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# CONTENTS

- 3 Editorial**  
What we've been up to lately, more leather gear, an explanation of the Japanese theme, and the hatches, matches and dispatches column.
- 4 <plokta.con>**  
Please read this to find out how to get to the con, and **book your hotel room now please**. Also some local information about Leicester.
- 5 The Moose is a Harsh Mattress**  
**Steve Davies**  
How much is it possible to spend on a bed? The cabal conduct a special investigation.
- 7 Five Gold Rings**  
**Alison Scott**  
When shall we thirteen meet again? High summer sometime in 2001, if we can believe the roll of the dice.
- 8 The Four Fluid Path**  
**Steven Cain**  
Our Oriental Mystic Correspondent reports.
- 9 Lokta Plokta**  
Our correspondents wax poetic, mostly about what they did over the Millennium.
- 14 What's in a Name?**  
**Giulia De Cesare**  
Giulia demonstrates that she's considerably more marriageable than we thought.

## Alternative History #1

What if caffeine had been banned but opium was legal?



*The Bad Girls Room at Corflu*

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This is issue 18 of *Plokta*, edited by Steve "Mothra" Davies and Alison "Titanosaurus" Scott (paper version) and Mike "Cosmic Mechagodzilla" Scott (web version). It is available on editorial yen.

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Picture manipulation by Alison Scott (1,2,13,14)

The cabal also includes Giulia "Gamera" De Cesare, Sue "Catbus" Mason, George "Barugon" the cat, Marianne "Podzilla" Cain and Steven "hiding in the toilet" Cain.

<plokta.con> is happening 26-29 May. See page 4. The con address is 3 York St, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 9QH and the website is [www.plokta.com/plokta.con/](http://www.plokta.com/plokta.con/)

**You need to book your hotel room if you haven't already done so. Please book by 30 April if at all possible.**

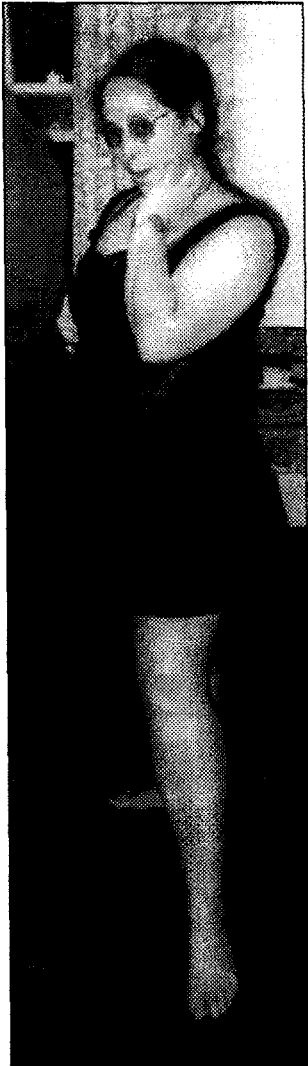
**Phone 0116 253 1161**

**Fax 0116 251 3169**

**Quote "plokta.con" to get the convention rate.**

**BOROKUSU**

**Leather Goddesses of Academia (2)**



Dr Amanda Baker

Still looking for photos of Dr KL Maund in leather gear.

**Singing to Plants**

While we were on the subject of science and its wonders (no, not Dr Baker), we thought we should mention the latest advances in human/plant interaction. It's long been believed that talking or singing to your plants is good for them. Naturally, science has been trying to ascertain exactly what you should sing or play to your plants to get them to react best. Do they like peace and quiet? The dulcet tones of Debussy on a dulcimer? Or the delicate murmurings of a maiden? No, it's been scientifically determined that plants grow better when they're listening to *Bat Out of Hell* by Meatloaf and Jim Steinman. Sounds good to us.

**Editorial**

WELCOME to this, the all Japanese Monsters issue of *Plokta*. With special Japanese binding for John Dallman-san.

Alison, Steven, Marianne and Dr Plokta went off to Seattle for Potlatch & Corflu. The odd picture in this issue (more next time), but the main event for us was the Iron Faned panel at Corflu, based on the weird Japanese game show *Iron Chef*. This cult TV programme features competing chefs constructing gourmet dishes against the clock, each containing a secret ingredient. The winner is feted in laurels and the loser impales himself on his fabulously sharp Japanese cooking knives. The fannish version offered two teams the challenge of producing a fanzine in an hour. One team—the challengers—comprised the four of us and Pam Wells, along with our ritually pierced bovine mascot. The actual theme ingredient was *Salmon*, and copies of *Steelhead*, our mostly-produced-in-an-hour fanzine, should be enclosed with this issue of *Plokta* as a special bonus. But we were given two other possible theme ingredients a week in advance, and we did various preparation. Which is why you may see some articles and illustrations on the topics of alternative history and corflu elsewhere in this issue of *Plokta*. Well, waste not, want not, as they say. Pam Wells may not be individually credited on these, but you should assume that she was also involved in anything Iron Faned like.

Various happy news this time (for once); Alison and Steven are expecting another baby monster (provisionally titled *Ploktemon*), sometime in August. Marianne is quite delighted, because she hasn't really worked out the full enormity of it yet.

Alison discovered to her horror that her brother has been getting ideas above his station. It turns out he is shortly to marry the daughter of a baronet. Well, David always was the black sheep of the family. He broke the news in typical fashion—Alison's parents read his engagement announcement in the Court pages of the *Times*. Alison is now fretting about what to wear for a posh society wedding when seven months pregnant. "It'll be in *Tatler*, you know," said a friend, helpfully. "If you wear a tent, it had better be a silk tent," said another. And her Aunt Margaret said, in the understatement of the century, "I think it will probably be a hat do."

And our very best congratulations to SMS and Eira, who will be married by the time you get this *Plokta*. We were enormously taken with their wedding invitation, and reprint the cover below—though not, alas, the detailed descriptions of a multitude of different ceremonies in various bits of the beautiful Rochdale countryside.



We hope to have a photographic record for the next issue of *Plokta*.

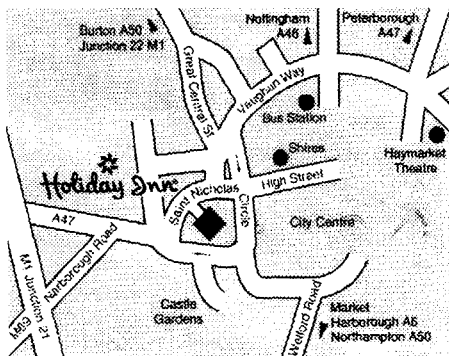
Giulia tells us that George has been put on a diet. The vet took one look at him and completely banned double cream, smoked salmon, pork chops and caviar. His tinned catfood rations have been halved, and Giulia has had Words with all the neighbours who'd been giving him titbits. As you can imagine, this has done nothing for George's temperament. He's also been given a more rigorous flea treatment regime, involving regular ministrations with noxious medicines and a fine-toothed comb. Giulia hopes she'll be able to take the bandages off soon.



## <plokta.con>

THIS is the last issue of *Plokta* before <plokta.con> so should fulfil the functions of a final progress report. And it does, at least a bit. Firstly, if you haven't booked your room, please ring the hotel and book it **right now**. They should be able to take reservations at any time—or put you through to someone who can. Their phone number is +44 116 253 1161 and their fax number is +44 116 251 3169. Quote <plokta.con> and the room rate should be £27.50 per person for twin or double, £37.50 single. The dates of the convention are Friday 26 May to Monday 29 May, starting Friday evening and ending early afternoon on Monday. Programme ideas are still welcome, as we're tapping the zeitgeist to ensure we're up to the minute. Or something like that.

### How to Get to the Holiday Inn



**By Car:** We recommend you come from M1 junction 21, because that's the one we have directions from. Leave the motorway at J21, and follow signs for A5460 & Castle Park. Take the A5460 (Narborough Road) for approximately 3 miles, until City Centre signs indicate a right turn. Go to the traffic lights and turn right into St Augustines Road. St Nicholas Circle is a great big roundabout in front of you with a hotel in the middle of it. That's the one you want; a slip road off the right lane of the roundabout leads into the NCP carpark.

**By Train:** Leicester is on a mainline from London St Pancras; the journey takes about an hour and a half. The station is about a mile from the hotel (St Nicholas Circle is at one end of the High Street). It's possible to walk but a taxi is probably easier; I'm afraid we don't know about buses.

**By Air:** From anywhere other than Birmingham or East Midlands airport, you'll be continuing your journey by train or car. Birmingham airport is about 25 miles, and East Midlands airport is about 18 miles, so taxis are plausible but fairly expensive.

### So what's there to do in Leicester?

*We met Chris Conway, a Leicester fan, at Didgeridouze. A multi-talented man, he's a singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist who also writes great articles about Leicester for Plokta. Go listen to his music at <www.chrisconway.org.uk>*

I met Giulia at the Didgeridouze filk con and, whilst discussing the nature of the universe, she asked me to write some lines on the fair city of Leicester, where I've lived for 20 years—I only came here for 3 to study—therein lies proof of the pull of the place.

The Hotel is in the centre of one of the city's biggest roundabouts, virtually over the river/canal (no-one is quite sure what it is at this point), one road off which leads to the High Street and the centre of town. This is marked by the clock tower—a meeting point for young couples by night and a perch for religious loonies with megaphones by day.

**History:** Well actually you're not far from it. The only bit of Roman wall is just over the road and is part of the Jewry Wall museum. On the river bridge I seem to remember there is a plaque which marks the spot where Richard III banged his foot on the way to the Battle of Bosworth. A soothsayer woman was heard to say that he would bang his head on the stone on his return. Sure enough he was killed, his body draped over a horse and his head cracked on said stone. I think this is the story—I wasn't there, you understand.

**Greenery:** Two choices really from the hotel. Castle Gardens is a formal garden across the road. Nice enough, it doesn't really go anywhere. You will, if you explore the vicinity, though, find a castle mound, a little courtyard where they used to chop people's heads off, a secret herb garden, and a hospital built for crusaders. You also have the river/canal path which isn't a bad amble, leading to Abbey Park.

**Food/Drink:** Leicester has never been very good on pubs. Like lots of towns there has been a rabid growth of wine bars with heavies in suits on the outside. The Café Bruxelles is a little different with its painted interior dome and just a walk down the High Street on the right. They do those fancy Belgian Beers. I play jazz piano there some Monday nights. *[The Café Bruxelles also comes Highly Recommended by the Plokta cabal].*

Leicester is about a third Asian in population and we think we have the best curries to be had on planet Earth (or

any other planet, for that matter—though Proxima Centauri 3's are excellent it must be said). Unfortunately you're not really comfy waddling distance to them from the Inn. If you were rabid for a curry you'd get a bus/taxi to the Melton Road—essentially Leicester's Little India—also a good place to buy saris and the like. I mostly only know the veggie places there. The Sayonara and Bobby's are both excellent in this respect. Meat eaters will have to try pot luck, though my local way across town (the Monsoon on the Evington Road, tell the taxi driver) is pretty fab all round. (I don't get commission, honest).



**Science Fiction:** My fave secondhand bookshop is called the Black Cat Bookshop and is in the Silver Arcade, (High St, first right, left at the Globe pub, second arcade on your right) A nice 1930s arcade; sort of a mini Covent Garden with hat shops, tattoos, knick-knacks. Black Cat is on the third floor—they have a wall of secondhand treasures. Their shop of new stuff (gamer stuff, action figures and an increasing number of saucy posters) is on the way.

**Music:** The Royal Mail, Campbell Street, (again, a taxi I guess—taxis aren't too expensive and you won't be travelling far) often has great bands Fri, Sat and an acoustic Sunday lunch, and blues Sun night, and is a regular haunt of bohemes. The Shed, Yeoman Street has bands but is more of a club for those determinedly seeking a late drink.

There is a secondhand CD shop called Archers just down the High Street which is pretty good (CDs ~ £7ish). Those into avant garde, electronic, prog rock etc are in for a treat. The Ultima Thule record shop by the railway station on Conduit Street is a complete one-off and has an extraordinary stock from around the world.

I'm hoping I can attend the con, but as a musician, gigs have a nasty habit of intruding on a good weekend. If I can make it, you can say hello and tell me what a fascinating account of Leicester I have written. If not, then enjoy our groovy city and have a great con.

—Chris Conway



## BOROKUSU

### Ken's Cock Ring

Hot topic at the moment on the *trufen* mailing list—did Barbie's boyfriend ever have a cock-ring? Apparently so. In 1992 Mattel, worrying about falling sales, decided to make Ken look a little more hip. Taking their cue from clubbing gear, they gave 'Earring Magic Ken' two-tone hair, an earring, a see-through purple mesh crop top, and a purple leather jacket with, well, a cock ring attached to it. He sported a second cock ring as a pendant.



Of course, while they gave him a cock ring, they didn't give him a cock. We're still waiting for Anatomically Correct Ken.

### Silly Computer Anecdote

Most of the cabal have at some time or other attending various historical recreation events. The Far Isles (England's answer to the SCA) has hosted many a medieval banquet with Sue slaving in the bedrooms kitchens like a good wench. The Roundhead faction has been enlivened by her camp-follower antics and the Brighton Vikings have not been the same for years. Anyway, we were wondering what the next trend in historical recreation would be, and we think we've got it. Usenet newsgroup recreation. Relive the flamewars of yesteryear! Troll unsuspecting newsgroups populated by AIs. Sign up to play Canter and Siegel in the great Green Card spam war! Looks like a goer to me.

Of course, we may have it already.

## The Moose is a Harsh Mattress

WE'VE been buying beds recently. Actually both Steve and Giulia and Alison and Steven have been out bed-hunting. Not that we're planning to move in together as one swinging foursome or anything (though the idea of leaving Marianne to set up house with George is definitely tempting). No, it's just good old co-incidence playing up again. Alison and Steven, having moved house and realised that their bed is four foot wide and, although it can hold two adults with a certain degree of intimacy, it can't cope with a rapidly growing population of two adults, a three-year old and another potential occupant sometime this summer. Meanwhile, as far as Steve and Giulia are concerned, the main incentive has been Giulia getting backache and finding the mattress too hard for her.

Time to go on the quest for the perfect bed. Hard beds, soft beds, wooden beds, steel beds, beds with slats, beds with springs, divan beds, four-poster beds (down, girl!), beds with ever-more fanciful frames and surrounds and peculiar little fiddly bits for you to damage your more tender appendages on. I mean, have any of the people who design these beds actually thought about the practicalities of having a foot-wide wooden surround to a bed? Even if you can get a special revolving TV stand to slot into it? Looks very stylish though. Have you ever noticed how you never see really stylish people wearing shorts? It's so that you can't see the bruises on their shins. Of course, you can go too far the other way, too. Near Alison and Steven's new house is a dealer specialising in Italian beds. These were just too, too over the top for words. No, really. I mean, a bed shaped like a swan with lashings of white drapery? Adds new depths of horror to the term Kitsch. Who buys these things? Do they wear shorts? Do you suppose that if the two met there would be some immense explosion of taste and anti-taste?

So, what have we ended up with? We both thought about water beds, but decided that they were too heavy, too much hassle and not really practical, though Giulia has been very wistful for the waterbed she used to have in Tasmania. Anyway, Alison and Steven have got themselves a traditional-

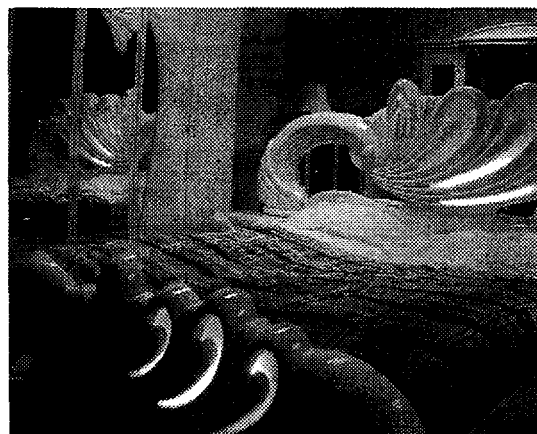
style brass bedstead with knobs on. So useful for tying things to. What sort of things? Well, you know. Men. And things. Of course, in practice it'll probably just be Marianne who ends up tied to it, but hey, start them young.

However, Steve and Giulia have gone for the superfluous technology option and have invested in one of those whizzy German beds from Hülsta. The sort where each person has a remote control and you can move the bed into interesting positions without having to get up. This after going round virtually every bed shop in Berkshire, trying to find something soft enough for Giulia and hard enough for Steve. This bed is it. It has flashy expensive slats which adjust to the person lying on it and a special motor which meets all the unbelievably stringent German regulations for such things. It is a marvel of technological sophistication. What's really horrifying is that it's actually the stripped down version since the full-featured version was just too expensive (special bedside lights at £150 a time? No, thanks). Actually, the only way even this version was cheap enough, was because Giulia has back problems. Which mean that, provided you have a letter from your doctor saying so (we gave him a bottle of wine), you don't have to pay 17.5% VAT on the bed. This brought the price down from stratospheric to merely exorbitant.

The bed is due to be delivered sometime in late June. Apparently, if the order had gone in any later, it wouldn't have got onto the factory order until the end of July. And there's a problem with this. You see, all the factories in Germany close down during the summer so that the workers can go on holiday and they wouldn't have started work on the bed until they all got back to work in September. Amazing! Maybe there just isn't the competition in the German bed industry that there is everywhere else. Of course, it also explains why the bed is so expensive.

So there you go, the essential dichotomy within the Plokta cabal, technology versus sex. Or should that be style versus substance? At least we got away without going to IKEA. Of course, Mike's just moved house and has probably been buying a new bed, too. Wonder where he went?

—Steve Davies



*The weirdest Italian bed in Walthamstow*

The Christmas puddings were provided by Brian Ameringen, who knows the sorts of places where you can get Christmas puddings very cheap in March, and were microwaved according to an old family recipe. Again, if I'd had my act together I'd have made some six weeks ago, or got someone who was making at Christmas to make me some extra. They were both all right, but I think the modern taste for vegetarian puddings that can be microwaved has led to slightly drier, less rich puddings with no silver charms in. Traditional puddings are made with good honest animal suet, and are so fatty that there have been cases of them catching fire in microwave ovens.

Speaking of microwaves, I have not the faintest idea how people coped with Christmas dinner before microwave ovens. For one thing, one of my rings would have been occupied throughout the critical part of the morning steaming a pudding. For another, the sprouts were part microwaved, and all the roast veg was parboiled in the microwave. One of the soups had its veg cooked in the microwave, thereby saving a pan. I suppose all these things could have been cooked the night before, so I could have traded my microwave for another marathon cooking session; this one after work. Ooh lovely. But the nuker also meant that I could warm things up at the last minute instead of frantically trying to keep them hot while other things were cooked.

Thirteen is a traditional number for these lunches, and in this case the thirteen were the three of us, Mike and Kathy Westhead & their children Peter & Karen (who I think of as sweet little toddlers but who are actually hulking great almost-grownups. There is a cognitive dissonance thing going on here), Brian Ameringen & Caroline Mullan (Caroline is now sufficiently gravid that she had to waddle off for a nap after lunch; mind you, we all felt like a nap but only Caroline had enough excuse to go and lie down. The rest of us just sat around drifting off from time to time), Steve Davies & Giulia De Cesare, Bernie Peek, and Pete Tyers. "You do know that Pete's vegetarian," said Brian cheerfully three hours before lunch. "Fuck fuck fuck" I replied. Luckily, I was reprieved; Pete is only vegetarian in that he doesn't like slabs of meat. He has no problem with soups made with meat stocks, gravy, stuffing, suet puddings, potatoes roasted in turkey fat, and so on, and was reasonably well fed on the trimmings from lunch. Whew. Peter Westhead had the best apparel; a Romanian tourist board "Watch the Skies" eclipse t-shirt. He regaled us with tales of warm weather, clear skies, reflections of the total eclipse on water, and wild bears. Brian and Caroline were charged with providing the drink, all of which was excellent, and remarked that these events

are much less boozy than they once were. We're all getting old.

It was only thirteen because I'd been really dreadful about sorting out the arrangements. Although the date was fixed many months ago, I hadn't thought about it even once before leaving for Seattle. After I got back, all I could do for a few days was get to work without falling asleep too often. So when I finally got round to letting people know it was shockingly short notice. Which is probably not a bad thing in some ways. When Brian & Caroline combined organisational efficiency with the draw of Gary Farber as guest of honour, they ended up serving Christmas dinner to twenty-four. I think that would have destroyed me. This is not a meal that scales up easily in a domestic kitchen. I've served thirty people at once a few times, but always by filling an enormous great stockpot with a stew or curry of some kind.

After lunch we observed the traditional ritual of sitting around feeling bloated, and the other traditional ritual of opening the presents. Each participant is required to provide three presents, wrapped, costing less than £10 in total, which are then distributed according to an arcane ritual. If only we had remembered this when wandering around Archie McPhee—probably the best source of peculiar presents at moderate prices on the entire planet. Visions of sarcastic eightballs danced in my head but alas, too late. To add a bit to the Christmas spirit, we had a large inflatable Christmas tree with artificial snow to array the presents beneath. Marianne liked the inflatable tree almost as much as the inflatable Wisconsin promotional Holstein.

The presents varied. Stars were probably the pushmi-pullyu two-headed neckwarmer, the stapleless stapler ("it's jammed", exclaimed everyone), the glow in the dark water balloons, the famous cats of art book ("Jackson Pollock's cat made the mistake of lying on the painting") and the Pokemon GameBoy bubble bath.

—Alison Scott



Marianne learning the gentle art of correction

## BOROKUSU

### Seven Uses For Corflu

Nowadays, there's not much call for correction fluid when producing fanzines. But we're sure that many of you have a half-empty bottle of the stuff lying around the house somewhere. With this in mind, we present:

#### Seven Great Alternative Uses for Corflu

1. High-fashion fannish nail varnish. You may know that nail varnish makes a fine stencil correction fluid—well, the reverse is also true.
  2. Gluing red (or blue) things together invisibly. In many societies, corflu has replaced Araldite as the number one adhesive.
  3. Aromatherapy. A few drops of corflu in your diffuser will instantly increase the fannish karma of your living room.
  4. Fannish tramps' marks. Over many years, British fans have developed a series of corflu signs which are invisible to the world at large but can be spotted instantly by those in the know. For example, a generous smear of corflu on the door-frame of a house where you crash will identify it as friendly to passing fans. Several such marks can be found on Interlake Ave N., Seattle.
  5. If you gather together a dozen partly-used bottles of corflu, you can make a dandy musical instrument by rubbing the rims of bottles with different amounts in.
  6. Tired of that dull office job? Dab little patches of corflu onto multiple areas of exposed skin. Should be good for three weeks off work, a full-scale quarantine note, and several trips down to the epidemiology department of your local university.
  7. You may find that your milk gets nicked from the communal fridge. Adding a teaspoon of corflu to each pint will put a permanent stop to any such theft.
- Finally, a tiny *Plokta* question. What colour is corflu? Evidence from Seattle is that there are many different theories, many quite unexpected. Answers on a pocksard please.

—Pam Wells (mostly)

## BOROKUSU

## Earring Magic Gary



*There is a ring hidden in this picture. Put an X where you think the center of the ring might be.*

Taking their cue from their successful Ken dolls, Mattel have now made Gary Stratmann available in a number of limited editions. This one doesn't leave a lot to the imagination but definitely appears to be anatomically correct. Psychologically warped, but anatomically correct.

## Chocolate is Sex-Related Shock

Recent advances in chocolate science (*A. Clow, 1999*) have shown that chocolate is wasted on women. As you know, Bob, science has shown that chocolate boosts the production of antibodies in the immune system and helps protect against diseases like colds. Just the smell of chocolate is enough to markedly increase the secretion of immunoglobulin A and to bring people back from the dead. Chocolate the Wonder Drug! If you're a man. Yes, chocolate only has this effect on men. Tough luck, girls! In order to conserve stocks of this rare medication, all chocolate supplies will be confiscated and redistributed by the NHS to those most likely to benefit from it. If you're nice to us, we might share. Might.

## Five Gold Rings

YESTERDAY, being March 18, we found ourselves serving Christmas dinner for thirteen fans. This necessitated a bit of rearranging, so we moved all the dining room furniture around and wrestled with Bernie Peek's trestle table of doom. But this house is much better suited to feeding large numbers than any I've previously lived in. I reckon that we could probably have about eighteen all sitting down at the dining table while still having enough space to eat their food here.

I cooked for seven hours. It all tasted pretty nice apart from the turkey, which was frankly appalling. I suspect that this is partly the turkey's fault; it was a rather poor quality branded frozen turkey. If Seattle jetlag hadn't prevented me from getting my act together, I'd have ordered a much better one from the butcher. Nevertheless, I can only blame the turkey a small amount. It would never have been delicious even if better treated, but I also overcooked it substantially. I haven't really got to grips with the oven yet. It doesn't run hot, exactly, but it is an electric fan-assisted oven, and is really very different from the gas AGA (or indeed the always running colder gas oven at Mike's house). The problem with turkey cooking is that undercooking the bird is fatal to lunch, whereas overcooking it is merely a bit of a waste, so it's best to aim on the safe side. My next 18lb turkey will be better.

In fact, we've invited both sets of parents for (real not fannish) Christmas this year, so basically, it had better be. This is the sort of occasion that turns perfectly happy, normal family cooks into raving loons. One of my staff was suffering near to Christmas because he and his wife had invited both sets of parents. And as Christmas came nearer, his wife drifted further and further towards delirium. On about the 22<sup>nd</sup>, he explained that she was so worked up about the dinner that she'd already rung the Turkey Panic Line twice. I expressed surprise at the concept of a turkey panic line. "They reassure you that yes, your turkey will fit in the oven, and no, you won't overcook it till it's dry as toast". I could have done with that. Sadly, they don't operate it in March, apparently. But I think that parental units are probably more panic-inducing than random friends can be. The average lunch-cooker believes that their mother is thinking "Goodness, how did she manage to grow up without learning the first thing about domestic management" and their mother-in-law is thinking "I always knew she was a slattern who wouldn't look after my son properly." (I should point out here that the average Christmas lunch-cooker is female, or at least 95% female. It's easier for men who cook, anyway; they believe that

their mothers and mothers-in-law are both thinking "Goodness, he's terribly accomplished.") In reality, I suspect that mothers of all varieties are most likely to be thinking "Isn't it lovely to have a year off from cooking Christmas lunch?" And if you've been sufficiently solicitous with the Bucks Fizz, they may not even be thinking that.

But I digress. The stuffing failed, as well. Taking a clever ruse from my cookbook, I stuffed the bird between the skin and breast. I think this is theoretically a good idea; it insulates the breast, and if it works then when you carve you get beautiful slices of breast with a layer of stuffing at the top. But in practice the stuffing was desiccated along with the turkey. The other half of the stuffing was rolled into balls and placed alongside the turkey in the tin, where it promptly disintegrated and turned into stuffing soup.

Most of the other trimmings were fine. This was the "large amounts of butter and cream" school of culinary excellence. Cooking lunch consumed four packs of butter and eight pints of milk, along with a couple of bottles of wine and several large slugs of brandy. And that was just the chef. It's a good thing that Christmas only comes once a year. Whoops.

The flip side of the turkey being dry and inedible was that the gravy, made from the turkey juices (and stuffing soup) whizzed up with a stock made earlier from the giblets, some onion, and an entire bottle of cheap red wine, was completely delicious. Sadly, I don't have anything as grand as a gravy boat, so it got served in a teapot.



# The Four Fluid Path

*This article was pre-prepared for the Iron Faned panel, during which we asked the audience to choose a fan to insult. The winning fan was Andy Hooper, but we're sure Plokta readers would rather we slagged off Ian Sorensen.*

SOME fans party all night and are still goal focussed and task orientated the next day. Ever wonder how they do that? Now at last we can reveal their secret, the esoteric Oriental art of Kor Fa Lu.

You too can maintain harmony and balance.

You too can follow this ancient wisdom.

You too can tell Ian Sorensen where to get off.

Follow the four-fluid path of Kor Fa Lu. Just apply the apposite correction fluid and exhibit correct behaviours in order to regain your karmic balance. The entire cycle is sometimes known as the Kor Fa Lu Learning Cycle.

## Correction fluid 1—Water

Water is the beginning of the cycle. Use water to correct drought. Particularly useful for parched tongues and fuzzy heads. Drink a pint for every hour you spend in the convention hotel, and for every pint of beer you had last night. Correct behaviour is not throwing up. Do not talk to Ian Sorensen. Your lucky phrase is 'Leave me alone'.

## Correction fluid 2—OJ

Orange juice is the second level of the cycle. Use OJ to correct shortages of vital health giving substances such as vitamins. Quite why you need to do this is unclear—you should previously have drunk lots of beer which is chock full of vitamins. Correct behaviour is not being too cheerful to people who are still at the 'water' part of the cycle, unless they are Ian Sorensen. Your lucky phrase is 'Can I have more mushrooms with my black pudding, please?'



## Correction fluid 3 – Coffee

Coffee is the third element of the cycle. Preferably latte. The right amount of coffee is bottomless. Use coffee to correct shortages of sleep. Correct behaviour is to be goal focussed and task orientated and produce a marvellous well-crafted article for Iron Faned, or *Plokta* for that matter. Do not write any material for Ian Sorensen. Your lucky phrase is 'Yes I'd love to do loads of work on your convention'.



## Correction fluid 4—Beer

Beer completes the cycle and allows you to attain enlightenment. The right amount of beer is More! Use beer to correct any tendencies you may have to be serious and constructive. Correct behaviour is to keep on drinking, and marvel at your increased sagacity as the night goes on. Wisdom will flow from your mouth like the crystal purity of the Yangtze. Give Ian Sorensen some beer. Now give him the glass. Truly advanced practitioners of the four-fluid path may be observed weaving their way along hotel corridors chanting the following mantra. "Kor Fa Loo, Kor Fa Loo. Kor Fa Loo Kor Fa Loo naa naa." Your lucky phrase is 'No chance of a shag then?'

Sadly, enlightenment in the four-fluid path is ever a transient state. As the proverbs tell us, even the master must be reborn. In fact, in the depths of the first stage, the master often wishes he had never been born. Fortunately, all things must pass, and, as blossom springs on the tree, the cycle inevitably begins again.

—Steven Cain

## BOROKUSU

### No, not that Button!

One day I was making the bed when Steve came in and said, "Why are you doing that by hand? Why don't you just hit the switch?" I looked up at him as I tugged the fitted sheet back over the corner of the mattress. "What switch?"

"The bed-making switch. Surely it's got one?"

This, I reminded myself, was the man who used to think toilets were self-cleaning. "No," I said, "It hasn't." Steve looked aghast. "It hasn't?" He rummaged about under the duvet. "Good lord, you're right! You mean, for the last ten years we've been sleeping on a bed with no electronics whatever?"

OK, I lied. But Steve wants a more superfluous bed—just one waffer-thin remote control. I merely want a soft bed. So we have bounced on every mattress in Reading, all with informative labels, such as 'Satin Princess', 'Majesty' or 'Empress'. The salesman pursed his lips. "I think you'll find that 'Satin Princess' is the softest and 'Majesty' is the firmest, and 'Empress' is somewhere in between."

"What we actually need," I told him, "is a mattress where one side is 'Concrete' and the other side is 'Marshmallow'. Do you have anything like that?"

They didn't. We continued our quest for the perfect bed, that was all things to all people. Well, two things to two people anyway. The long and the short, or at least the hard and the soft of it, is that we have ordered an adjustable bed from a high-tech German company. I did make Steve settle for the model with only two motors in each mattress – the next model up had three. We had a test drive, or at least a test undulate, and played with the whizzy remote controls. The salesman warned me that women's remote controls need repairing more often as they tend to get gummed up with hand lotion. I wondered if "hand lotion" might have been a polite euphemism for "KY Jelly" or even "lime jello". Naturally, we've chosen a model that would not have looked out of place back on the original Starship Enterprise, all brushed aluminium curves.

And a couple of waffer-thin remote controls. After all, a man needs something to keep him happy in bed.

—Giulia De Cesare



# Lokta Plokta

[Just before her stroke, Mae Strelkov sent Marianne a package of letters and hecto prints. We set it aside while we moved, but have found it now, and print extracts below. We're all so sad that there will be no more tales of the Argentinean wilderness in Plokta.]

## Mae Strelkov

I'm sending some bird and animal pictures to Marianne. She knows that great big mob of silly grown-ups is trying to subvert her inborn common sense. I went through "brain-control" at that age. All the grownups around me singing gospel hymns at the tops of their voices while wondering "Is this sweet little child born to be lost?" I seemed so naughty-looking, though I behaved good.

Clones don't work out well, I've read. Clones of Dolly the sheep turn out to be her age, no younger. Clone me and you'll get a second disapproving great grandma, approaching the tottering age.

Square Bear's "Lesbian" sweat-shirt was too silly to merit commentary. Me, I like Lesbians lots. More than tars such as appeared in the previous issue, though such spectacular equipment should be reserved for pretty lassies, I think! What a waste! We 'ladies' are made for nice big cocks.

All the pigs are gone now, save one young boar that roves this wild place, up to the high hillsides where real wild boars and their families multiply. This began happening when we declared that sector of the mountain-side a "Private Nature Preserve". From far away come visitors. Trembling with fear they try to hide, when our Sylvia, Carlos and Carlitos take them to the top of our high range.

"Haven't you a gun?" asked the last pair of visitors—a couple from the USA. "No, we don't need guns," replied

Carlos. They stood together, surrounded by mother-and-baby wild pigs and their furious young dad-boar, its huge sharp teeth rattling and snapping.

Carlos later told his mom who lives in distant Jujuy town about it and in terror she cried, "I'm going to buy a hunting-gun for you right away." But our mountain-side is a Nature Preserve; no hunters are allowed.

As for what happened? Carlos said *Shoo* to the male papa-pig, and everyone waved their hands at them to show what *Shoo* means. So off trotted the boar and his family of wives and children, and very cautiously our visitors kept following our own three towards the mountain-top.

When Carlitos was just six, he wasn't afraid of condors or even alligators. He kept crouching at the very edge of the swamp, and when I scolded Sylvia she argued "Oh, those are just *caimans*. They don't *attack* people." As for the huge condors, they do swoop down on people to study them and they seemed to think Carlitos (who stayed on a rock after the grownups fled) must be especially delicious, and still small enough to carry away. He stayed on, as they took turns in swooping nearer. Later, he told me what the sound of their wings was like right above his head. He finally decided to postpone—"for another time"—winning them as friends, and with great dignity he got to his feet and walked down to the astonished grownups.

It had all begun because our friend Benjamin had told Carlitos, "If you want the condors to come down to you, say *Baa* over and over like a baby lamb. It'll muddle them and they'll come down to check." So Carlitos had crouched on that high rock shouting *Baa* over and over hopefully till down they came

indeed to check on this funny-shaped lamb.

I don't mourn for vanished fellow fans. You see, willy-nilly, I expect to meet them and all of us in the bleeding choir invisible. Save Sue's butterfly, that has migrated here to celebrate spring ahead and fill our garden with nasty caterpillars.



Dark comes the night, but all is bright again the next morning. "Great grandma" tells you this, true.

Love again, Mae.

**Steve Jeffery**  
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Hi goy & grils! Read of proposed plokta.con (great name) at a highly secret location in the merry May of the Noo Millennium. Sounds fun. Yes Yes Yes. Please rush me details NOW. I understand I need send no money. Product safe when used as directed. Void where prohibited.

Meanwhile, run do not walk to your nearest bookshop and form a disorderly queue for Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon*. Gobsmacking book—from the Enigma/Ultra years when technology was not just superfluous, but filled entire rooms. Haven't worked out whether the acoustic wave pipe organ computer was real,

or a product of NTS's wayward imagination.

Have just come across another wonderful piece in Greg Egan's *Teranesia*. You realise that your fascination with overpowered woggles of silicon is perpetuating a phallogocentric metatext of gendered binary coding? You didn't? Nor did I until Egan had one of his characters (a postgrad in Cyberfeminist Discourse and Diana Studies) explain the symbolic hostility of 1s and 0s, and I fell off the bed laughing.

Somewhere around is a Langford recipe for the perfect salad. It involves a pound and a half of mince and a small onion (which is discarded).

Vikki maintains that her Chernobyl style glow-in-the-dark mushy peas are not a vegetable in any accepted use of the term. (Having tried to clean the saucepan I have to agree. This is brightly coloured caulking sealant and, once set, impervious to water.)

Are chocolate covered jalapenos an Acceptable Fannish Food? [*Yes—Ed*]

On a much sadder note, I assume you have heard that John Rickett died earlier this week, suddenly but according to accounts peacefully. It seemed like he's been around for ever but I was surprised to learn he'd only come into fandom some ten years ago, then in his fifties, and rejoiced in the title 'The Oldest Neo in Fandom'. It seemed he knew, and was known and instantly liked by everybody; he introduced a number of people we know to fandom and to various apas (including me). It seems inconceivable that I won't see him again or see any more of his letters, postcards and apa contributions about the adventures of Spidey and Spidess and the long-suffering Rufus.

**John Berry**  
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As the only remaining member of the old Irish Fandom who is, at the moment, in reasonable nick (pray explain that to Giulia), I must complain at the harrowing experience I underwent recently, at the hands of very nasty and spiteful French school-children, mostly girls, always the worst of the two sexes.

I was travelling from Paris via



*Red wine fairies in the flesh*

Eurostar, and in my carriage, reserved vacant seats were suddenly commandeered by the afore-mentioned French schoolchildren. Noting that I was the only elderly Englishman in the carriage, I'm sure I was the intended victim of their dreaded ploy. I went to the toilet, as elderly men usually do frequently, and after a slash (please explain that to Giulia) I swayed to the sink, which was full of water, the outlet being dammed by chewing gum. The out-flowing segments had been attuned so that the gently flowing water constituted a full basin. I gently lowered my hands into the basin, hit the heater, and, Christ, it burst out and hit the full basin causing the water to cascade over the walls and ceiling, except for the areas protected by myself. The heater wouldn't stop, the water still flowed into the basin, and I tried to secrete myself into the left of the cubicle. As soon as the heater stopped blasting the opposite wall, I eased myself out of the

cubicle. Fortunately no-one else was waiting. Where the carriages are joined, rather like a concertina, there are four small seats, and I sat in one of these, the cold air being insinuated therein permitting me to dry my clothing. The only good thing in this scenario was that I'm sure in my carriage they were all waiting to see my soggy entrance. An official entered, and asked me for my passport. I said my wife had it in my carriage, but I was drying my

clothing. I could see he was baffled as to how they were originally impregnated, but he demanded I take him to my wife to view my passport. We went to my seat, deathly silence from the French schoolkids, and he flipped through my passport, almost ten years old, trying to orientate my photo therein with my present hirsute dewlap (please explain, etc). Eventually, he returned my passport. I happen to know that on that particular train, over thirty illegal immigrants were on board, wonder how my official missed them?

I'm enlarging the three French schoolgirls on the last page to remind me of my experience in Eurostar, but also I think it's very kinky. (Don't worry, she knows what *that* means.)

*[Austin has now provided us with a photo of the genuine article, taken on our holiday, and even sulzier than I remember, which we have reprinted specially for you.]*

**Alan Sullivan**  
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I've always wanted to know why an alien race with galaxy-spanning space-travel capability should come all the way to Earth just to stick things up the bottoms of people like Whitley Streiber.

The house moving thing? Well, it's kind of like with masturbation: everybody does it, and when one person admits it, all the rest feel compelled to come out with their own sordid confessions.

*Notes Towards Maple Ambrosia:* Shouldn't it be made with maple mead, rather than rum and maple syrup? Perhaps a partial solution lies in taking this a stage at a time. *First* we make the maple mead, using maple syrup instead of honey. *Then* when everyone has sobered up after the testing (we must be sure we've got it right, after all) we brew a *second* batch, and get to work on the sweet, buttery, creamy dessert goo bit.

Out of interest, just what *is* it with female fans, and their desire to get male fans into dresses? Not that I'm above such things, I just want to know *why*. (*Exeunt, ranting, pursued by Men in White Coats*).

**Steve Green**  
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Many thanks for *Plokta* #16 and the helpful "Have you been abducted by Aliens?" questionnaire. Unfortunately, every time I try to complete it, I wake up with no memory of the previous three days, in a Somerset meadow piled knee-high in dead cattle. Still, guess that serves me right for asking Tony Berry to recommend a decent real ale pub.

**Rodney Leighton**  
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You can't get anything containing maple syrup to thicken until all the water in the syrup (about 97%) is boiled off. The story about the year end party was intriguing

although I am afraid I ended up speculating on what Joseph Nicholas would do if he was there in mini and tights and needed a leak.

I have always been amazed that some people expect to receive every issue of fanzines published in return for a pathetic plea to be kept on the mailing list sent once or twice per year. Here I am almost doing it.

God does this make me a trufan?

*[Speaking of pathetic pleas to be kept on the mailing list:]*

**Jan Van 't Ent**  
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Netherlands

*[and about bloody time too if you ask me]*

I'm sorry for having lurked so long without pressing lots of keys to appreciate in return. Even the good doctor's easily accessible website didn't get me going.

Alison's tale of woe, or how to free a toucan, was wonderful; especially having seen the poor thing trying to get out of the Adelphi earlier. Good to hear the cruel string parted at its fect (so even an owner's name tag would have been left behind), although now we'll never be sure whether it made its way back to the north or more sensibly to warmer parts. Will there be another clone in Glasgow to be set free at the 2Klosing ceremony, one wonders?

The worsening punctuation crisis had me confused at first: no more than six eclipses in a loc? That would seem excessive indeed, except perhaps for the addicted chasers of such.

I sure hope I'm not too late—there's this serious similarity between the grey alien and the black cat directly underneath. You know, the one who's reputedly running that con of yours. Say, this isn't going to end up with 100-150 <Plokta.con> attendees abducted by aliens, to be sure?

**Harry Warner Jr.**  
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I watched some of the New Year's Eve festivities. We were left with the impression that the Thames actually did catch fire on schedule. In contrast, Hagerstown's welcome to 2000 consisted of a lot of auto horns sounding simultaneously at midnight.

I suspect that Jaine Weddell would order hog maw if she were ever in Hagerstown. This is identified on menus of certain local restaurants as food. I've never heard of its availability in any other place on this planet. The small restaurant where I usually eat has it one day a week in the cooler portions of the year, and it is the most expensive item on its menu, which isn't saying much to be sure. All I know about it is that it looks worse than its name, on the rare occasions when I've seen it conveyed to the tables of other diners.

**Dave Weingart**  
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NY 11735 USA

I was expecting that the night of December 31<sup>st</sup> 1999 would be filled with chaos and destruction, and I was, of course, entirely correct. The fact that I spent that evening in a house full of nine year old boys (plus one four year old) had, I'm sure, nothing to do with it. I even expect to clean up the mess soonish.

**Sandra Bond**  
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I can just see you all sitting back in your chairs cackling an evil cackle and saying "All those people who send in their <plotka.con> membership cheques will be bound to write at least a token letter of comment on *Plokta 17* while they're at it." And in my case, you were right.

Nice to see someone remembering Mike Glicksohn, who was far nicer to my fanzines than I deserved when I was a neo. Harry Warner omits to mention that every

issue of Mike's *Xenium* had a free gift; jokers from a pack of cards he'd played fannish poker with, cancelled credit card slips, maps of the London underground, and so on. Rumour has it he eventually stopped publishing only because he couldn't harvest enough fluff from his belly button to provide a piece each for his 250-copy print run.

Vicki Rosenzweig is hanging out with the wrong people if she only knows two male fanzine fans with pierced nipples. Come to think of it, she isn't, because she hung out in my Portsmouth flat with Simon and Sophia, both of whom sport that very adornment. She obviously lacks X-ray vision. I'm not about to make it three out of three in Stirling Road, though; I like mine too much the way they are to take chances with them. (And my navel ring grew out and fell on the floor in front of my then boyfriend, a dreadfully *infra dig* happening).

[You're oversharing here, Sandra.]

**Marty Cantor**  
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We start with your listing of Andrew Plotkin's address—"In Transit." Does this mean that he is an in-transit-gent? I mean, he wrote, "It's too sweet." *Ick*. Is this person human? Where does he keep his tongue? "Too sweet" is an oxymoron if there ever was one. If anything, almost everything is not sweet enough. And then, after going against nature by trying to *lessen the sweetness*, compounding his heresy with, "...but still too sweet." *Gaack*. Does this man have no shame?

On page 4 there is an illo of a female moose with antlers. This was obviously drawn by a gay, male moose. Female meese don't have no antlers.

In looking at reports claiming that the beer in Australia is bad, I wonder if one can make the assumption that it is so bad because the yeast which would otherwise be used for

beer is used for Vegemite. Or, maybe what is passing for beer in Australia is just liquid Vegemite. If Vegemite is so wonderful, why do all Aussiefen drain their country's Vegemite production and give all of it to fans in the US of A? I should note that any Aussie's way to *my* heart is to ply me with Pavlova. I ply easily.

Here at Kipple Central, I have decided that the executor of my estate will have just one instruction: to throw a burning torch into my abode and then just walk away. I mean, even my piles of stuff have piles of stuff atop them. I think, if my landlord were to ever discover that I might possibly develop some sort of flat surface in this place, he would classify this as a luxury apartment and raise my rent. As Giulia writes, one can never tell when something might come in handy. Not to put to fine a point on it, but the only thing around here that would ever come in handy in the future would be a nice, cleansing fire.

**Milt Stevens**  
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Congratulations to George on his assumption of convention chaircatship. If he follows the usual feline practice of when in doubt fall asleep, I'm sure he will do a fine job.

Several years ago, it was determined that the duties of Loscon chairmanship could just as well be performed by a stuffed toy. As a result, a stuffed moose named Chocolate was chosen as Loscon chair. The theme of the convention became Take This Con and Stuff It. Chocolate did a better than average job. He didn't get mad at anybody, he showed no signs of stress whatsoever, and he didn't make any wrong decisions.

[On Y2K]: I decided to stay home up here in the hills and not venture down into Los Angeles. The City staged several large public parties, but attendance was sparse. It appears people wanted to

forgo the opportunity of being gunned down like dogs by any itinerant psycho looking for a really big body count. There was also the possibility of riots: a popular form of recreation in Los Angeles. Almost any holiday can be celebrated with looting and arson. The riots always result in a drastic shortage of marshmallows afterwards. There was the added complication that Y2K Eve fell on a Friday evening. In some parts of the City, you have to wait until 3am to tell whether it is a riot or just a regular Friday night.

Patty Wells mentions the subject of static cling. I don't know about the rest of you, but I've always liked static cling. I have no idea why some detergent companies want to get rid of it. Without static cling, how would anyone be able to harass their cats by sticking socks to them?

**Joseph T Major**  
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*Editorial:* "[Tranquillising] Marianne with dozens of Barney videos." I believe that constitutes child abuse. Indeed, considering that you had to have seen bits and pieces of them as well, small wonder that *Plokta* was delayed. The Great Purple Avatar of Satan has that effect on adult minds.

*Notes Towards Maple Ambrosia:* Maybe you just ought to bear in mind the Kentucky Mint Julep recipe:

Prepare the silver mint julep cups by chilling them in shaved ice for at least two hours. Take one cup, fill it to the brim with more ice, then add one half-lime, two sprigs of genuine garden-grown mint, and a teaspoon of sugar.

Prepare another cup with two inches of genuine Kentucky bourbon, aged in the wood for at least seven years.

Throw away the other junk and drink the bourbon. Repeat as desired.

**Ned Brooks**  
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The difficulty with the Maple Ambrosia may have been due to lack of mead—I hardly think that adding rum to maple syrup is the same as a maple mead, which would have to be made by fermentation. The sugar maple is originally a North American variety and so could hardly have entered into traditional mead-making. In the oldest system—described in *Wassail! In Mazers of Mead* by G. R. Sayre, M.A., D.Sc. (Phillimore, London 1948)—honeycombs were steeped in water until the honey had dissolved from the wax, and this mixture was then allowed to ferment. It was believed to produce a happier drunk than ale, and one writer notes that most of the effect was from the waist down, so that drinkers became unsteady on their feet.

The sap as collected from sugar maples already contains more water than is wanted for syrup, and has to be boiled down—I have never heard of any experiments in letting the raw sap ferment. It seems that this would work, but I can't find anything about it in Sayre, whose book lacks an index.

**Charles Hitchcock**  
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Eric Raymond did *what*? And here I thought he was getting a little more sober, twenty years after (no, can't tell that one) or (better not tell that one either), or.... Maybe you should just point those readers that believe in superfluous technology to [www.userfriendly.org/cartoons/archives/99jun/19990620.html](http://www.userfriendly.org/cartoons/archives/99jun/19990620.html); someone who wasn't even there had to remind me that the appropriate subcaption is "Does this mean I don't get laid?"

And what is it about how potaroos rip each other's goolies off? Do they fannishly use a Leatherman on each other, instead of teeth and toenails as you'd expect?

**Eric Lindsay**  
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The bungee jump that was formerly here closed. The local pub rushed in a replacement activity, in the form of a weekly "horizontal bungee" competition. One end of the bungee cord is tied to a suitably robust part of the building, and those most inebriated are encouraged to buy a bungee jump. Rushing across the dance floor, they hurl themselves at the case of beer at the other end of the bar. If they get it before being hurled backwards by the bungee, they get to keep it. I've seen a couple of the faster and heavier contestants manage to grasp the holy grail.

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I'm sure Marianne checked out okay for millennium bugs, but I hope that stuffed Teletubby was put down immediately. Don't care what it had.

Our faux-millennium celebrations were held with a party at our place, with lots of good food, some beer, some fake. There weren't too many people at any of the New Year's parties we knew about (there at least four fannish ones in Toronto). I asked some where they were that night, and some of them said they weren't quite sure what would happen with Y2K and all... Some had fears of being caught in elevators, or having all the lights go out at once. Many just stayed home, fearing loonies here and there, plus a few millennialists, end-of-the-worlders or Second-Coming weirdos terrorizing the streets.

The Canadians will be kicking down your door shortly, Andrew, for daring to use Vermont maple syrup. So, be using da Canadian stuff from now on, see, or me big bruddahs Guido and Bruno will come to your home, and, uh, show youse the error of your ways.

Reading past issues of *Plokta* has convinced me that there is a fairy beyond the Red Wine Fairy. The Sexy Lingerie Fairy, which has allowed the adult females of the cabal to show off to great effect the blessings the Tit Fairy left behind for them.



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I saw in the new year with the Pope. St Peter's Square was absolutely heaving, with a concert going on and two enormous video screens. When the Pope addressed the crowd, all that could be seen was a tiny figure on the far side of the square; they thoughtfully put him on the screens too. Couldn't hear a word, mind.

When I'd first visited the Vatican (earlier that day), I'd noticed the hills South and West of it, topped with distinctive and attractive pine trees. Suddenly I knew why Respighi was moved to write 'The Pines of Rome'. Now, at midnight, the hills erupted with fireworks.

We wandered out of the Vatican. Just outside people were letting off bangers—strangely, that part of the street was empty, though there were crowds just across the road—an accident waiting to happen. Indeed, the next day we read that a number of people had been injured by these traditional 'botti', though none I think in Rome.

Our host had for some quixotic reason enrolled in the Millennium Marathon, which left from the Vatican around noon. We went there, but

didn't somehow manage to catch sight of him. They must have had an army of cleaners in, because there was no trace of the mess that the night's crowd must have left behind.

**Pamela Boal**  
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My LoCs may be too tedious to use but I do too send them, in fact I wrote quite a bit in response to your last ish. Ah me! I certainly don't need ego boo but I do like to know (via the WAHF Col) that you registered the fact that I had written before you threw my letter away. [We have no recollection of it —Eds.]

Glad you enjoyed those fireworks (our son and family also found a park to view from). They were not well televised and we feared that people may have put themselves through a great deal of discomfort only to be disappointed.

Our other son was doing the lighting and staging for one of the Bristol events. He mentioned that apart from the wine merry folks who jumped in the water features and caused a small flood the only event to mar a very long evening and night were morons who set fire to the portable toilets. Maybe the London organisers knew something the Bristol ones did not—hence your lack of loos.

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The Kipple Fairy strikes a chord, except that "kipple" is plainly what my Nana (my mother's mother) called "toot" (it rhymes with "foot") - as in "you're a toot-collector". You *must* have known this already, otherwise you wouldn't have been able to pun so neatly on "toot-h fairy" in the second paragraph. And is there some relationship to "tit fairy" as well? The mind boggles. Dr Plokta should clearly be sent out to research such deep matters of fey etymology.

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On Millennium Eve night, we went for the boring but extremely pleasant option of inviting a few friends round and then stuffing ourselves silly on sumptuous food for most of the evening. Not forgetting the drink, of course. Katherine was allowed to stay up for a while in her Millennium dress, but Christo was just put to bed. Cruel, but he wouldn't have appreciated (or remembered) it.

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I particularly liked Giulia's Kipple Fairy, who filled my suitcase while I was in Seattle. Also Sue Mason's delicate drawing of her, carrying Tesco bags. I have more than one bag devoted to holding & storing such bags.

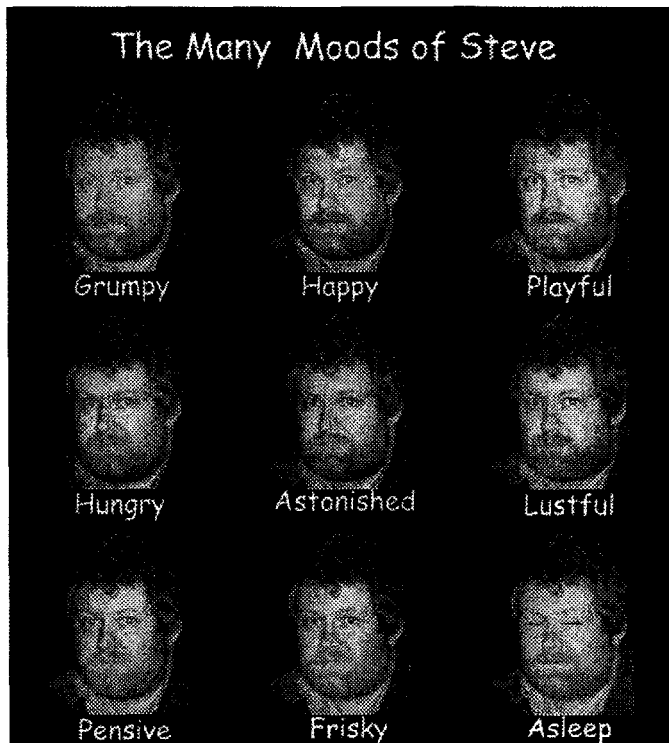
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Bujold's maple ambrosia. I always like a new dessert. But it worries me, now that I think about it, this attempt to make something in a science fiction story a reality. What's next? Will people trying to make matter transmitters or social structures based on what they read? What's scarier is that people have already done this. The Church of All Worlds, based on Heinlein's model from Stranger in a Strange Land, has been around for about thirty years.

I attended the Orycon Opening Ceremonies that Patty Wells describes. I wish she'd written this and passed it out to the audience before the performance. Then we'd have had more clues as to the meaning of the more bizarre actions on-stage. I think we got the broad outlines, despite not having seen *Mystery Men*, the model for the plot. But many details escaped us. Let's say that the productions of the Not Ready for Sidereal Time Players are under-rehearsed

and often incoherent enough to approach truly dreamlike surreality. Needless to say, we almost never miss them.

Some very pleasant artwork this issue, but my favourite, after the cover, was "The Many Moods of George."



"Humph," said Steve

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The question to be asked of Patty Wells's article is: did she get the idea from the film *Mystery Men*, or did she arrive at it independently? I ask because it is a tongue-in-cheek send-up of the superhero genre, featuring a gaggle of inept wannabe crime-fighters with no super-powers to speak of. The Shoveller—he wields a shovel! The Bowler—she throws a bowling ball! Mr Furious—he gets insanely, pointlessly angry! The Blue Rajah—he throws cutlery with unerring accuracy! The Sphinx—his super-powers are, er, unknowable even to himself (although he does teach them how to stitch themselves better costumes so they won't look so cheap). And so on; Dryer Lint Woman would have fitted right in. The film apparently died in the USA, because, it

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Giulia, I am vastly heartened by your piece in Plokta 4.4 about losing your mind. Or perhaps only your nouns. *You*, surely, will understand—rather than snigger, or fall about laughing—if I happen to mention that I sometimes confuse Clark Gable with Cary Grant. You will consider "I think we need to buy a new Um. Coat hanger. Dishwasher. Thing." an entirely reasonable thing to say if the clothes washer has exploded. You would probably even join me companionably in staring at the shelf of computer manuals on the north wall of the office, as I wonder why I am here when I am trying to pack my gym bag (note: towels in cupboard on north wall of bathroom).

[*And, finally...*]

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I thought i would send you a email, to you because i am looking for work on the internet, i am trained in html,htm,ftp,online saport and editing photos, using photo shop i offer my service 24/7, i run a server from home, so if you could give me some work to start with, contact me. also i have included 3 of my web sites for you to look at to see if i am good enough for you. One of these sites is a get paid to surf site, but the money is very poor, plus i dont think that some of these companys pay any way. i hope to here from you soon.

**We Also Heard From**

**Bridget Bradshaw** ("Nude Scientist"), **Steve Stiles** (who sent great art, which is in Reading this weekend while we're in Walthamstow), **George Flynn** ("Featuring an article by Andrew Plotkin in *Plokta* is openly inviting confusion of consonant clusters"), **Lucy Huntzinger** ("Get the moose out, put up some news!"), **Tommy Ferguson**, **Terry Jeeves** ("I am now an operating e-mailer, ain't that something?" [*Yes, but you might have sent us your email address...*]), **Paul Barnett** ("not much to report"), **Sharon Sbarksy** ("Team Plokta's now contributed 10,000 completed work units"), **Pat McMurray** (inspecting his piles and despairing), **Kate Schaefer** ("right after I click *send* I'll think of something astonishingly witty") and **Tobes** ("I haven't quite got around to loccing except for those written under my pseudonym of Alan Sullivan. Let me buy you all drinks of comment instead." [*That'll do nicely.*])





## What's in a name?

I HATE governmental bureaucracy, I hate standing in queues and filling in forms, I hate the dingy rooms and the horrible grey plastic stackable chairs and the threadbare carpet, I hate it all. I worked for the government for ten years and this probably scarred me for life.

Luckily, these days, my life requires very little interaction with governmental bureaucracy—the annual application for a parking permit is about all. I had nearly forgotten how horrible it all was, but yesterday it all came back to me, when I had to get a new passport. I'm actually here in England under false pretenses: I have an Italian passport and, as a member of the EU am entitled to live and work here. I also have an Australian passport but my membership of the British Commonwealth gives me no such rights. The Italian passport was due to expire in a couple of weeks and the last time I had to extend it they took weeks to send it back.

I rang the Italian consulate and got to sit through about twenty minutes of recorded message before they finally produced the option I needed: to apply for a new passport if you live out of London and are aged over eighteen. I then listened to lists of all the local Italian consulates you can go to. It turns out that if you live in Berkshire, your local office is in Watford. *Ma, non sfottete il prossimo, ragazzi.* Or, as Auntie Sue would put it, bugger that for a game of soldiers. It would be easier to go to the consulate, which is at 38, Eaton Place, Belgravia, not very far from Victoria station.

It took me a little while to find Eaton Place, even with the A-Z. The town planners cunningly tried to hide it by camouflaging it with other streets called Eaton Square, Eaton Mews, Eaton Mews North, Eaton Mews West, South Eaton Place, Eaton Close and Eaton Terrace. You think I'm kidding? Go look at the map if you don't believe me.

When I finally found the right street, at least the numbers were large and easy to read. The whole road was a sweep of identical, three-storied Regency town houses, all painted white, with big, prominent numbers beside the grand double doors. With brass knobs. Did I mention this is a posh area of town?

So I followed the numbers along, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. They went continuously up one side then down the other, none of this alternating odd and even that the lower classes do. 31, 32, 33, 34... I looked up to the end of that stretch, where one building was covered in scaffolding. Oh, god, what if that's it? *Chiuso per restauro*, closed for renovation, just like every other monument in Italy. At least

they're consistent. 35, 36, 37, 39—what? 35, 36, 37, 39. After standing there with my mouth open for a bit, my tongue was drying out. I finally asked one of the workmen on the scaffolding what the hell had happened to 38. He pointed over the road to a place with the Italian flag hanging outside it. 41, 38, 42, 43. Sure, why didn't I see that?

The next hour and a half were spent filling forms in a dingy room with a threadbare carpet and gray plastic chairs, but I won't go over that again. My turn finally came. I stood at the window straining to hear the surly looking chap on the other side of the thick glass partition. He went through all the questions I had already filled in on the form, checking against their computer records. He got to the question about marital status. Last time, I was single, now I was married. This was inconsistent and unheard-of and needed investigating. I explained that I had married an Englishman in Australia three years ago. Did this somehow cause a problem for the Italian government? *Ma si, signora.* It seems that I would have to send them the marriage certificate and they would need to send it back to Australia to be verified and translated by the local consulate, and I really should have done this when I got married, then it would have to be sent back to London... By now, I was waving my arms about, shouting, no, no, no, forget I said it, I'm single, really, and what does this have to do with the Italian government anyway?

We finally came to an agreement that, as far as the Italian government is concerned, I am, for official purposes, single. Sorry, Steve. But there is a small consolation. If an English woman is single, she is a spinster. The Italians have a different word for a single female and I think it says a lot about the two nations.

It's official. I'm *nubile*.



—Giulia De Cesare

## BOROKUSU

### Alternative History #2

What if America had become a Communist state with statues of Lenin on every street corner?



*Mine's an enchilada, comrade*

### Weird Oriental Food Department

We're always on the lookout for tempting treats to give the cabal a new gastronomic sensation. So our eyes immediately lit up when we saw this in Yaohan Plaza's oriental supermarket. We assume that "Nissin Retort Pouch" is an almost perfect translation of "Boil-in-the-bag". And "Almond Cordial with Fungus" is clearly the Japanese for "jolly tasty actually".



But for some reason, none of the *Plokta* cabal—or, indeed, any other visitors to Walthamstow, for that matter—have been prepared to try it out yet. You could be the first.