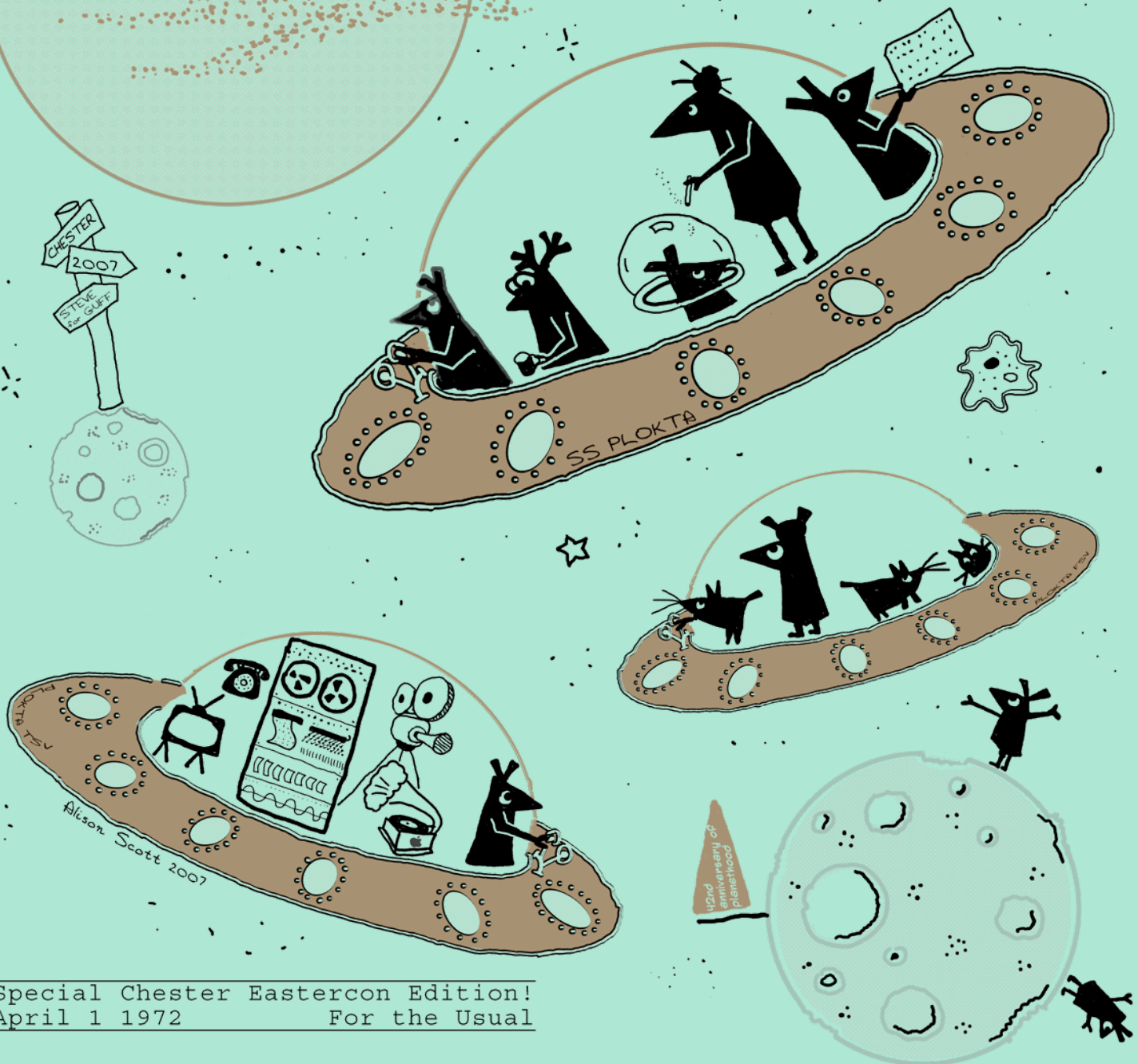


POSTA ON MARS



Special Chester Eastercon Edition!
April 1 1972 For the Usual

CHESSMANCON CONREP

=====

We're on the train to Liverpool for Convoy, tapping in to Virgin's new wifi network, talking to each other on iChat and watching Bittorrents of BBC cop shows. There's a loud crunch, and the coach comes off the rails and grinds sideways along the track in a shower of sparks. Then it rolls down the embankment, and the next thing we know we're pulling into Chester station on an old DMU, staring at a 1970s British Rail sandwich. There's a progress report in front of us, saying that the original venue has fallen through, and so the Eastercon has had to move to Chester at short notice. Are we mad, in a coma or back in time? What has happened to our hair? And WHERE'S THE GODDAMNED INTERWEB?

So, here we are in the Blossoms Hotel, just on the edge of Chester City Centre, and it's a bit small for an Eastercon. We think about crashing with Mike's parents, just outside town, but it might be hard to explain who we are and how we got here. Also, if it does turn out that Mike meeting his younger self would cause the entire space-time continuum to come apart at the seams, the con committee could be stuck with an unexpected bill for damages.

Flick is loving her A-line mini dress and knee-high boots, but isn't too sure about Mike's bellbottom jeans, bought with Green Shield Stamps. He thinks they make him look like one of the Osmonds, but she's keener on T-Rex. She isn't too impressed by the film-heavy programme, either. Perhaps Peter Weston has a point when he complains about the encroachment of media fandom at the Eastercon -- there are more than twice as many films or TV episodes on the main programme as there are literary talks or panels.

Still, she's doing better than Jonathan, who in the absence of his GameBoy is reduced to playing Subbuteo, and Marianne, who's struggling to cope without her Mac. Actually, that's a lie: we're all struggling to cope without our Macs. Where is the fucking interweb? Does nowhere have wifi? How are we supposed to do a newsletter from the bar in these working conditions? We're hearing rumours of a plan to connect a machine at UCL to the ARPAnet, but haven't managed to track it down.

We look at the programme book again. What's this item called "Visitors from the Future"? We read the description. It says "Blink if you can hear me". We blink, and when we open our eyes, the item is gone. Must be a last-minute programme change.

Dr Plokta enjoys Larry Niven's guest of honour speech on planetary engineering, even though he's going to read all of the details in Niven's essay "Bigger Than Worlds" several years later. The rest of the cabal feel some sympathy with poor Brian Aldiss, who gets a nosebleed halfway through and misses the fascinating exposition on the use of partial differential equations and linear analysis to calculate the tensile strength of a Dyson sphere.

In the bar, we tell John Brunner how the internet is going to work, so he can get it right in The Shockwave Rider. Unfortunately, he's too busy looking down Flick's cleavage to take decent notes, and when we tell him about IP addresses and computer viruses he just scribbles down something incoherent about code groups and self-replicating tapeworms.

Meanwhile, an annoying squirt called Terry keeps trying to show us his novel. Something about carpets, ghastly stuff. I think we can safely say that he'll never amount to anything. But he seems to get an idea for a new plot when we tell him we've travelled back in time to our own past.

Some busybody called Roberts is taking notes of everything that happens during the convention, and we get a bit worried about the effect on the timeline if we get

written up in fan history. So we send Jonathan off to sneak into his room and purloin what turns out to be the manuscript for Checkpoint 17.

Sue's annoyed to find that, after she finally caved in and bought an iPod, it seems to have vanished: she can't even buy a Walkman! She's also horrified to learn that, even if she could get online, slash hasn't been invented yet. Still, she amuses herself by suggesting to the three women present that there's a whole world of possibilities relating to Kirk and Spock, and they go away full of ideas for a new fanzine.

The food and drink situation is not good. Alison spends most of the first day wandering pathetically around Chester asking everyone she sees for "a perfectly normal, ordinary grande skinny latte". After the fourth cup of Nescafe, she takes to her bed, and no one can extract her for the rest of the con. And when Giulia tries to arrange a restaurant booking, she is annoyed to find that mobile phones won't be invented until 1973. She's also a bit scuppered by the fact that there is only one restaurant in Chester, and it's a decidedly average Italian.

Meanwhile, Flick goes to the bar. "Bombay Sapphire and tonic, please," she asks the barman.

"Bombay what?", he asks. "I've got Beefeater or Gordons."

"Noooooooooooo!"

Still, at least it's not pre-mix slimline tonic. But why does the beermat say "We're about to turn off your life support machines"? Must be a charity appeal.

We go to a room party for the Minneapolis in '73 Worldcon bid. They explain that they're getting quite tired of bidding, but it'll be decided soon and then their bid will be finished, one way or the other. We don't have the heart to tell them. The TV seems to be on in the corner of the room, although it's after closedown. But what are Marianne and Jonathan doing on the test card? And why does Jonathan have such a scary manic look on his face? Oh no, wait, that's normal.

We decide to let Peter Weston know about the future of SF and fandom, after his "Fifty Years Of Science Fiction" programme item. We explain that by 2007 the bestseller lists and Hollywood will be dominated by SF, that SF fans will have real political power in places as diverse as Romania and London, that the economy will increasingly be moving into a virtual space largely conceived and designed by SF fans, and that geeks will be among the richest and most influential people in the world. "But will there be love-camps in the Ozarks, breeding the race that will rule the sevagram?", he asks. We have to concede that there will not. "Then your work is not yet done," he replies. Unlike John Brunner, he listens carefully when we give him a quiet tip about this company called "Microsoft"; maybe it'll make him rich. In exchange, he agrees not to mention us in his con report in Speculation.

Alas, Eastercons only last for four days, even in 1972. Everyone goes home, and we're still stuck here in the past. We have a bad case of post-con depression, and we're starting to have trouble breathing....

What's going on? How did we get here? How will we get home? Are we really back in 1972, and will our actions affect the fandom of 2007? All will be revealed in episode 2 of Plokta on Mars.



Editorial

Christmas is over and Easter is nearly upon us, it must be time for yet another issue of *Plokta* to emerge from hibernation and glare grumpily at its shadow. Somehow, though, we seem to have stumbled into a time warp and found ourselves back in 1972.

We've reorganised this issue a bit, because in 1972 we would have had to put the contents page and colophon at the back, after we knew what was in the fanzine and what page it was on. Flick's cries of "But surely you could just edit it in later on the computer?" are being roundly ignored.

In this issue of *Plokta*, more than any other, we are standing on the shoulders of giants. Particular thanks to Rob Hansen, Peter Weston, Dave Langford, Pat McMurray and Peter Roberts for fanhistorical resources which we have plundered for information on 1972. Any errors (and there are lots) are entirely our fault. Thanks also to Bill Burns and Tim and Marcia Illingworth for hosting some of these resources, either virtually or physically, and special thanks to Marcia for scanning and emailing us the Chessmancon programme at short notice. And of course the cover is a pale imitation of the work of Arthur "ATom" Thomson, our favourite fan artist of all time.

Steve and Giulia have acquired an additional pair of cats, Tequila and Sahara (named by their previous owners). Unfortunately, Shadow has got rather used to being an only cat and there is a certain amount of tension in Reading. Not to mention blood, fur and cat litter.

Christmas brought with it a number of things, including a general addiction to Wii Sports. It's amazing how much fun

bowling and tennis can be when you're playing them in your own living room, armed with a remote control instead of a weighty bowling ball. Of course, there's a bit less space in your living room than on a tennis court, as we can attest to the tune of a smashed light-bulb and several sets of bruised knuckles. Top tip: don't leave full wineglasses anywhere in the same room as the Wii if you don't want to clean red wine out of everything in sight.

We had a January full of wild weather, starting with the 100mph winds, the worst in twenty years, and carrying on to actual snow in London (at least for a couple of hours). Steve lost a bit of roof, and the odd tree came down, but naturally, that was as wintery as it got, and March has very obviously brought the arrival of Spring. Mike has demonstrated the arrival of middle-agedness by birdwatching around Rotherhithe, and has spotted his first duckling of the year. The swans are swimming around looking covetously at all of their possible nesting locations, while the coots follow from a safe distance and hope that they won't be made homeless this year.

We wanted to capture the *zeitgeist* with this issue of *Plokta*, and concluded that it had to be either *Life on Mars* or bird flu. And none of us has been personally touched by bird flu, though Mike is worried that one of the Rotherhithe coots has a bit of a snuffle. Besides, we thought it would be hard to draw.

Meanwhile, Alison has been in negotiations with the European Union over the UK melodeon mountain, currently occupying large areas of Walthamstow. Her cry of "Well, how many pairs of shoes do you have?" fell



Inner city violence in Rotherhithe

rather flat when it became apparent that many of the cabal do, indeed, have fewer shoes than she has melodeons.

Alison and Steven have been knuckling down and tidying the house, chucking things out, sending clutter to Freecycle and so on. Well, at least that's what they tell us. If we could see the difference we could offer credit where it's due, but since it all looks just as full of stuff as ever, we've come to the conclusion that the house is built over a white-hole-style Hellmouth, constantly spewing tat into reality. Yes, we've finally found a source of dark matter in the universe. Anyone thinking of sending us a Nobel prize for physics should make sure to send it to Mike or Steve or it will get lost in Alison's study (along with some people's LoCs).

Flick, having given up on being an accountant, is currently spending most of her time binding books. She's considering doing that for a few years and then having a spell working in a betting shop in order to round out the set.

Steve is standing for GUFF. Vote for him. It's all Pat McMurray's fault.



The Fourth Circle of Hell: IKEA

Wikipedia describes the 4th circle of hell thusly: *Those whose concern for material goods deviated from the desired mean are punished in this circle. They include the avaricious or miserly, who hoarded possessions, and the prodigal, who squandered them. Guarded by Plutus, each group pushes a great weight against the heavy weight of the other group. After the weights crash together the process starts over again.*

Now who doesn't read that and think of Ikea?!

Ikea is a wonderful concept. Solid, simple products that are made cheap through Swedish efficiency in shop layouts, purchasing and self-assembly. Except when you think about it, the Swedes aren't exactly famous for their efficiency. The only Swedish things I can think of are meatballs, blonde women and the Muppet chef. With the possible exception of the meatballs none of these are particularly efficient and don't really provide much confidence in the Swedes' ability to design a pleasant shopping experience.

Moving into your new flat you find ugly carpets, no coffee table and that at some point in the move your tin opener has departed for greener pastures. Plus, as always, you need more bookcases and clip frames. And meatballs. You go on a weekday evening to avoid the weekend queues. That's a mistake—there are *always* crowds at Ikea. As soon as they start to dwindle the store staff take some more down off the shelves where they've been shrink-wrapped.

You arrive in the car park to discover the fuzzy definition of 'parking space' being adopted. There are cars on grass verges, zebra crossing and squeezed inside trolley enclosures. You walk past the eerily empty kiddies' play area still playing tinny music and with a sense of dread, arrive in the Showroom.

The biggest cause of trauma at Ikea is having a plan. If you know exactly what you want, it won't be there; if you know exactly which section you're aiming for, it will be blocked by idiots; if you selected the fjyrjn chairs from the internet, they'll turn out to be moulded to fit a 3-legged hippo. Plans just don't work at Ikea; they

result in flapping, tears, ugly furniture and homicide.

My advice is to just follow the arrows. Drift with the crowd along the twisty route; collect the pencils, play with the paper tape measures and sit in an office chair and spin. Seriously, the way to achieve a stress free visit to Ikea is to just give in and spin.

You negotiate the showrooms and come out with a scribbled list of numbers and letters which when appear to spell out 'd00m3d'. Avoiding the food hall in desperate hope that you'll get home in time for dinner, you enter The Market Place.

Now's your opportunity to drive the people you're shopping with truly bonkers as you agonise over whether to buy the 99p candle set. Eventually everyone adopts a 'just throw it in' approach and you accrue 4 clip frames, a plant, 2 rugs, tealights, some kind of spice rack involving magnets, several large pieces of cardboard that through origami will become a desk tidy/ magazine holder/coffee maker and some more tealights.

Eventually your trolley is full and you move into the Warehouse. You stand in front of Aisle 23, section B staring in utter disbelief at the complete absence of Birch Billy Bookshelves. Your entire plan comes crashing down around your ears and you just stand there gaping, wondering what on earth you've done to deserve this cruel mockery. You're a good person—you pay your taxes, haven't killed any of the people that have pissed you off and have only sworn at people very quietly under your breath. Why have the sacred Billys forsaken you?

There follows some of the darkest moments of despair you're ever likely to experience—do you just go with beech which won't match the rest of the your shelving or do you resign yourself to a return visit. (Or just go with the beech and put it in a sunny spot; it'll match in no time).

You now find yourself with one trolley loaded down with long, heavy boxes of

flatpack stuff and a second trolley loaded up with the rest of the tat. You round the final corner and are confronted with the point where the 'Swedish Efficiency Experts' gave up and went off for a meatball. All hell breaks loose as you are funnelled into a narrow passageway which then explodes into 132 individual checkout lines. You attempt to control trolleys that have the desperate desire to mate with each other and become completely and embarrassingly entangled.

After several days of queuing you get to the cash register. You attempt to squash all your purchases onto a tablemat sized conveyor belt. Hopefully by this point you are beyond caring about how much money you've actually spent and are just glad to be approaching the finishing line. Alternately you're left slightly stunned by the War and Peace length receipt you are handed and how much you've spent on a lot of "it's only 99p" items.

And what reward are you issued at the end of this saga? An 89p hotdog. Well whoop-de-frigging-do.

At this point I could go on to cover the joys of attempting to wedge all the items into your car. However I can't actually talk about this without suffering nightmarish flashbacks to the Great Dining Table Debacle of 2006 when it turned out that only 95% of the table would fit in my car and we were forced to make extensive use of the free Ikea parcel twine to hold the boot closed. If anyone finds the silver striped tablemat which we lost out the back somewhere on the North Circular, please give it a good burial.

Then of course there's the issues of unpacking everything, inserting tab A into slot 43, staring in amazement at the innovative screw designs and discovering that the new rug sheds everywhere. The final straw comes when you realise there's only three legs for the coffee table and you're going to have to return to Ikea. But that's ok, because you forgot to buy any bloody meatballs anyway.

—Lorna Robinson

Langford Patent Juniper And Quinine Lemon Marmalade

We were very taken with this old recipe from Dave Langford, except that we're using limes instead of lemons. But we've all been working diligently on the marinating process.

The ingredients are even less rigorously quantitative than you would think:

- Many lemons.
- Quite a lot of white sugar.
- Some water.
- Some more water (solid phase).
- The all-important MARINADE.

This is not a recipe for the faint-hearted. Our most recent batch of this marmalade was two years in the making. (You will need a spare corner in the freezer, by the way.) It is the marinade which makes the process such a prolonged one, since only a small amount of lemon can be properly treated at one time.

The marinade should be prepared in the six- or eight-ounce liquor glass of your choice; it consists of approximately one part of gin to four (or two, or six, or one; who am I to cramp your culinary style?) of a good proprietary tonic water. "Diet" tonic water will completely ruin the flavour, although the marmalade will probably turn out OK. Ice may be added, and one slice of lemon is then slid delicately into the glass.

(Americans sometimes seem puzzled by subtle allusions to tonic water. Soda water might be good enough for T.S.Eliot's foot-bath, but is not the same: you want the stuff which is or used to be flavoured with quinine. Throw away those malaria chills, and walk again.)

It is a well-known phenomenon, extensively documented by Charles Fort, that this marinade evaporates with startling swiftness. Quite soon the prepared lemon slice can be removed from your suddenly empty glass and dropped into a plastic bag in the freezer. It is now permissible to treat another slice... and so on while supplies of marinade ingredients hold out and the cook can remain upright.

An admixture of non-marinated lemon is permissible: our 1987 batch of this fine preserve gained additional, subtle flavour from the inclusion of (a) partially mildewed half-lemons discovered in the fridge after periods of slackness in marinade treatments; (b) lemon slices included with takeaway Indian meals, and thus interestingly flavoured with a soupçon of tandoori sauce; (c) country-of-origin labels accidentally left sticking to the occasional lemon rind.

When "enough" has been accumulated—meaning that the plastic bag is full, the previous batch has run out, or one's spouse is complaining loudly about lack of space in the freezer—the final preparations are easy. All the lemon shards are thawed, pips and things (especially moving things) removed, and the whole lot chopped thinly (perfectionist method) or shoved brutally through a mincer (my method).

It all goes in a big pan with the amount of water indicated above, being as little as will see you through the next stage. Bring to the boil and simmer for an hour or two, stirring with lackadaisical grace, until the bits are soft. During this period you are free to realize that you should have shut the doors and windows, since the penetrating smell acts as a long-range lure for enormous kamikaze wasps. Add exactly the amount of sugar specified above... no, I tell a lie, we just tip in more sugar until it tastes "right", meaning not too bitter to be eaten thinly spread on the substrate of your choice. Another half-hour of simmering and it can be ladled via a large jam funnel into previously heated jars. Put on the lids before too many loathsome spores drift in, hoping to surprise Sir Alexander Fleming.

(Our 1987 batch behaved in a semi-miraculous way: on the third day, instead of rising, it finally condescended to set.)

Certain aspects of the procedure are sufficiently boring—especially the long simmering and the even longer wait for the stuff to set firmly enough to be tried—that to pass the time one finds oneself irresistibly impelled to start work anew, marinating lemons for the next batch. Any fan wishing to drop in and help, thus cutting down that two-year preparation time, will be very welcome. Bring your own marinade ingredients.

—Dave Langford

Choose Tits. Choose a thrush. Choose a pied wagtail. Choose a family of coots. Choose a digital camera with a fucking long optical zoom lens, choose to spend your Saturday mornings poncing around Rotherhithe in search of slightly pixellated wildlife. And your Friday mornings, Sunday mornings and whenever you have a free moment. Choose a fluffy little yellow duckling that's lost its mummy. Choose a majestic pair of swans imperiously breaking your arms with one flap of their wingtips. Choose a heron being eaten alive, whole and wriggling by a predatory frog. Choose your wife, your cabal and your entire livejournal friendslist deciding that you have become Old and Sad. Choose some surprisingly early moorhen chicks, and even sadder, choose knowing when moorhen chicks are surprisingly early. Choose nature red in tooth and claw. Choose shovellers. Yup, they're birds too. They're all fucking birds except the frog. Choose a shag, nope it's a cormorant, well, it wasn't very likely to be a shag really was it? Choose a great spotted woodpecker, a kingfisher, a goldfinch, a crested grebe. Choose eighteen thousand bandy-legged and moth-eaten London feral pigeons. Choose twitching. Choose a better fucking hobby.

Choose wildlife.
Choose tits.

Duckspotting

Plokta Investigates

A recent *Plokta* investigation, in association with the Campaign for Ent Emancipation, has uncovered shocking evidence of gross mistreatment of both Ents and Triffids by local gardening enthusiasts.

Not content with merely imprisoning these noble lifeforms, a practice that has recently been denounced in parliament, these sadistic torturers systematically and deliberately mutilate their prisoners, twisting their trunks and branches into a bizarre, fetishistic parody of a free, healthy plant. No civilised person would condone the painful mutilation of a human child by the process of crushing and then binding her feet, so why is it seen as polite dinner party conversation to discuss the horrific practice of creating a Bonsai Ent or Triffid?

Our undercover investigation in the Birmingham area led to a secret meeting with “Sharkey”, a shady character who refused to give his real name or the location of his secret plant nursery to our operatives, who posed as prospective buyers.

His guide, ironically entitled “Taking Care of Your Bonsai Ent”, makes it plain that all involved appreciate the cruelty with which gardeners treat our vegetative cousins, and the agony which these practices cause.

The guide recommends that immature Ents, whether captured or the result of breeding programmes, “should be chained into the pot to avoid escaping, and their principle arms wired in position to stop them from freeing themselves”, and that the neophyte gardener be sure “to invest in a pair of ear protectors, [as] the screams of the Bonsai Ent can be quite loud during the pruning process”.

The concept of breeding programmes might seem strange to our readers: surely these intelligent, wise creatures would refuse to bring new seedlings into such a situation? The slave masters have an answer to the problem, explaining that weak or unattractive specimens can be “improved” by, for example, “grafting the upper trunk of one less hardy but attractive Ent to the more hardy rootstock of a less attractive specimen.

The remainder material can be recycled into cuttings, creating a new generation of Bonsai Ent starter material to serve your purpose.”



A victim of this cruel trade

This reporter emptied her sadly depleted expense account in order to acquire a number of specimens, which are now being rehabilitated by the Campaign for Ent Emancipation. Readers who are also concerned about this trade should note that even a mutilated, so-called ‘bonsai’ Ent can, when aroused, be dangerous. The sorry conditions in which these creatures have been raised make them difficult to reason with and slow to build trust, and so care should be taken.



Instruments of Ent torture

Even in the hands of a careful gardener, the risk of ‘wire bite’, a result of too-tight constriction of the branches, is real and deforming. Worse are the purely ‘cosmetic’ practices such as ‘Jins and Sharis’, which involves the “removal of living bark with a sharp knife and painting over the exposed heartwood with lime

sulphur to bleach the wood white while giving it the look of a tree long exposed to the elements, and a feeling of age.”

With Triffids, the situation is graver: after they have been rescued from captivity and allowed to reach some semblance of their natural growth, many of the most cruelly abused Lurking and Tiger-Stripe Triffids have to be kept under guard for their remaining natural life. Their animal cunning and lethal stings, when combined with utter and understandable hatred of humanity engendered by their treatment, means that the danger to innocent citizens of their release is too great to accept.



Please help these poor creatures

This means that the charities associated with their care and, where possible, rehabilitation are always in need of funds and, particularly, grants of land in secluded areas of the country. Please consider whether you can help to rescue these poor creatures from their lives of pain and torment!

—Flick (from material by Peter Harrow)

Apology

It has come to our attention that some copies of *Plokta* 36 were contaminated with silicon, probably due to the accidental addition of silicone lubricant, and that this may have damaged the irony sensor on a number of our readers. If you were affected, please let us know, and we’ll replace the defective copy, as long as you agree never to ask what we were doing with silicone lubricant while we were printing *Plokta*. We fear that the sensor damage may prove to be permanent, and some of our readers will never again be able to appreciate, or even recognise, irony.

Lokta Plokta

Chris Garcia
garcia@computerhistory.org

Abi Brown talks of WorldCon 2005. Excellent! As I said in that article that came a little later, I wasn't there, but I've read so much about it, I can talk relatively fluently about it. As a note to Abi, the best way to cure a hangover with material readily available in most ConSuites or Hospitality Lounges is to drink one giant bottle of water, 14 Chewable Baby Aspirins, one Ginger Ale, a Coke and a handful of Cashews (Brazil Nuts will work in a pinch). There's no hangover so strong as to resist that remedy. True, you may vomit, but it's for the best, really.

I can't believe you found that picture of me on the Future of Fandom panel. I didn't think anyone else had seen that one!

Treacle Sammiches... MMMMMMMmmmmmm... molasses. I've eaten some strange things in my life. There was the Peanut Butter and Turkey on Soda Bread that I made when there was only a thingee of Turkey and bread in the fridge and the two last pieces of bread on the counter. It wasn't half bad. Crisco and Brown Sugar wasn't nearly as good.

Alison's look at Potato Chip flavorings is really fun. I'm a huge fan of the Terra brand that we've got here in the States. They do Taro chips, Blue Potato Chips, Parsnip Chips and so on. The only issue I have with them is that they're almost all flavored. What's a brother gotta do to get a plain Sweet Potato Chip? I'm one of the very few humans who seems to

like unsalted chips (though I must admit that I enjoy chips with black pepper, but there's no such thing as Black Pepper Chips without salt). I've got a bunch of friends from Canada and they are all in love with Ketchup chips. I don't get it.

Milt Stevens
miltstevens@earthlink.net

I found Abi Brown's article most enlightening. While I'm a beer-totaler myself, I know that some people at conventions may drink things that are either green or blue (this is in spite of the fact that a blue liquid may be laundry detergent or toilet bowl cleaner). However, you don't see people drinking absinthe at American cons. That's because absinthe is illegal in the United States. Our fearless government seems to think it has bad side effects even aside from rotting your brains. I first encountered absinthe in Japan when I was in the Navy. You've probably heard that sailors seldom meet vices they don't like. One of our sailors managed to get drunk on absinthe. He was out cold for 24 hours. On thinking about it, I recalled that guys in Gothic literature who drink absinthe always come to a bad end. Even worse than drinking laundry detergent or toilet bowl cleaner.

Chris Garcia's article was also enlightening. Faking it? I couldn't fake having been at the 1968 Baycon. It's not that I'm all that moral. It's just that I was really there. That was the convention where I found John W. Campbell Jr. sitting behind a pillar behind me at the Hugo Ceremony. Everyone at the Hugo Ceremony was seated behind

a pillar. In the years since then, nobody has been able to figure out the design of that room.

John Nielsen Hall
john.sila@virgin.net

Thanks for keeping me in the loop. Can I make small but important correction to *Plokta* 36 wherein you are so kind as to print three of my well crafted sentences? My name is not John Sila. You can call me what you like, most people do, even though I answer to Johnny quite a bit. But my actual name is *John Nielsen Hall*.

Cardinal Cox

Your issue of *Plokta* was accompanied by a Royal Mail questionnaire, see copy of my reply.

Eric Lindsay
fijagh2007@ericlindsay.com

I am aghast at your catalogue gifts. Whalemeat is surely more expensive than you suggest, while Afghan farmers who already have opium fields probably have sufficient seeds.

Marianne is doing pretty good wedding reports. Good stuff. Thanks for the photos also.

Lloyd Penney
penneys@allstream.net

I have tried our own version of a treacle sandwich, which included blackstrap molasses. I reached the same conclusions as I did in the experiment with the crackers and four-molecule-thin layer of Vegemite... Yuck. QED.

Royal Mail

ROYAL MAIL SURVEY - YOUR MAIL IS ENCLOSED

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1. Please tick the boxes which best describe the contents of the letter or packet. If there were a number of different items of contents, tick all the boxes that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> Greeting Card	<input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledgement/Receipt	<input type="checkbox"/> Book
<input type="checkbox"/> Christmas Card	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Financial Correspondence	<input type="checkbox"/> Magazine/Newspaper
<input type="checkbox"/> Gift (excluding book)	<input type="checkbox"/> Insurance/Legal Documents (including renewals)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Goods Ordered
<input type="checkbox"/> Letter/Postcard from Family or Friend	<input type="checkbox"/> Advertising Requested	<input type="checkbox"/> Order for Goods/Services
<input type="checkbox"/> Bill/Invoice	<input type="checkbox"/> Advertising NOT Requested	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Business Correspondence
<input type="checkbox"/> Payment by Cheque/Other Means	<input type="checkbox"/> Catalogues Requested	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) TECHNOCRATIC MANIFESTO
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2. Please tick ONE box which best describes the sender of the letter or packet.

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<input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Company	<input type="checkbox"/> Post Office/Royal Mail	<input type="checkbox"/> Publisher
<input type="checkbox"/> Satellite/Cable TV Company	<input type="checkbox"/> Health (Doctor/Dentist/Hospital)	<input type="checkbox"/> Charity
<input type="checkbox"/> Government Dept. (eg DSS, Inland Revenue)	<input type="checkbox"/> Education (School/College/University etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Distribution/Courier Company
<input type="checkbox"/> Local Authority/Council	<input type="checkbox"/> Mail Order/Home Shopping Company	<input type="checkbox"/> Local Trader (Builder/Plumber etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Bank/Building Society	<input type="checkbox"/> Travel/Tourism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) CABAL OF EVIL SCIENTISTS
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Jackie Duckworth
duckworths@fastmail.fm

Thanks very much for this. I thought the cover was funny but Chris just couldn't get it and thought it was in very poor taste! I have to say that generally the visual jokes, pictures and cartoons (I loved Plokta Bride) are much better than the written content these days. However I would like to add my concern about weird crisps! Pekin Duck flavour was so peculiar not even Katherine would eat them. Parsnip crisps are nice though—but then they are actually made from parsnips.

KRin Pender-Gunn
kringunny@optusnet.com.au

Fortean Times had a full page spread on the giant animals and girl wandering around London. Pity I can't actually find the issue as I have cleaned up.

Eric Lindsay (again)
fjagh2007@ericlindsay.com

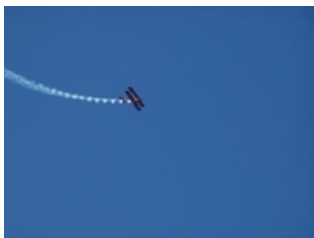
I don't recall moose having much of a part in *V for Vendetta*

Glad that the melodeon was also explained. I rather like the wild flinging apart and together of the hands that go with accordion playing, but the keys worry me. I have a music keyboard, but it appears you need to connect it to something before it makes music. Apparently you also should know which note is which. I am sure they didn't mention that in the box.

Jean had not discovered Google Earth (running Ubuntu does occupy your spare time). I am trying to find time to label all my relevant photos with latitude and longitude in their exif headers, as you do. One handy tool involved finding the spot you photographed in Google Earth and dumping the photo in Geotagger. Alas,

our home town is one of the spots that is still in the misty and indistinct strips of sat photos. Council seat Proserpine, and tourists resorts Hamilton Island and Long island are all very clear. You can see boats, and golf buggies. Jean thought the whole Google Earth experience very dizzy, as we did demented zooms all over the area. I did find good shots of most places I had lived in Sydney.

Got to get out the machine gun and try to shoot down the confounded Tiger Moth that is buzzing the verandah.



Must be someone using <http://www.isoma.net/games/goggles.html>

Alex Lawson
alexowl26@hotmail.com

Just wanted to say a big thankyou for sending up the latest issues of *Plokta*. Enjoyed the Bad Gifts guide immensely, made me chuckle. Haven't seen your zine in a while so it was a pleasant surprise. Must say I felt a little confused, how come it's called *Plokta* Cabal, what is Worldcan/Novocon and Hugo? Thought they may be zine awards but weren't sure when there were stories of jetting off to L.A. I'm probably exposing myself as an out of it fool but there we go. Liked your website too by the way.

Dave Weingart
dave@weingart.net

One of the things that always astonishes me when I'm in the UK and drop into Tesco is the astonishing variety of flavours that crisps come in on your side of the Pond. For

example, take lamb (and mint, IIRC) crisps. This is a flavour that you would never find in the snack foods aisle at Stop and Shop or Shoprite. Just doesn't exist over here.

What was even more astonishing was that the ingredients listed "lamb powder." I'm not sure I want to know how one comes by lamb powder. Is it also sold in supermarkets there? Is it the remnants of meat grilled so well done that even I will not eat it (my personal preference is that the piece of meat on my plate that I am about to consume obviously has been, is and will remain dead).

Does one drink lambic with them?

Brad Foster
bwfoster@juno.com

Always a pleasure getting a new issue of *Plokta*, and getting several stuffed in the envelope just increases that pleasure. (Insert fawning, grovelling, crawling and boot licking here.)

Also insert the usual praise for the highly imaginative covers. You do know, by this point, everyone is wondering if it is even possible for you to run out of new ideas to entertain us with! I actually keep mixing up issue #36 with the various shopping catalogues that are flooding into out mailbox this time of year.

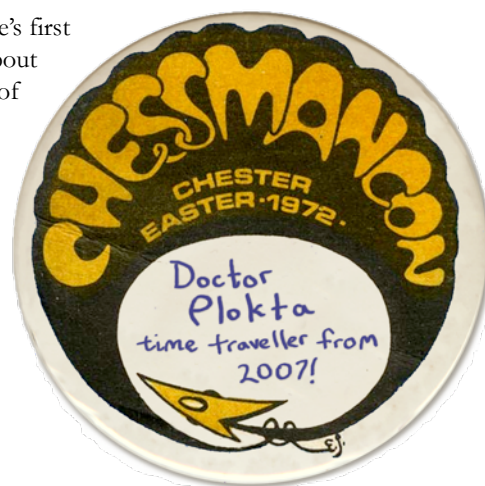
I think Marianne's first Photoshop is about fifteen degrees of professionalism greater than my own first attempts. (I have, on the other hand, been trying "real hard" to get better at it, in particular in the realm of

scanning in my line drawings and then working with color in Photoshop.

I agree with Joseph about missing gate fold sleeve art from the old foot square LPs. It's nice to be able to take up less storage space with the CDs, but the impact of having so much cool design and art is lessened by the smaller size. I still recall the wonder of getting an album and opening it to find out it was a three-section gate fold. That was just too freaking cool, man! Pull out a multi-section pamphlet from a CD, and it is more like unfolding a map, just not the same visceral "grab". Sigh, it's tough to be an old phart.

Marianne's report on "Flick & Mike's Wedding(con)" hewed well to the fannish tradition of convention reports: the trip there, the food that was eaten, the room parties, with minimal attention to the programming. If that isn't perfect fan writing, it's pretty darn close!

Oh, and a personal note, I loved the shot of the Bridal doll in outfit to match Flick. When Cindy and I finally made it all legal, I drew up a design for our announcements of a happy cartoon couple of a bear and cat in a decorative hot air balloon. At the wedding, my sister in law surprised us with a center-



piece that she had made based on my drawing. She papiermached a balloon, adding lace to mimic the design details, attached it with rods to a small wicker basket with a stuffed teddy bear and a cat, for which she had made small outfits. That was over 15 years ago and it still has an honored position on display in our living room.

Steve Jeffery
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Christ, can you really buy two landmines for less than the price of a box of fireworks? That's a truly horrifying statistic.

Joseph Nicholas reminisces over proper gatefold sleeve art in vinyl LPs in *Plokta* 35. I keep meaning to see if Man's Be Good To Yourself (At Least Once a Day) ever got re-released on CD, and if so quite how they coped with the fold-out origami map of England and Wales inside the original sleeve. That was a

feat of paper engineering. And I remember Yes's *Fragile* had a bound booklet inside, which you wouldn't fit inside a normal CD jewel case. On the other hand, several CDs have included small booklets, such as the reissue the Velvet's 'Banana' album (although without the peel-off banana skin of the original record sleeve, which is a pity), and Jeff Buckley's 'Sketches for My Sweetheart the Drunk'.

Janine Stinson
tropicsf@earthlink.net

Alison Scott has revealed a heretofore unknown (to me, at least) artistic talent. Brava, Madame!

Andy Sawyer
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Two *Plokta*s together, one with a picture of a shiny rocket thingy, too. And still people talking about Kansas, whoever they were. My own contribution to Zimmer-Frame Rock and Roll Fandom

was the recent Bonzo Dog Doo-dah Band 40th anniversary tour . . . after cracking all the tasteless "so are they going to dig up Vivian Stanshall or what?" jokes we could think of we hobbled down to the Liverpool Philharmonic and watched the band (average age 193 apart from the three musicians they'd got in to play the parts the original members had forgotten) shuffle through their paces and Ade Edmondson and Phil Jupitus render actually quite good versions of Stanshall's songs.

Biggest disappointment was, after the entire audience had remembered the "Oh no, not the LEG!" catchphrase Roger Ruskin Spear's bloody theremin leg wouldn't work, which was quite a wonderful metaphor for all these sixties bands who seem to be staggering round the country instead of living off the pension which they were far too stoned and groovy to actually think about paying into when they *had* money.

Biggest thrill was that it was still genuine *fun* and that I can now actually *live* the promises that I used to make about how when I'm old and decrepit I'm going to mutter in curmudgeonly fashion about how in my time songs didn't need to make sense and people played loud and fast and turned up their amps to eleven not like these new-fangled pop singers nowadays. When I retire I'm forming the band I wanted to form when I was 17.

How did Jaine know it was chav-cats who did the birds if they weren't seen? I spent last Sunday morning cleaning up the evidence of a Horrid and Brutal Murder in our own garden and I refuse to believe a cat had anything to do with

it. Not *our* cat, who doesn't know birds exist. I reckon it's the robins. Aggressive little beasts, always swearing at me when I weed the garden. A couple of robins will dismember a pigeon, no mistake. Or wrens. Never quite trusted wrens, sneaking little things....

Pamela Boal
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fsnet.co.uk

Claire Brialey's letter struck a chord. On occasions I too feel that I'm at a party with very pleasant and welcoming strangers but they are speaking a language I have yet to learn. I think I know what an iPod is though I have never seen one. Pi as a mathematical thingumy that squares circles I know but when it acquires an extra i I'm at a loss. As for chav people! I get the impression they are not very nice but have no idea what it is that makes them undesirable neighbours, as cat owning is not regarded as reprehensible. Only last week we treated ourselves to the latest edition of the concise Oxford English Dictionary. So many new technical words, foreign words, words once regarded as slang and dehyphenated words are now acceptable English. Doesn't help with *Plokta* speak though. Guess it's time to phone a grandson and ask him to prepare a glossary. On the other hand one only has to read Lokta Plokta and observe the substantial number of letters from not so young fans to realise you reach us despite the occasional language barrier.

Terry Jeeves
terryjeeves@ic24.net

I enjoyed the con report which didn't leave any bottles unopened. At least it was a good laugh and reminded me of my own Con going days,



Were You There? Did You See Him?

WE WANT TO INTERVIEW THIS MAN ABOUT A STRING OF LINGERIE ROBBERIES.

HE IS A KNOWN FANTASIST WITH A DODGY SENSE OF GENDER IDEATION AND VERY POOR TASTE IN KNICKERS. NOT TO MENTION CAMISOLES.

HE HAS BEEN SEEN PLAYING THE "ROLE PLAYING" GAME SHADOWRUN AND HAS BEEN KNOWN TO CONSORT WITH BELGIANS.

DO NOT APPROACH THIS MAN UNLESS YOU WANT TO FIND YOURSELF TRUSSSED UP IN STOLEN UNMENTIONABLES IN AN X-RATED SLASH STORY.

APPEAL FOR WITNESSES



ARTIST'S IMPRESSION

CALL CRIMESTOPPERS IN CONFIDENCE OR EMAIL LOCS@PLOKTA.COM

no more alas, just walking across the room is a major effort.

If you want something really whacky, the latest issue of *The Aeroplane* tells of a university student making a large rubber powered man carrying model which actually moved—six inches backwards.

John Dallman
jgd@cix.co.uk

Yours is the first Christmas gift catalogue I've seen that could deliver just what it says on the tin, without any shortfall in aspiration or execution. Come to that, there's no surprise firing squad for a friend listed, but I bet that'll be available next year.

Rob Jackson displays much wisdom on Fandom Ancient & Modern. Me, I'd just fall back on the short version: think of modern fandom as being the old kind in the style of the Unorthodox Engineers. Think that would make Peter Weston happy?

Rob Jackson
jacksonshambrook@
tiscali.co.uk

Many thanks indeed for the double-barrelled mailing. Congrats on the well-deserved rocketship, and don't let it gather dust. (This isn't what I meant, but Lakeland do quite nice feather dusters.)

I love the way the cover of no. 36 occupies the moral low ground, and Sue's portrait of you all in the summer gives new meaning to the idea of enjoying an apple in the garden.

I must be increasingly given to senior moments. I was a bit surprised, though reassured, to find three things: first, that I had actually written to you last time; second, that you

had put my comments about the inevitability of change in society and fandom quite near the front of the loccol; and finally, that I actually agreed with myself!

I am drumming up takers for *Bellissimo!*, the 122-page collection of the best of Harry Bell's artwork. This has been quite well received, as people like the production as well as the content. It is available for £8 post free, or half that price on CD-R. Pay to the above address by PayPal, or email me for address details. I intend to keep it in print even beyond Harry's trip to Corflu, and further profits will help finance the traditional fan funds.

John Dallman (again)
jgd@cix.co.uk

Plokta makes me feel young again, on a regular basis, which is weird since it probably ought to make me feel old. Not arguing, though. Thank you!

Q (with help from Alasdair Hepburn & Allison Ewing)
Beercat@calumny.demon.
co.uk

Right, pay attention Plokta-oh-seven. I've got some useful things that just might help you in your next mission, based on a few things that our agents reported in issues 35 and 36. Yes, Plokta-07, I'm well aware that they should have arrived separately, but a double helping did mean we could both digest something without a "haven't you finished it yet?"

Right, now firstly, the cover references.

Look, I know that "Missile Command" was seen as retro, but apposite even when "Terminator 2" came out, but you never know. These tips could save your life. You get a bonus city every 10,000

points, which isn't too hard to get in the later levels. Also, if you start with the maximum 6 cities and run out of missiles, the game is programmed always to leave you with one city for the next round. Kind of a "last chance", if you will. After 2 rounds of "1 x bonus", then "2 x" and so on up to "6 x", that 10,000 points should be quite easy. Don't worry that all the next levels are "6 x" bonus. No, Plokta-07, that means the end of round bonus for each city saved and each missile left unfired is six times the normal. It does not mean "have a bonus pint of Wadworth's 6x". Be persistent. Very persistent. A couple of hundred rounds later—yes, calm down, it will take a while—and the bonus will apparently be "0 x". This doesn't mean that everything is worthless. Due to arcane computer stuff—it's all right plokta-07, I won't bore you with the details—it actually means "256 x" bonus. Which means that each city left at the end is worth 256,000 points. Which, on its own, will give you 25 bonus cities. So what? Well, it means that when SPECTRE suddenly announce their master plan, you will have enough time to leave the game, defeat Blofeld, get the girl, and still be able to resume your original game.

Sometimes, plokta-07, the cards go against you. You know what they say—"unlucky at cards, lucky at love". Yes, erm, well you would know about the latter. We're quite aware of your reputation on that front. Anyway, there may be times when you have blown all your expense account, and it might be an inconvenient time to contact us for more funds. Look, what I'm getting at is that sometimes you might

have to lower your standards a bit. Yes, I understand that you'll never get the information if you economise, but sometimes, it is worth knowing that Asda Premium gin tastes almost exactly like Bombay Sapphire, but costs a lot less.

Good luck plokta-07. It's good to have you back.

Claire Brialey
claire.fishlifter@googlemail.
com

I've been meaning for ages to suggest a feature for a future issue. Earlier this year, the first issue of *The Observer's* magazine for women included reference to a piece of superfluous technology that might bear further investigation. If only I'd written sooner, I would have suggested that you get Flick to take the iBuzz for a test run, but now that she's a respectable married woman I'm sure that wouldn't be appropriate. And *Plokta* often gives the impression that Sue doesn't get off on technology. As it were. Still, it's a thought...

We Also Heard From:

Rich & Nicki Lynch ("We continue to be impressed and amused by each issue, but we don't have anything to send you in return."), **Karen Babich** (on a postcard that she made at Wiscon), **Martin Morse Wooster** (asking why we feel is necessary to use a Creative Commons license), **Henry L Welch** ("I may never be able to eat a potato chip again"), **Jerry Kaufman** ("Do you pronounce 'Pii' the same as 'Wii'?"), **Marcus Rowland** ("Consider this my statutory resub loc"), **John Hertz** ("I wrote to Lichtman about his capital pun.") and **Sheryl Birkhead** (too late for this issue—maybe next time).

This has been PLOKTA 37, brought to you by Steve Davies, Alison Scott & Mike Scott. The Cabal also includes Flick, Giulia De Cesare, Sue Mason and Steven, Marianne & Jonathan Cain. Plokta is available for letter of comment, trade, contribution, editorial whim, or a distressed Courier master font.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1.....Cover by Alison Scott | 6.....Langford Patent Juniper &
Quinine Lemon Marmalade by
Dave Langford |
| 2.....Chessmancon Conrep by Mike Scott
and the Cabal | |
| 4.....Editorial by the Cabal | 7.....PLOKTA Investigates by Flick
(from material by Peter Harrow) |
| 5.....The Fourth Circle of Hell: IKEA
by Lorna Robinson | 8.....Lokta PLOKTA by our
Correspondents |

Steve Davies

Alison Scott

Mike Scott

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Art by Alison Scott (1, 3, 6, 10), Sue Mason (4, 10, 12)

Photos by Jon Evans (www.thevalvepage.com)(3, TV), Alison Scott (3, Marianne & Jonathan), Mike Scott (4), Peter Harrow (7), Eric Lindsay (9)

Bonsai Ents by Peter Harrow.



"Zoiks!"