survive the next century. I know some calligraphers who take heart at the recent revival of interest in handwritten messages as a more personal and in some ways more powerful medium for executives than email. In fact there was extensive discussion recently on the calligraphers' online list about an SF work in which clever young executive managers used Spencerian steel-pen writing styles (historically about a hundred years old now) for their meeting notes, with some kind of wall projection equipment and letter-recognition software involved. I don't know, but sharpened steel looks to me as though it will probably be more widely available than goosequills in the world of the future. I know how to make a really interesting dip pen from a soft-drink can—a beer can would work too I suppose—you can cut the stuff with scissors—but they are kinda slow to write with. It is the latest thing in expressive calligraphy, though you can make those thousand-year-old letters with it too.

The Olde Plokta's Almanacke was worth several giggles. What's this dragon's scroll saying, anyhow? [Eigi Eru Enn Allir Jomsvikingar Daudhir — Ed.]

John Hertz
236 S Coronado St., No. 409,
Los Angeles, CA 90057

If brevity's wit,
Is superfluous techno-
logy what won't fit?

Terry Jeeves
56 Red Scar Drive,
Scarborough, North Yorkshire

The mention of the Bonfire night 'do' reminded me of a party we had at Frank and Patty Milne's home in Maghull some forty years ago!! We fired off rockets and as their house backed on to a canal, we tried firing them into the water. They went under OK, then shot out again thus proving the practicality of the Polaris missiles.

Talking of MI5 (page 3 of 3/3½), is there or has there been MI1, MI2, MI3, & MI4 and if so, what were they? [MI1-4 were other branches of Military Intelligence which no longer exist. MI5 & 6 we know. And there are rumours of an MI7, which is a UK Government secret, military version of SETI@whitehall]

Sad news—Ron Bennett recently underwent successful heart surgery. The operation went well, but then he had a stroke which paralysed his left side. Last I heard he was showing slight improvement. One by one we old farts are running into planned obsolescence.

Brad Foster
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Texas, USA 75016
bwfoster@juno.com

Wow, that's certainly one way to make certain readers notice the change in design for a zine: send the last of the old design and the first of the new one in the same envelope! (And I only jumped a little bit at the sight of Jethro Tull leaping at me from the cover of V4/#1!)

Almost (I repeat, almost!) want to clip those three photos of The Walker and make a lot of copies, then put together a little flip-book of the actions.

(Or, keeping with the superfluous technology, maybe you guys could do a little mini-movie of him on the web site?)

Birds Eye logo change was interesting. Sometimes I've got to wonder what goes through the minds of corporate hacks who do this kind of stuff. I mean, what, they asked people in stores what they were and weren't buying, and the response was overwhelmingly "I'd love to eat your fine product, but am I truly grossed out by the repulsive old man on the logo"? Sad.

R Graeme Cameron
Apt #110, 1855 West 2nd Ave.,
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6J 1J1

I did take great delight in printing out the Corflu UK *The Debauched Sloth* newsletters. Great to put faces to names, or in Naomi's case...err, ahh,... never mind... A Fannish pair by ghod!

Bob Devney
25 Johnson Street, North
Attleboro, MA 02760 USA
BobDevney@aol.com

Are you a Horny fan? [No, Aubrey/Maturin is more our sort of thing]

Enjoy the power and
beauty of your youth. He
may be busy tomorrow.

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

If it's Tuesday, it must be another *Plokta* from Belgium. The cover...mighod, it's Eric Idle in disguise. The bottle might give it away...is he Tobes Valois? Hey, Tobes, yer famous!

Too many of us have unwilling left our happy circus, if you might allow passing away to come in under the definition of fufiated. Ian Gunn, Buck Coulson and Vincent Clarke gave more to fanzine fandom than they knew, and we now know, by their absence. None can replace them, although I

hope others will try to pick up where they left off.

Also, Yvonne asks...when shall we see your nifty prizes from the scavenger hunt? Greed is good, and I'm sure so are the pressies awaiting us. [*Er. We ate them. <belch> We'll have to actually get round to sending you some stuff. Sorry.*]

Mae Strelkov
4501 Palma Sola, Jujuy,
Argentina

Congratulations to Steven and Alison and may Ghu grant you many happy years. Beautiful Marianne in ivory silk looks lovely and bemused. She'd look even lovelier sitting on that Apiarist's hat turned upside down for something indispensable—a potty, for instance?

Auntie Sue has fallen in my estimation—offering poor little Marianne as a virgin on Guy Fawkes Night. (How's Sue's butterfly, by the way?) [*It has shuffled off its mortal coil. It has ceased to be. It has joined the bleeding choir invisible.*]



I should come to Hyde Park and upbraid you in Sue's own lilting cadences when she carols. (But my voice might not be up to it.)

Captain Birdseye products are not on sale in Latin America to my knowledge. Which saves us from further corruption from you Brits, Still—cod-pieces are less restricting than chastity belts, undoubtedly.

Your tars should be restricted in their practice of proctoscopy. The victim looks so horrified. (Sizes should be taken into account!)

You insist "One size fits all", and it seems cute Marianne agrees. She makes the very fanzine glow in that photo. (Page 8, Nov issue.) However: SIZES MUST BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT. Huge Marianne pinching steeples

from skyscrapers and cathedrals alike, will need a mate to match. Have you one for her in prospect? No, don't tell me. And please, no more photos of that sort, huh?

Oh, enclosed are two small recent "Paintings" revealing my confusement. "I'm all at sea" and have retreated to my Simon Stylite pillar or peak, from which see me descending on a waterfall. (Try your microscope and tell me what you see.) [*Not at their best in black and white, but we'll put them in colour on the website.*]

Alison in the wig is also irresistible. What a sweet innocent young girl!

I've got a new Web address you might look up—www.fortunecity.com/roswell/quatermass/87/mae/ [*Richard Brandt's website—with lots of Mae's art.*]

No, I still have no computer. Telephone lines in Jujuy don't extend this far into our jungles. (We do have a cellular phone that receives regular calls from Canada and Patagonia from

our farflung clan.)

It seems friends in the States feel that early fandom's triumphs in hectography need to be extolled, attempts going back to the Thirties as attested by all our recent fan-histories. So I'm an object lesson showing "what can be done with patience", but same date only from the Seventies actually. Were you born then? My attempts included all the magical appurtenances—knuckle-bones, aniline dyes—all are included in the paraphernalia of good (and evil) witches, wizards, etc. I ran my show from a gelatine-based Knuckle-bone press, and looked like a Celt (Pict?) covered in blues and purples as I struggled. Very properly! (I confessed all in a *Stet* years ago).

No direct message to my pet Marianne this time. Tell her to go on using her left hand to develop her brain better. Tell her I'm scolding all you virtuous (uh, virtual) lassies and laddies so she can go on looking so charmingly puzzled and bemused.



Dop
(You know where I live. Which is quite scary really.)

Thanks for the latest *Plokta*, much appreciated as it's one of the few fanzines I bother to keep up with these days. Many congratulations on the Hugo nomination. Surely Dave Langford doesn't need two Hugos this year, and I hope you win if only so you can go "Ner ner na ner ner"! at certain folk! [*Who could you mean?*]

The place in London I always thought was made up was Norbiton. I knew there was a Surbiton, but I thought that Reginald Iolanthe Perrin catching the train at a station marked 'Norbiton' was a kind of parody. Until I saw it on a rail map. Mind you, I know several southerners who don't believe in Grimethorpe.

I still tend to think there's something horribly, oh, well, decadent or something about reading in the bathroom. I mean, I'd never heard of anyone reading in their bathroom until fairly recently. I don't have books in there, and I wouldn't dream of reading in there either. It just strikes me as odd. Maybe it's a north-south divide sort of thing.

Ben Yalow
ybmcu@panix.com

Mostly, I like the new layout, but sometimes the typeface clash between the bollocks and the main sections gets troubling. However, anything that gives you more space to play with seems good to me—I don't need to keep coming up with high-quality material to fill it. Of course, you can always re-use the "Space 1999" illo again in a few years, as a "2001: A Space Odyssey" illo.

Karen Pender-Gunn
PO Box 567, Blackburn,
Victoria 3130, Australia

Mike Abbott is as shaggy as ever I see. If your readers would like to see the pictures of our wedding, they are on the web site, www.ozramp.net.au/~fiawol. Stand by for a major overhaul of the website and a listing of

what is available from the Ian Gunn Memorial Fund. T-shirts could be on their way soon.

Friends had a Furby on the table next to their phone—frightened the shit out of me (Australian expression there). Kill them, kill them all. I have been taken over by the Beanie Baby bug. Sad, I know, but I was sent about 40 when Ian had just passed away and now I am hooked. Strange, when you consider that they don't actually sell them in shops in Australia! I have been depending on the kindness of people overseas to help with my addiction.

"Let me hold your milk while you climb over the pig."

I have a gay friend who has some of the type of comics like Hake. I find them strangely fascinating. Maybe its a glimpse into a world I have no entry to. I'm sure most people don't have tonks as big as some of the gentlemen depicted in these publications. It's not natural...

Richard Brandt
125 Vaquero #24, El Paso TX 79912, U.S.A.

I was taken by the barman's remark of the Lake District, "if the weather was always sunny they'd have to re-name it Big-Holes-in-the-Ground" district. The reverse is true of El Paso; as a transplanted Californian once remarked to me, "If you guys had an ocean instead of Juarez, you'd have something."

Last time we were in New York, Michelle and I were in Washington Park waiting to meet some of the local fans for a dinner outing, and we observed a Japanese performance artist who assumed the positions of figures in famous paintings and sculptures and froze himself thus for several minutes at a time. For his piece de resistance, he took on *Guernica*, which required the assistance of a few volunteers from the crowd. This is how I wound up with my palms on the

pavement and one leg raised in the air while a flower protruded from my butt. (Photographs on demand.)

Latest revelations are that the Fanbys, contrary to popular belief, do not become more sophisticated and urbane as their years in fandom increase, but come with a repertoire of stock phrases and anecdotes, which they utter sparingly at first but with increasing and eventually annoying frequency the better one gets to know them.

Somehow I should not be surprised to see brimstone and Marianne in the same sentence.

Edwards saw it three times, which she alleges is due to our inadequate stock control rather than her surfeit of tequila slammers.]

Sandra Bond
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As I believe I may possibly have conveyed to you a few hundred times I remain unconvinced about the amount of technology in *Plokta*, but the editorial tampering with the Birds Eye logo and the Tom of Finland picture was nearly enough to make me change my stance. Nicely done, and it's pleasant to see someone find a good use for both Tom of Finland art (stereotyped and

Wombles in Michael de Larrabeiti's superb book *The Borribles*, in which the Rumbles, nasty furry creatures with fleas and sharp noses from Wimbledon with pointy sticks (litter collectors?) are the sworn enemies of the anti-heroic Lost Boys manqués, the Borribles. You say you haven't read it, Alison? Shame on you. Rectify the oversight.

I share a house with a wine journalist and when absinthe was relaunched he came home with two free bottles of it. <silence> Oh, sorry, this isn't an anecdote with a punchline or anything. I was just being smug.

The letter writers appear to be a good crop, though the editorial comment wasn't up to much. Whatever happened to the traditional editor's desire to have the last word at any cost? [Needs a last word, Vern—at any cost]

Jo Walton
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I'm sure most people, on discovering that they're Millennial and Robert Jordan is Antediluvian, would be nothing but thrilled. It fills me with an urge to hide under the table—hardly anyone's read the thing yet, and certainly you haven't! The reading of chapter 12 in *Kitchener* went over pretty well though. Thanks for the thought, which is appreciated.

"I thought I liked everything Birds Eye make until I tried their chillies"

The other thing is Alderney Womble, who was not added to be politically correct. She's there in the original Beresford novel, and I never could understand why she was left out of the old TV show. I suppose it was a bit like the fifth Beatle or something. I'm glad to see she's finally getting the stardom she deserves. But Tbilisi, (there's a word that looks like a spelling mistake) the female Womble in black leather, was made up by Andrew Morris.



Kim Huett
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After all due consideration I have decided that if Jean Paul Sartre had built Grigori Rasputin from scratch the end result would be very like Michael Abbott. Down to I might add the fact he is clutching a bottle of what looks to be red wine rather than vodka. Still, I imagine Mike Siddall would prefer it if Michael was into another French beverage since absinthe makes the heart grown fonder as they say. And on that note I shall end this note in order to Basque in the glory of that previous pun.

[We did get a lot of complaints about Michael Abbott's face. Lilian

dull) and fish fingers (as the song went, "Oh I've sailed the seven seas my lads/All on the roaring main/But I'm not very keen on fish fin-gers/Cos I know what they're made of").

Alison's piece on Wombles contained two flaws for me. Firstly, it implies that Alderney Womble is a new innovation and a nod to girl power. Sorry, but she and her equally female buddy Shansi Womble were in some if not all of the original books in the 1970s; Elizabeth Beresford may not have worried about realism in small furry animal breeding (not as much as Richard Adams in *Watership Down*, anyway) but there was a slightly more equal gender mix in the books than on the telly.

Also, no mention is made of the wicked parody of the

Alan Sullivan
30 Ash Road, Stratford,
London, E15 1HL

Further thoughts on Captain Birdseye, every house wife's ideal nautical beefcake (fishcake)... How about the cross over; Captain Birdseye and Tom of Finland in a daring commando raid on certain WWII German naval quarters—*The Buns of Navarone*...



[Meanwhile, Karen Pender-Gunn wrote asking if we would be like a picture of Aussie fishcake Captain Birds Eye. Betcha won't catch him rogering the cabin-boy.]

I'm sure I heard a transatlantic snicker, just then... As for finding animals in unexpected places (sic) I'm told Claire has been demonstrating the trick with the wombat and the cleavage. Well, did you evah...

Very striking Mike Abbott cover. Dare I suggest a hint of resemblance between himself and a very young and manic Greg Pickersgill? No, not a chance. I like my anatomy the way it is...

As for the Reconvene Weapons Policy—all I can say is, those guns aren't as big as the SuperSoaker 5000s, favoured by UWAC:TNG, particularly The Lovely (© M J Simpson)—not to mention talented—Anne Stokes. I can't help thinking there could be potential for some sort of "Special Interest" fanzine here... Fhannish Babes Who Dig Massive Guns... ("SuperSoaker 5000—when you've absolutely got to drench every m****rfucker in the room, accept no substitute..."). Well, it's an idea...

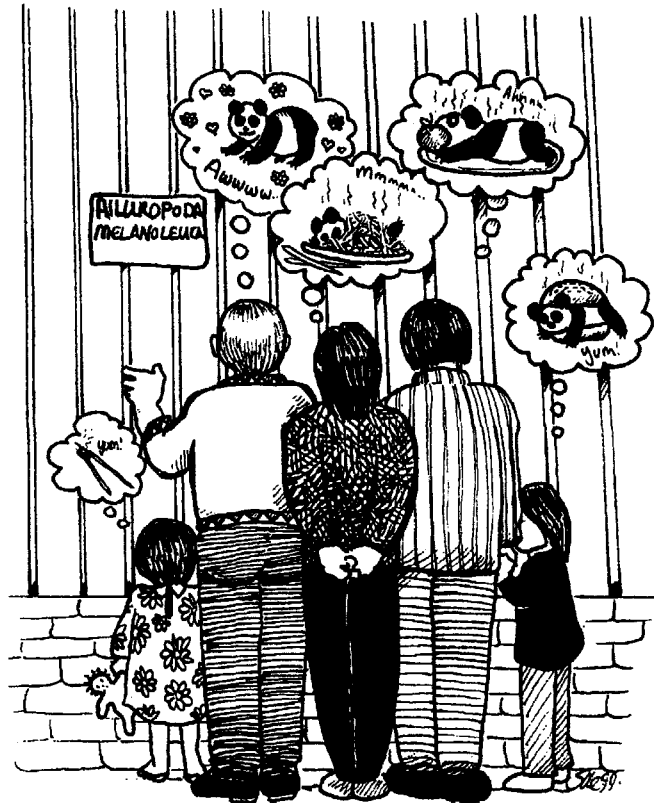
I can't help wondering if a few more relics of our generation's

childhood TV-watching will be resurrected. Clangers: TNG anyone...?

Harry Cameron Andruschak
PO Box 5309, Torrance, CA,
USA 90510-5309

I enclose a couple of pages that I wrote to *Fosfax* about my China trip, since I understand a lot of British fanzine publishers do not get *Fosfax*. [And to save you the trouble of trawling through 192 pages of *Fosfax*, we've extracted the following from Harry's letter.]

On my first day in China, 18 April, I walked to the Beijing Zoo with a friend, and we had a chance to see the pandas. Two adult pandas and two baby pandas. I remember the excitement of the Chinese when the keeper rolled out the two babies. Now, I don't speak



or understand a single word of Chinese, yet I bet I can accurately translate the comments of the crowd: "ooooo, aren't they CUTE?", "how sweet", "how adorable" etc. etc. etc. because on a cuteness scale of 1 to 10, baby pandas are a solid 10. In response, the baby pandas tried to roll up and go back to sleep. The adult pandas slept all the time we were there. Not exactly an active animal.

Rodney Leighton
R.R.C3 Tatamagouche, NS,
Can., BOK 1VO

Sometime during the morning, I was reading Judith Hanna, in *International Revolutionary Gardener 2*, attempting to persuade Britfans that they are boozing way too much and not only making a bad impression on overseas folks but harming themselves to boot. Mail brought issues 12½ and 13 of *Plokta*, which proves her point quite decisively. You lot must make one hell of a pile of money, to be able to afford all this technology and drink as much as you apparently do.

Rather strange that I have become almost a campaigner for teetotalism and have found that tales of boozing in other venues have upset me. But it doesn't seem to bother me

back of the dust jacket, Buck is wearing a black cowboy hat, white T-shirt, and jeans. A pistol is stuck into his pants on his left hip. The photo is cropped on the right but Buck's right hand appears to be grasping the end of a shotgun. His left arm is parallel to his left shoulder. He is drinking from a clay jug supported by his arm and his shoulder.



The text explains, "Robert 'Buck' Coulson was bitten by the science fiction bug at the age of twenty and shortly afterward discovered 'fandom.' He met his future wife, writer Juanita Coulson, at a fan club meeting; together they continued to attend science fiction conventions and went on to edit and publish *Yandro*, the Hugo Award-winning 'fanzine'. A former secretary of the Science Fiction Writers of America, Mr. Coulson resigned the position to devote more time to writing. He lives with his wife and son (and some uninvited livestock) near Hartford City, Indiana."

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

Congratulations on your nomination. *Plokta* 12½ and 13 arrived today, with the announcement that *Plokta* would not be on the Hugo ballot. And according to *File 770*, it isn't. You would think the people who do this *Plokta* would at least have the courtesy to trade with you.

The US Geological Service has been assiduously renaming certain geographic features that

adversely in *Plokta*. Maybe that means I don't care if you all drink yourselves to death?

Murray Moore
2118 Russett Road,
Mississauga, Ontario L4Y 1C1

I began reading Gene DeWeese's and Buck Coulson's 1975 novel, *Now You See It/Him/Them...*, or, *A Murder Mystery with a Worldcon Setting Not Written by Sharyn McCrumb*. In his photo on the

were named by explorers who, well, had not had any in some time and therefore named geographic features of a certain shape after what was on their minds. And so impressionable youth are shielded from trying to climb Whore's Tit Mountain.

And now that the inquiring reader, thanks to the kind advice of "Dear Annie", and the useful shelves of Cover Girl Shoes, has obtained a six-strap suspender belt, where does she (was it "she"?) get the size 40 hose to go with them? Please let me know. By mail, not in person.

Chris Bell
3 West Shrubbery, Redland,
Bristol

Plokta this time seriously weebled Charles, to whom I showed but yesterday the article by Mike Abbott about loving England, that which I chose for the Harveys' Reconvene/50th Eastercon fanthology. He had just decided that maybe some fans were his kind of people, and then this genially bearded weirdo with a bottle in hand first-foots it onto the doormat. So Charles bravely opens *Plokta* as far as the second page (using the wooden tongs provided for taking washing out of a twin-tub) and finds someone he knows depicted inside carrying an unreasonably large hunk of ordnance under an ominous header, and he doesn't know what LoC means apart from vaguely associating it with Amway and therefore with Crowley. Good grief! Now he's never going to come back out of the cupboard under the stairs. He's guarding the wine-rack with a stone axe against potential incursions of crazed fannish hippies from religious cults brandishing superfluously technological corkscrews of unreasonable size.

It's not very easy for those of us whose spouses are disenfranchised, you know.

And I certainly don't remember inventing any new games recently. Cleave the

Nun wasn't mine, it was invented by Patrick Gilbert, and jolly good fun it was too back in the sixties when nuns were still recognisable by their habits as they poled about town in pairs and eschewed nylon stockings; but fishslice-cleaving is a whole 'nother thing, obviously. Please tell me what it all means?

Yours, Baffled of Bristol

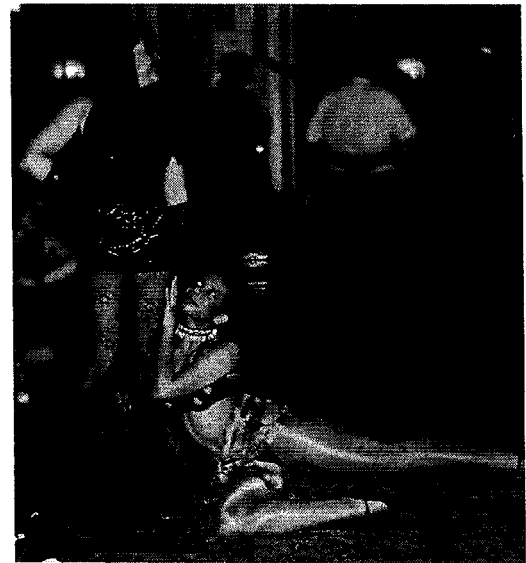
We Also Heard From:

Martin Morse Wooster (enclosing two sticky dollars for *Plokta*, which is unfortunately not available for mere money, but show of interest is fine), **Kim Huett** (again, with a sad tale of somebody being attacked by an elk), **Jerry Kaufman** (astonishingly sending us a **Nepalese Good Luck Tantra Totem** spam. Please don't do this. "Send this to 15 people and your life will improve drastically and everything you ever dreamed of will begin to take shape"), **Margaret Austin** (Is "Martin the Megalomaniac Mouse" Martin Easterbrook or someone else? [Yes] And you might be amused by the CIA's kids page at: www.cia.gov/cia/ciakids/),

Susan Francis (I never actually watched the *Wombles*, but I suspect there's a paragraph in the middle of the article that's *not strictly true.*), **Sheryl Birkhead, Sarah Prince** (sending a wide variety of assorted mooseware), **George Bohmfalk** (trying to determine what *zäftig* means), **Eric Lindsay, Teddy Harvia** (with 2 more lovely postcards), **Tom Ferguson, Joe Mayhew** (Sometime I will write and tell you about what I found in the secret compartment of my Buccaneer Hugo), **Sue Jones, Bill Burns** (Enjoyed reading and seeing Velma's exploits - I think I went to bed early that night. [these were on the web—see right for more details] and **Pamela Boal**. And thanks to everyone who sent us congratulations on the Hugo nomination.

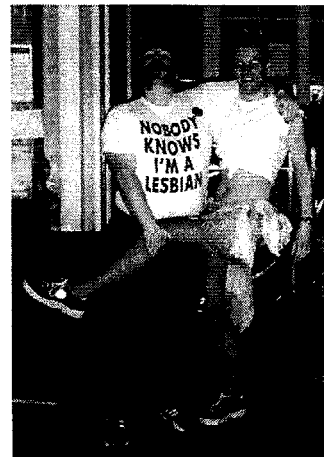
Vijay Pulls it Off

Eastercon was livened up for the *Plokta* cabal by the sight of TAFF delegate Vijay Bowen taking off nearly all her clothes in the Adelphi main lounge, and raising a large amount of money for various fan funds. The *Plokta* cabal went around dunning money out of people in return for an ogle, and preserved the event for posterity in a strictly limited for sale for the fan funds zine, *Hot Ansible Action*—so called because Rob Hansen had explained that if you wanted your webzine to get lots of hits you should call it *Hot Lesbian Action*. HAA is no longer available in print (although it ran to two editions and we sold 93 copies at a quid each), but you can see it at www.fuggles.demon.co.uk/Fanzines/botansibleaction.htm, and we thought we'd put a photo here for the benefit of the web-impaired sector of our mailing list. Vijay is grovelling at the feet of the ever-luscious Eira Latham.



Shoe shine only two dollars, lady

Also entertaining the troops was Tommy Ferguson wearing an official fan funds wraparound tie-dye orange miniskirt thoughtfully sent by Ulrika O'Brien and Terry Frost. "Tell me Mr Ferguson, how does it feel to be living through a Belfast man's worst nightmare?" asked Belfast emigrée Caroline Mullan. Persuading Tommy into the skirt—after Joseph Nicholas had rejected it as "not my colour dahling"—also required the assembled multitudes to dig deep into their pockets. In total we raised more than £300 for the fan funds from all this silliness.



Square Bear reckons his luck's in tonight



Tommy and Joseph argue about the black tights with white trainers question.

Everybody's Free (to send us letters)

Gentle *Plokta* readers... send LoCs.

If I could offer you only one tip for remaining on the mailing list, sending LoCs would be it. You will appreciate the long term effectiveness of sending LoCs when *Plokta* thuds onto your doormat, a delight spoiled only by the sight of Michael Abbott on the cover. The rest of my advice can only reflect the arbitrary diktats of Alison's editorial whim.

I will dispense this advice now.

Enjoy the power and beauty of superfluous technology.

Oh... never mind.

You will not understand the power and beauty of your technology until it is obsolete. But trust me, after 5 years of increasingly bloated software and systems that demand exponentially more power, you will think back in a way you can't grasp now to a computer that would boot up in less time than it took to cook a three course meal.

You are not as fat as the *Plokta* cabal.

Write one thing every day that scares someone else. Preferably Ian Sorensen.

Spell *Plokta* correctly.

Remember the Hugo nominations you gain. Forget the Novas you don't. If you succeed in this tell us how.

Read the fanzine.

Keep your old copies of *Plokta*. Send all your other fanzines to Memory Hole.

Do not look at pictures of Chris Treganza in drag. They will only make you feel beautiful.

Don't make jokes about Pat McMurray.



Don't feel guilty if you don't know what to do with your life. Some of our most interesting readers didn't know at 22 what they wanted to do with their lives. But for heavens' sake Gary, by the time you're 40 you really should have a clue.

Send articles.

Maybe we'll quote you, maybe we won't. Maybe we'll WAHF you, maybe we won't. Maybe we'll never publish you in *Plokta*. Maybe we'll print a picture of you in a compromising position.

Send us pictures of you in compromising positions.

Whether you get published or not... don't congratulate yourself too much, or berate yourself either. It all depends on how much space we need to fill, and whether Alison has lost your LoC again.

Send art.

Do not read *Fosfax*, it will only make your brain implode.

Shag. Even if you have nobody to do it with except Tobes.

Live in Leeds once, but leave before it gives you angst. Live in Croydon once, but leave before you start talking in Goat.

Accept certain inalienable truths. *Banana Wings* will win the Nova. Langford will win the Fanwriter Hugo. You too will forget what you did at the last Worldcon. And when you do, you will pretend that you did not get horribly drunk, you did not insult the Guest of Honour, and you voted for *Plokta*.

Vote for *Plokta*.

Be careful whose advice you accept. But be patient with those who supply it. Advice is a form of coercion disguised as rational discourse on the part of fanzine editors who are desperate for egoboo.

But trust me on sending LoCs.

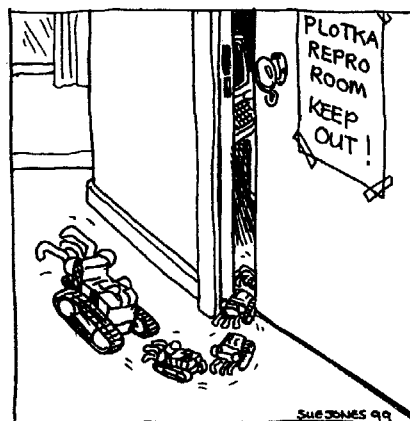
—Steven Cain

Mind the Gap

NEW YORK is the first really big city I have visited since moving to London. So it came as quite a surprise to me that, whereas Boston, San Francisco and Trivandrum seemed quite alien, New York felt much more like home. And I knew what the New York subway was like, because I've seen lots of tv shows and films with scenes in the subway. Dirty, dangerous and run down, and that was just the passengers. So I was quite surprised to discover that it was clean, cheap and efficient, with a week's go-anywhere ticket costing less than I spend for three trips to London.

But nevertheless, the subway had the knack of reminding me of home. A voice came over the tannoy. "Please stand clear of the closing doors. There is another train right behind this one." Exactly the same words as in London, where the phrase "there is another train right behind this one" normally means "We

are about to attempt to break the all-time record for longest interval between rush hour trains on the Victoria Line".



Tube trains have turned up on rec.arts.sf.fandom recently, as well. Complaints about the whimsicality and chaos nature of the subway led Avram Grumer to discover his inner poet.

—Alison Scott

Attention all passengers

The delay we are experiencing is not the eternal delay.

The red signal ahead is not the eternal red signal.

The train just behind this one is the eternally real.

The doors you are holding open have their origin in this particular train.

Free from the closing doors, you realize the mystery.

Caught in the closing doors, you see only the manifestations.

Yet mystery and manifestations arise from the same source:

A train going out of service at DeKalb.

Darkness within darkness.

The gateway to all understanding.

Please use all available doors.

—Avram Grumer