

All India Pictures Present:



Dr. Plokta as the

BANDIT FANNED

This is issue 26 of *Plokta*, edited by Steve Davies, Alison Scott and Mike Scott. It is available for letter of comment (one copy is fine, we pass them over to each other), trade (copies to each of our addresses if possible, please), contribution, editorial whim, or for ten cases of beer delivered to the Hilton Basingstoke on Saturday morning.

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Free Bindi for every reader!

Your free bindi should be attached to the front of the fanzine. If it isn't there, ask Dr Plokta to give you one. Void where prohibited by law.

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Editorial

FOR THOSE of you at <plokta.con> Release 2.0, welcome to the convention. This issue of *Plokta* also fulfils some of the normal requirements of a convention programme book, providing a brief article about our Guest of Honour, John Meaney, descriptions of the programme items (though watch out for a possible Read Me if we make loads of changes next week), and we don't expect most of you to read it until you get home. It doesn't yet have a lengthy list of all previous <plokta.cons>, a piece about how you can vote in the <plokta.con> awards, or the minutes of last year's <plokta.con> business meeting. But we're working on that.

We're having a few special events. You will notice that in an attempt to foster Balkanisation, cliques, rivalry and unsportsmanlike behaviour, your badges sort you into four Houses. These are **Spectrum**, the **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**, the **Wombles**, and the **X-Men**. This will be particularly appropriate at the Sports Day on Saturday afternoon, but the cabal will be awarding house points, merits and demerits throughout the weekend. There will be a prize for the House with the most points at the end of the weekend.

Oh, yes. And Alison Freebairn and Flick are to report to Dr Plokta immediately for a thorough caning.

We'd like you to dress up on Saturday night, and Sunday night is Bollywood night. We'll have various Bollywood related activity, like dressing up, henna tattoos, Indian sweets and likely music, and the hotel have promised us a curry.

"Who put the bollocks in Bollywood?"

If by some chance, <plokta.con> is your first convention, can you let us know? We'll explain why it was a rather peculiar one to choose first time out, and make sure you know a few people. We can be spotted by our distinctive "Cabal" badges [*Memo: Alison to design distinctive Cabal badge—Ed.*] and we'll probably be in the bar. In any case, if you're one of the two con members that none of the committee can remember meeting, please make a point of coming to say hello.

Smoking is permitted in the bar and garden only (though if you're a dealer who smokes, we can probably sort something out). For children, the hotel has an unsupervised play area, which will be available throughout the weekend.

In real life, the Cabal have been seduced by the Cult of LiveJournal. You can find us on <http://www.livejournal.com> as miramon, bohemiancoast, drplokta, malwen and frostfox. We'll leave it as an exercise for the

reader to match up the names. There's also a community called plokta cabal; you're welcome to read it, but membership is restricted to the cabal only. There will be a LiveJournal event on Sunday night; all welcome but there is an omnipresent risk that your brain will be eaten by a hive mind.

"Who is Green_Amber? I am Number One. You are Green_Amber."

Please send us your digital photos and digital video footage after the convention, because Alison's hoping she'll actually have some time to play with her new iMac then.

Steve doesn't have a new job yet, but is being pursued by headhunters whenever he's not ringing the hotel to ask them about beer.

Ah, yes, beer. We're going to run out of beer. We know this; we've told the hotel. They don't believe us. Please don't tell us again, though you can join us in the massed cry of "We Told You So".

The hotel will be serving their normal lounge menu, and cheap con food for a spell each day. Dealers room hours are whenever the dealers feel like selling you things; some of the dealers will only be selling stuff some of the time so check with them.

Basingstoke town centre is about a ten minute walk away—just long enough to work up an appetite. It has a range of restaurants including some quite interesting looking ones, and perfectly good shops, including a fabric shop that will sell you material suitable for Bollywood night. All in all, Basingstoke's much better than you might expect.

This weekend, the *Plokta* hive mind has assimilated Lilian. We're all spending much more money on our haircuts now. And we cackle. Sorry about that. Normal service will be resumed as soon as possible. Bwah ha ha ha! This slowed down the production of con-related material rather substantially, but increased the throughput of red wine. And half of fandom is now immortalized on *Cluedo* cards.



BOLLOCKS



Cat Hair

Every evening, after work, I take the fat fuzzy one outside and groom him. Spookie seems to be a magic fur generator. Every surface in my house is covered in a fine veneer of cat hair; carpets, stairs, stock, clothes. Grey tabby hair everywhere; emptying the vacuum cleaner reveals mats of the stuff, no wonder I have a cat hair allergy. Don't ask about the ziplock bag of hair I cleaned from a keyboard, or the impressive quantity Steve Davies found inside the recently murdered laptop.

I do occasionally threaten to varnish him. Usually when picking hairs out of a freshly varnished piece of woodwork.

So, in a rather vain effort to combat the creeping tide of grey, I groom Spooks each night. I use a brush rather like a currycomb; it is similar to grooming a small, purry Shetland pony. And I get combs and combs of fur off him, each and every night. I have taken to casting the fur to the winds.

The local sparrow population has noticed this. They sit in the silver birch tree and watch the grooming ritual. Then they swoop down and collect the discarded fur and carry it off to their nests.

So now I am worrying about the chicks hatching and growing on a soft bed of finest Spookie hair. Will they lose their fear of the cat, having grown up with the smell of him? Spooks is a venerable 18 years of age but any silly little sparrow coming within pouncing distance would get a nasty surprise, he's always been a great hunter.

Over the years, he's brought in pigeons, rats, mice and the forebears of the little fledglings. I am expecting a new present any day now.

—Sue Mason

Convention Programme

Saturday

11:00—Opening Ceremony

We introduce Guest of Honour **John Meaney** and appoint the official Stunt-Tobes for the weekend.

11:30—The British SF Renaissance

John Meaney, **Tony Cullen**, and others discuss the remarkable surge in British SF over the past few years.

14:00—Death of the Frequent Fanzine?

What has happened to the frequent (or even semi-frequent) fanzine? Former frequent publisher **Claire Brialey**, last-of-a-dying-breed **Max** and others discuss.

15:00—Sports Day (including children's fancy dress competition)

The four houses compete for fame, honour or a chance of making the pain stop. In the vicarage if wet.

17:00—Destroying the World for Fun and Profit

This is the way the world ends—not with a whimper but with an IPO. **John Dallman** and **Simon Bradshaw** speculate on ways to destroy the world.

19:00—Bellydancing Workshop

Sue shows you how to sheikh your booty.

20:00—Grill the UK05 Committee

Vince Docherty & **Colin Harris** answer your questions, update you on the bid's progress and dodge rotten tomatoes.

21:30—LFF auction

The **League of Fan Funds** doesn't love you, it just wants all your money. Bring it along so that we can send Chris O'Shea or Tobes to America.

23:00—Where Do We Go From Here?

The mandatory *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* panel. Unlike at Helicon, this panel will allow *spoilers up to the end of Season 6*. You have been warned. **Margaret Austin**, **Michael Abbott**, **Spike Parsons** (and doubtless many more) ask what Joss Whedon is up to now.

Sunday

10:30—Bin Liner Corsetry Workshop

Giulia De Cesare shows you how to give yourself a great figure for Bollywood night. All welcome.

12:00—Lego & K'Nex Robot building workshop

A prerequisite of any evil genius's plans for world domination is an army of loyal robot warriors. **Tim Kirk** shows you how to build one from things you probably have at home.

14:00—Guest of Honour Speech

John Meaney speaks.

15:30—Runaround

A chance to win points for your house! The classic mass-participation quiz game. Outdoors in the garden if fine. **Dave Hicks** is the questionmaster.

17:00—Body Modification

John Meaney, **A³** and others discuss the future options for practical or recreational modifications to the human body.

18:30—Bollywood Night

Belly dancing, Indian movies, henna tattoos, costumes and other related tat. *Kabbi Kushie Kabbie Gham* will be playing in the general background

21:30pm—Once More With Fanfunds

Another **Ian Sorensen** travesty, with a cast of several and in a radical innovation, *live singing*. Bring your own ear-plugs as the Cabal will *not* have spares.

22:30—You Are Green_Amber and I Claim My Five Pounds

The Second Coming of the **Cult of Livejournal**. **Sneerpout**, **Hawkida** and **Swisstone** officiate.

Midnight—TAFF deadline

If you haven't voted for TAFF, it's now too late. The results will be available as soon as possible after midnight.

Monday

11:00—Spot for a Spare Panel

Let us know if you'd like to fill this.

12:00—Bend it Like Boromir

The *Lord of the Rings* slash panel, with **Lilian Edwards**, **Sue Mason**, and many more.

14:00—Best of the Year

Mike Scott and **Julian Headlong** lead a discussion of the best recent SF.

15:30—John Meaney Reading

John Meaney reads from his works, possibly including a sneak preview of his forthcoming novel *Context*.

17:00—The Retro Novas

If we were awarding retro-Nova awards for the 1950s, what would we give them to? And would we get it right? **Rob Hansen**, **Mark Plummer**, **Sandra Bond** and others discuss.

18:30—Closing ceremony

The *Plokta* cabal reveal their plans for World Domination and award a tasteful prize to the house that won most points.

Later—Dead Dog in the bar

You know what to do. And you know where to do it.



Sue demonstrates how the Cabal recruits convention guests

Wall Of Death

MY ARM hurts where it was flung against the crash bar. My glasses are missing. I'm lying on my side, strapped into the bucket seat of a dune buggy. The dune buggy is also lying on its side. My teeth hurt. It's hot, very hot, and it's completely silent. Not quiet...silent.

So...the motor stopped then. That's not good. I look around. I'm at the bottom of a hole. A nearly conical hole about ten metres across made out of red sand, with walls that look at least that high. Hmm...am I in a Larry Niven story? It could be his Mars, it's the right colour. But no, I'm too hot, my teeth hurt, and unfortunately this is all too real. I'm in a dead dune buggy, in a hole, in the Red Desert, in Saudi Arabia, and I'm in big trouble.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. "Hey, why not come for a ride with us this weekend, we're going to have a barbie and drive dune buggies and off road trikes and motorbikes out on the sand dunes. It'll be fun". The only alternative was to go to the Riyadh Hilton and eat some of the most expensive chocolate cake in the world. Well, I'd already done that, so instead, on Friday we had desert.

The convoy was quite impressive, five trucks, three trailers with three dune buggies, two balloon tyre trikes and a motorbike on board. We drove out of Riyadh about two hours into the desert to where the big dunes started. The red dunes just don't look real...a garish SFX backdrop, less convincing than Lynch's *Dune*. But the barbie was good, a little bit too much sand in the sandwiches and a distinct lack of beer, but pretty good.

And then we got to play with the toys.

The trike was OK. I only tipped over twice, banged my knee, and melted my trouser leg on the exhaust. But riding a motortrike was *fun*, as Alison can tell you. I'm just glad I had a crash helmet. Then I had a go in a four wheel dune buggy.

This was a bit harder. I couldn't get the two-stroke engine to start at first—it's a two man job—one to sit in the seat and play with the choke and brakes, and one to pull bloody hard on the starting cord. But with the help of a passing lumberjack we got it started, I got my ear plugs in (the motor is right there behind your head, and is *astoundingly* loud), crash helmet on, four way seat belt fastened, then I took off over the dunes. This was even *more* fun. So, I was driving flat out along the top of these spectacular dunes, a hundred miles from anywhere and several miles from the camp in a completely random direction, when suddenly the sand runs out.

For a moment I was flying, then the buggy remembered just exactly how

aerodynamic it was and stopped doing that, and the next thing I knew there I was, lying on my side at the bottom of a hole. With the comforting thought running through my mind—*Nobody in the whole world knows where you are right now.*

Decisions, decisions. What do I do first? First I find my glasses. Then a good look round. It doesn't look good. The walls look unclimbable. It's really hot, and I didn't bring any water. My arm is bleeding, but only a little. I'm in hole, miles from help, my only resources are a pair of glasses, a pair of ear plugs, a dead buggy, a near infinite supply of sand, and a winning smile. Actually, I don't think I was smiling at all.



Damn.

The only way out is up. The only way up is...First I right the buggy, then I start it. How easy that sounds. Actually it took more than an hour, in the desert heat, with one working arm, and constantly diving into the buggy to adjust choke, relying on the dinky hand brake to stop it running off, and generally swearing and cursing and effing and blinding until eventually I hit on just the right combination of words to make it go.

There is no sweeter sound than the sound of a two-stroke engine in the middle of a desert.

Now for the hard part. I reckon I'll only get one go at this. I get in the dune buggy and start driving. Around the bottom of the hole. Accelerator flat to the floor, pulling the wheel around as tight as it will go, I drive around the bottom of the hole. Faster and faster and *faster*. And up the walls of the world. And I think "This is the *stupidest* thing I have ever done in my whole life". But if a circus daredevil can do it on a vertical wall, I should be able to do it on sand at its angle of repose. Shouldn't I?

I come out of the hole like a shot from a sling and take off across the dunes following my trail back to the camp. I think I'll let somebody else play with the toys for a while. I've had *far* too much fun today.

—Julian Headlong

BOLLOCKS

From Our Swedish Correspondent

Ylva Spangberg writes:

"I vaguely recall promising you this, in a state of... err... um... slight inebriation. It's a quite irresistible little item, I think."

Hello...

...Sune Høggmark, who has been appointed "Entrepreneur of the year" in the tourist business for his enterprise in Moose Garden outside Stersund:

Congratulations to the prize!

—Thanks. If you work with tame moose and print money on moose shit, you're far out on a risky limb.

So you make paper from moose droppings?

—Exactly. The winter droppings are like cellulose. I mix it all in the mixer, and then I print calling cards and money. It comes out great.

In the mixer? You're kidding!

—Not at all. The only problem is a slight discolouring of the sponge cakes.

And tourists buy this?

—Sure. I've printed notes in all the old European currencies. The tourists love it, especially the Germans.

But money made from moose shit...

—They're brilliant. Just like real money. Only a bit rough and uneven on the back side. And there's no smell at all.

I didn't know you could tame moose?

—Oh yes, and the first two weeks, I sleep together with the calves.

Outdoors?

—Yes, in a Baden-Baden chair. The moose lie on the ground beside me. But I have to wear a big cap, the calves often want to suck my ear lobes when I'm sleeping.

(From *Metro*, free daily paper, March 23 2002)

Losing Battles

We were distressed to discover that Damn Fine Convention had *two* guests who were black-belts in karate, as compared to <plokta.con>'s solitary John Meaney. We guess this means that their convention can beat up our convention.

BOLLOCKS



The Wrath of Goo

We recently discovered a website (<http://www.bowlesphysics.com/marsh.htm>) explaining how to measure the speed of light using the things you find at home: vis, a microwave oven, a couple of packets of marshmallows and a ruler. This sounded like a *Plokta* kind of experiment, especially as you get to eat gooey marshmallows afterwards.

The idea is that the hot-spots in the microwave oven should be a distance apart equal to the wavelength of the microwave radiation. A domestic microwave is generally 2,450 MHz. Multiply the wavelength by the frequency, for a dandy estimate of c . So we nuked some marshmallows, and the molten ones were in a rough hexagonal pattern 12 cm apart. So we're delighted to confirm that the speed of light in Alison's kitchen is 294,000,000 m/s, plus or minus 5%.



Preparation



Safe disposal of laboratory waste

Does Your Gut Wobble When I Do This II

IT'S THURSDAY so I must be hobbling.

You see, I've developed a new ~~vibe~~ hobby.

I'm not an exercise kind of girl, never have been; we recently went bowling at work and I of course came last.

I had warned them: hand-eye coordination? Nope.

I wowed them with my pool skills too. Particularly when they discovered that I was too short to reach some of the shots in the middle of the table.

Next time we went bowling, they used me as the handicap system.

I am totally crap at sports. I was the kid at school who not only didn't get picked for sports but to whom the teacher said "Don't you want to go to the library, Susan?" So I did, for five years. I was a very good librarian.

But now I do an hour's vigorous exercise once a week.

Very vigorous exercise.

And I absolutely love it.

Belly dancing.

Or, to be more accurate, Middle Eastern Dancing with Zehara.

Now, dance was the one thing at school I was good at. I ran the dance club at lunchtime too.

I ended up doing belly dancing by accident.

My friend Debs wanted to go, so she talked me into going along to keep her company. And you can guess the rest; she dropped out and I stayed.

Zehara (or Nicki, to her class) is a lithe little thing who tortures us weekly and gets us haring about the class to all manner of music. 'We' are a wide variety of women, big women, small women, lissome young students, and bored housewives. Some of us wear gauzy little belly dancing outfits, most of us wear soft loose clothing and skirts and scarves round our hips.

While some of the class are beautiful, graceful young gazelles, there are no eyebrows raised at those of us who more resemble the hippos in *Fantasia*.

We do circle dances from Africa: lots of bouncing up and down which looks very easy until you try and do the movement for ten, twenty, thirty minutes at a time. We do hip drops, lots and lots and lots of hip drops, basic maneuver, as Nicki never ceases to tell us. I can do you static hip drops, or hip drops in different directions.

We do hip sways, hip bounces and figures of eight. I'm getting good at those—I have a lot of hip to work with, of course.

I practice upper body shimmies in the car—you should use the top half of your body not the bottom, so you practice sitting down. I sometimes get funny looks at traffic lights.

Belly Dancing
Tonight!



Dancing like this has definite health dividends; I run up the three flights of stairs at work where once I walked and the smokers huff and puff their way up after me.

I also sew costumes at work. The boss, who already thinks I am a tad eccentric, has yet to comment on me sewing on company time. I have a whole growing wardrobe of costumes.

I have a real proper belly dancing belt of chiffon sewn with a myriad of little beads and coins from Egypt. I bought that during a mammoth shopping spree in York at SMOFcon. I knew I wanted one of these belts, several of the class have them, they are truly spectacular and make a delightful jingling sound. Nicki likes them because she can hear if we are still doing hip drops if we are wearing coins, even with her back turned. I really wanted black and silver, on the general grounds that black and silver will go with anything and the nice man in the shop dutifully rummaged through the whole bag of rainbow scarves to find the sole black and silver one for me. He had just returned from Egypt that morning with an entire suitcase full of scarves and headdresses and belts and explained that black and silver were just not commonly combined colours, whereas here, of course, it's popular.

I spent a week hemming a couple of metres of rainbow chiffon and sewing a braid with little blue faceted droplets on the edge of it. Work is hard.



I play belly dance music on the way to work.

I love the music we use, I've been a fan of world music for years and we dance to African and Turkish and Lebanese and Techno and Bagpipes (The Afro Celt Sound System, of course). I have a particular fondness for a band called Transglobal Underground who do World Techno music and through them I discovered Natasha Atlas and other such fun things.

We are in a deep sulk because some insipid Antipodean pop thing has just got to the top of the Hit Parade with a cover of Tarkan's 'Kiss Kiss', and the original version is much the superior one. I'm hoping some intrepid entrepreneur will re-release it.

She doesn't dance as lewd as we do either. That's another part of the attraction for me; these are sensual dances. Some of the moves are openly sexual, others more subtle but most are alluring and 'come hither' and these are women's dances, for women, by women.

They are to entertain women and educate them and their daughters and to train their bodies for childbirth. It's astonishing how many societies have such dances and such traditions.

So this is my new hobby. Good for me, and all that. However, since Christmas I have been the proud owner of a pair of dodgy knees.

It's all my own fault really.

I've been self-employed for the last 12 years. The poor artist *starving* in a garret.

And now I'm gainfully employed. And so I get to go on works trips, such as the Infamous Bowling Fiasco.

And the Christmas piss-up.

Being builders, we are shut over the Christmas/New York break and it's rather reminiscent of the last day at school.

So we went out and 'did' the fleshpots of Altrincham.

I should point out that the fleshpots of Altrincham are somewhat pedestrian, even though we do have a rather dubious bar called 'Totties'. We didn't try Totties but we had a good go at every other bar in town.

I ended up belly dancing for three hours solid to all the latest unsuitable pop songs.

Which was, if I recall, jolly good fun. I had quite a lot to drink but also lots of water and staggered home happy.

The next day, my knees were a little sore; I worked out that I had been dancing for about three hours, maybe four.

I had a warm bath and got ready for the works Christmas party.

Dolled up to the nines, and rarely for me, in high heels.

The party, a professionally organised affair, was wonderful, marvelous, splendid. We drank copious amounts of good wine and ate great food in a marquee with sparkling stars overhead. And I danced—corrupted belly dance moves again—for a good three hours.

When I woke up the next morning I was crippled.

Housemaid's knee, in both knees. Oh what fun.

So I spent all of the holiday doing a fine impersonation of an arthritic capybara.

The knees have gradually recovered.

But I'm not daunted, this hobby is going to run and run.

Most of all, because it's fun.

Even if I spend most Thursdays hobbling round like a geriatric hippo. Expect me to bore you rigid with belly dancing frothing at a convention real soon now.

<plokta.con> for a start.

I think I fancy running a belly dance workshop; let's see how many fans I can cripple too.

—Sue Mason

BOLLOCKS

Costume Melodrama

You may have noticed this issue's cover, another of Alison's Photoshopped masterpieces. We had the idea for it during the weekend when Dr Plokta went to Las Vegas and the rest of us merely gathered at Steve's and my house in Reading,

The ability to delay gratification is not high among members of the cabal, so we immediately raided the vast dressing-up box that is my boudoir, for costumes, accessories and props. We quickly came up with everything you see on the cover and quite a few more bits that did not make it into the final montage, such as the bunch of peacock's feathers. You don't really want to know where we tried sticking those.

Sue, however is just wearing the clothes she happened to have on that day. You should see the effect she has on nice Asian gentlemen in shops, particularly when she starts waving her arms around.

Anyway, what I particularly wanted to say was that even George turned up and posed with us. I have mentioned elsewhere that he is a much more pleasant and amenable cat when he is not well, although he has since reverted to form. So, where are the pictures of George? Well, the sad truth is that all the photos we used came from Take Two of "Bandit Faned."

None of the first lot of pictures came out. We were let down by our technology. It's funny how that only seems to happen when Dr Plokta isn't around.

—Giulia De Cesare



George Davies Is Unwell



GEORGE hasn't been well.

He was twining affectionately about my shins one evening, purring and wheezing, in just the way he usually doesn't. Well, actually, he's wheezed for years, but affectionate? Nah. Then he went to Steve and twined and purred around him as well, gazing up with big green eyes. Steve and I looked at each other.

"Do you suppose he's ill?"

"I was just wondering that."

"Wheeze. Kaff. Snurf."

The next day, George's other mother, Maureen, rang up in a right old tizzy. Avid, or even only vaguely-interested followers of previous articles about George, may recall that our mild-mannered hero has a secret identity as T.C., or Top Cat, in which guise he fights crime sleeps on the neighbours' bed all day.

"Ooohh, I'm really worried about T.C.," she said, "He hasn't eaten anything all afternoon. And he's very wheezy."

"Yes, well, he's been wheezy for years. But he has been off his food a bit, now that you mention it. He only had three bowls of tinned and a few mouthfuls of dry cat food yesterday."

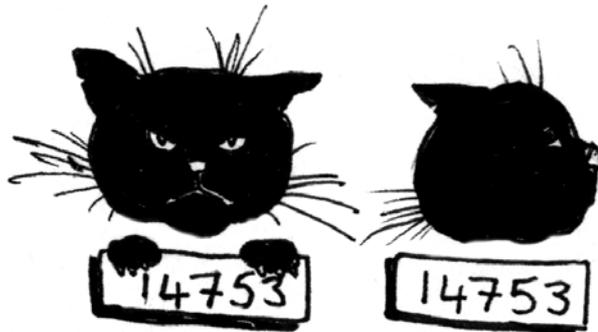
"Ooohh, well, he never eats cat food here, but he hasn't wanted his cooked chicken either. And it's from Marks and Spencer and all."

"Hm. Well, why don't we keep an eye on him for a day or two and see how he goes."

The real conversation actually went on for about twenty minutes but the above brief excerpt gives you the gist. In the next day or two we noted that he

certainly was off his food, he was a lot more clingy and the daily phone calls from Maureen increased in number and anxiety. So I rang the vet, left work early, and together with Steve, wrestled George into the porta-dungeon.

We sat at the vet listening to the anguished yowls from the depths of the plastic cage until we were called in to a consultation room. The young lady vet eyed the cage warily and asked us to get him out. A lot of poking, prodding, temperature-taking and yowling later, the three of us realised that no-one had even been scratched. He was definitely ill. The vet gave him a shot of antibiotics and sent us off with more in the form of pills. George may be an immovable object but when it comes to dosing cats, I am the Irresistible Force.



Maureen continued to ring us several times a day..."Ooohh, he hasn't eaten anything all day..." "He's just slept on the bed all day..." "He's just gone out, has he come over to you yet?"

Back to the vet. This time we had to leave him there for the day, having starved him from the previous night. Yowl, yowl, *yowl!* It's one thing to be off your food but quite another not even to be offered any. They were going to sedate him so they could peer down his throat to see if there if there was some obstruction. This is because he has a habit of chewing sticks and trying to swallow them, so there could be anything down there—old cricket bats, banisters, canes... and while they were at it they could take a blood sample, do an X-ray, and hopefully give him a good brushing.

Finally it was time to go to retrieve him. We were ushered into a consultation room and told that they had done extensive tests and could

confirm that he was, in fact, One Sick Pussy. But they couldn't say exactly what was wrong with him. And that'll be £273, thank you.

She trotted off with our plastic while we picked our jaws up off the floor and looked through the itemised bill.

"Item: X-ray, qty 1 £70.43

"Item: X-ray, interpretation of by qualified staff, qty, 1, £35.60

"Item: Sharply in-drawn breath by qualified staff, qty 1, £12.00

"Item: application of sticking plaster to qualified staff, qty 17, £ 97.25 and so on.

The vet's assistant returned our plastic and it only remained to collect our wounded hero and go home. "Ah," she said. "Well, actually, we'd like you to come and get him yourselves. We're not prepared to bring him out to you. He, ah, he gave us a bit of a hard time."

That cheered us up considerably. Our Boy was obviously feeling better.

A week on, George seems to be recovering, though slowly. He's still not eating as much as he used to, and the skin is hanging off him in folds. But Maureen has managed to go whole days without phoning us at all and today he actually jumped over the wall at the front of the house after I had given him his evening dose of pills.

And, you know what else? He growled and tried to scratch me.

—Giulia De Cesare



Lokta Plokta

D West

Thanks for the Tolk Tie-in issue. Good cover. I suppose it is not entirely flattering to be identified as a Northern Waste, but as a career layabout I can't complain too much.

Anyway, here's a couple of drawings as my usual contribution to the advancement of learning, the improvement of morals and the raising of aesthetic standards.

But when are you going to get some proper equipment that doesn't fuzz the edges? You claim to have all this technology and the art repro is still scarcely sharper than an antique electro-stencil.

[The campaign to buy Alison a 1200dpi heavy-duty full duplex colour laser printer starts here.]

Kim Huett

I am very pleased to announce I've at last worked out how to open up *Plokta* #18 and actually read it. There must be something wrong with your diet to think this was a good idea. You were eating raw fish weren't you? Hasn't anybody ever told you that raw fish isn't brain food but insane food?

Once inside I was interested to note Marty Cantor (who was married to a Canadian

too) had assumed Taral's drawing was of a female moose. The antlers are a dead give away of course, it's a female caribou because female caribou grow antlers. Hmmm, they eat a lot of raw fish in California too don't they?

And somebody should explain to Alan Sullivan that, according to the reports I've had, just being in the proximity of young Master Streiber invokes a desire to stick something unfriendly up one of his orifices, any of his orifices. Under the circumstances I don't see why aliens should be immune from this any more than the rest of us.

Marisol Ramos-Lum

I have a great laugh reading *Five Go Mad in Mordor*. Even my husband which is not a SF fan, crack a smile when I stumble in the part about Ultima and Lord British. We are both fans of the Ultima series and I am trying to finish *The Serpent Isle* one of these days.

Alison, would I interest you to add a weird art form to your collection? I friend of mind played this strange album by a Nepalese and an African American from NYC that use only their vocal cords to play music. They can create like three different harmonies with their throats. This

Nepalese singers are called Tuva Throat-Singers. My experience was that the music was strange but actually sort of pleasant to hear.

Henry L Welch

Alison's discourse on Wobble reminds me of a restaurant called Antlers. It is located about a mile east of the Soo Locks in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. They have the largest collection of stuffed fauna and assorted head pieces as implied by their name. They also have an extensive collection of flashing lights, bells, whistles, and sirens. One of the trademarks of the restaurant is the activation of the lights and sounds about twice an hour. Other than that the food isn't too bad and quite reasonably priced for a touristy area. Don't forget to stop by the next time you are out that way.

Lloyd Penney

Here's hoping Dave has a good, restful, uninterrupted night's sleep on Hugo night. Lock Martin in his room, just to be sure.

Marvellous map on the front. I had to examine it with a magnifying glass on some areas where the type was two points tall or smaller (I didn't get my cover-mounted magnifier, send one around any time), but a great smile nonetheless. Postcards for all from the seashore of the Bay of Bollocks. Wish you were here! Grand to see the battle royal between Christopher and son Simon, who knows the value and income sources of a good story, and additional tie-in merchandise at Burger King.

The movie's made scads of cash, Tom Bombadil's on the dole, Book 2's in the theatres

soon to pile up some more scads, and all's right with the world, hey nonny nonny. With some of the buxom and short wenchy types seen during the hobbitish birthday celebrations, wearing something scanty and low-cut, I might be looking for hobbit porn on the Internet myself. As long as I can get past the hairy feet, everything's fine. All fear the Pikachûl, those evil, ghostly types that look suspiciously like brightly coloured Japanese cartoon characters. There's over 150 of them; gotta flee them all!

Mice and Nutella...I didn't know they had such good taste in breakfast spreads. However, I have found Something Even Better. President's Choice Dark Chocolate Spread, available only in Canada. Yes, I have been seduced by the dark chocolate side of the Force, and found it delicious. I can think of only one thing that would be even better. If Terry's Chocolates could make a chocolate orange spread for my morning toast, I'd never leave the kitchen. (I'd be so large, I wouldn't be able to squeeze through the door.)

Colin Fine

So you've found Radio 3, and *Late Junction*. Maureen Speller was on Radio 4's *Feedback* recently, giving the boss of Radio 3 a roasting for turning the thinking person's music station into a sandals and polenta world music happening. At the time I had some sympathy, but felt she was overstating the case—now I'm not so sure. I'm sure there is a place for *Late Junction*, *World Roots* and (even) *Mixing It*—but I no longer think it's Radio 3, because I sometimes want to listen to more, well, Radio 3 sort of music at night.

ANCIENT WISDOM REVEALED



David B Wake

I'd like to point out an error in the last section (and you were doing so well) of *A Bijou Ploktette*. The furry mice are not zero-buttoned. The single button, in contrast to computer mice, is inconveniently located underneath in the middle of the belly.

Dave Langford

The *Bijou Ploktette* flyer arrived this morning. Much appreciated the extremely subtle text effects in E.J. Plokta's threnody.

Janice Gelb

Interesting to read in your *Dangermouse* story that Nutella is irresistible to one carbon-based lifeform, at least. The first time I tasted it when I was living in Israel, I thought I'd get diabetes on the spot.

Kari

One hates to be pedantic, but professional etiquette forces me to point out to you a tiny historical error in *Middle Plokta*. The Scandinavian colonization of Iceland didn't get underway until the second half of the ninth century, and prior to this, it was largely uninhabited. There were no indigenous peoples, and the sole residents were a very small number of Irish Celi De—pilgrims for God—fanatical monk-types who had set themselves adrift in boats in order to find somewhere barren and empty in which to live lives devoted to God (and being cold and wet). They lived as hermits, on their own save for whales, skuas, fish etc. etc., but may have passed some of their time (when drier?) in inventing or playing musical instruments. (Doubtless the

more raucous the better.) Thus, any horn-type instrument originating in Iceland during the 8th century would have been Irish in type and nomenclature (and made out of narwhal horns or whale bone or, um, pumice), rather than the Germanic-sounding 'Durrphhorn' cited by yourselves (an instrument perhaps better attested in the Rus, or Scandinavian, layers of Kiev than in Iceland). I respectfully submit that the instrument for which you seek would have been graced with a resonant Q-Celtic name, along the lines of *adharchardhbrean* (only with more 'h's and lots and lots of nose-blowing).

Joseph Nicholas

It's rather a shame, though understandable, that the cover can never be uploaded to the internet; from a personal point of view, it means I'll never be able to enlarge it enough to read all of it. [*Large copies will be auctioned for the LFF at forthcoming conventions.*]

When I was much younger, I was able to achieve a great level of detailing on the Airfix kits I made because I could bring them in very close to my right eye, which is much shorter-sighted than my left. (Indeed, it wasn't until my teens that it was realised I had certain defects with my vision, because my otherwise perfect left eye was

compensating for the right.) But now I find that I can no longer bring things as close as previously—in addition to noticing, over the past year, that when moving objects towards or away from me there's a detectable (albeit very, very brief) lag before my eyes can refocus, I've also found that I can't read text at as close a range as previously. I can still make out individual letters and words on the page of a standard book or magazine at 13-15cm away, but any closer and they start to blur and in any case that distance is too close to read comfortably; at 23-25cm I can read it for longer periods without too much strain; but my normal reading distance these days is 45-50cm and up. Which means that, even appropriating the magnifying glass from our two-volume-plus-supplement boxed set of the OED Compact Edition, there is text on your cover map which I cannot bring close enough to make out. Curses!

Judith, too, is getting longer-sighted as she ages. She used to have near-perfect vision, but now needs reading glasses for close work such as reading (obviously), working on her dolls houses, and knitting. So now she can watch television and knit at the same time, with her glasses pushed down her nose to allow different focal lengths for each activity. (She looks just like a librarian.)

And this deterioration in our vision is additional to the

other signs of ageing, such as the lower back pain I get when I spend too long digging and bending on the allotment, and the dull ache in my left knee which is refusing to recover from the, er, "bizarre gardening accident" I experienced a few months ago. Oh well. I daresay that next stop it'll be zimmer frames and ear trumpets (although of course Judith already has a hearing aid).

Jerry Kaufman

Great to see Rob Jackson back in a fanzine. I just finished reading about him the other day, in Peter Roberts' TAFF Trip Report, *New Routes in America*. I hope we can get it back into print, as it's already out.

I don't think Patty Wells and her family need Thorazine. Isn't that an anti-psychotic? I think Ritalin should do the trick. [*Anyone with Ritalin to spare should send some to Alison.*]

Art Widner

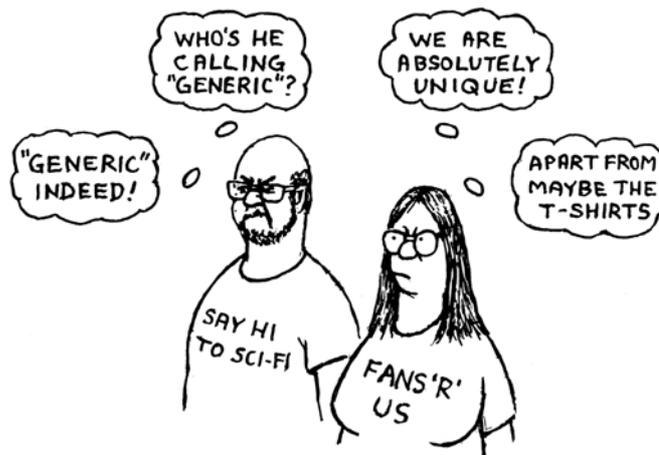
Paper *Plokta* V7N1 just above. Brit metric tonnes of thanx for sticking with me all this time w/out a word from me. Humbl apologies. Will loc soon, send trades, etc.

By no means is this to be construed as a back hander to all the other fine Britzines ive been getting. Thanx & apologies to them as well.

Brad W Foster

Loved "Giulia's Infidelity", as we have almost the same thing going around here, all this little sweeties in the neighborhood all over me whenever I step outside the door. After the inside loves have ignored you for the past four hours, it's kind of hard to resist that sweet face and arched back wherever you go outside. Of course, the

GENERIC FANS SULKING



accusing glare from behind the window will off cast a shadow on the joy....

While you're out there looking for *Ark 2*, if you ever run across a recording of a musical version of the poem "Beware the Jabberwock", let me know! Lady stopped by our tent at the last art show and, seeing my company name was "Jabberwocky Graphix", said she had been looking for a recording of that song for years. She only knows it was around late '50s or early '60s, and it was by a folk group that, as she put it, was someone with a big name you'd recognize, not a little group no one ever heard of. So now she has me curious to find this thing. So, I'm planting seeds where I can.

Milt Stevens

Alison seems to have made a major discovery regarding modern music. In past times, it was said that music had powers to soothe the savage beast. Modern music may not be so good at that, but Alison can testify that it has powers to crunch the solid gallstone. I once had a similar experience with the therapeutic effect of music. It was some years ago at a Westercon in Sacramento. I had a nagging ear infection at the beginning of the convention. One evening, I was in the bar when a rock combo was about to start playing. The rock combo hit the first note, and it burst the infection in my ear. I didn't quite scream, but I was seriously considering it. Before that time, I had seen many pictures of people screaming at rock concerts, but now I can really identify with the experience.

Patty Wells talks about killer clown Santas as Christmas decorations. I thought Connie Willis had some really neat ideas for Christmas decorations in her novella deck.halls@boughs/holly (which I expect will be on the

Hugo ballot this year). I particularly liked the toy soldier firing squad. You really need something to cut through the smarmy good will of the holiday season.

Eric Lindsay

Good move on the part of Alison to resolve never to go on another camping trip. We saw a number of these pop up tents on our travels. The most impressive was from OzTent, whose minions kept demonstrating how a fit and well trained young demonstrator could take the bundle from a car and have it completely assembled in under 30 seconds. It was a walk in tent, and really was impressive. More recently these deluded creatures have produced a smaller one that snaps into a complete unfolded tent in the time it takes to throw it from waist height at the ground.

Ned Brooks

I wonder if what Patty Wells calls "box beetles" are the same thing I call "ladybugs"—they look like tiny polka-dot Volkswagens and I have been finding quite a lot of them in the house. They don't seem to do anything, or even move much, but just sit on a wall or the carpet.

Alison's complaint that "music people actually like is never played on the wireless" is generally true here as well, although the local NPR outlet does play some classical music I like, and they manage 1 hour a week of Celtic music.

Joseph T Major

Decking the Halls with Thorazine: *Only* six Santas and a dozen candy canes for a Christmas yard arrangement? The neighbo[ur] at the corner

puts up two complete Nativity scenes, a Santa in sleigh, a set of choir singers, garden gnomes, and penguins.

Dave Weingart

In the best spirit of superfluous technology, I'm writing this LOC on my PDA.

I especially enjoyed the cover of Plokta v7 #1. I've often wondered what dark power truly ruled the City. However, I'm a bit confused. Is Rasseffe on the Picadilly line or Hammersmith & City?

Bob Devney

Your Jan zine arrived (via Singapore!) in most timely fashion today, March 22, as I'm supposed to be in a last-of-the-last minute frenzy pubbing *The Devniad* (www.devniad.com, plug plug). Loc'ing you instead thus fulfills my monthly requirement for maximally self-destructive procrastination.

Alison, if gallstones do revisit your gut like the swallowbats returning to Capistranova, be advised I suffered them also in my youth. When losing 50 pounds wouldn't budge them, I had surgery. In those days they went in with spelunking boots; the scar looks like the Great Rift Valley seen from an altitude of oh, 12 feet. But nowadays I hear they simply thread a fiber-optic eye with razorbade eyelids under a toenail and wriggle it around until something snips off. So relax.

Loved Patty Wells' skewed portrait of her family's year. On her twins' 10th birthday party, that line about "the activity they wanted more than life itself" (pie-throwing) really captures the intensity of those wonder years.

Alison, we've had more of a fluffy tree rat (squirrel)

problem than a mouse problem. Over the years, they've maintained a vigorous civil rights campaign predicated upon their inalienable access to the fruits (and nuts and seeds) of our bird feeder. And someone's definitely breeding new cohorts of gene-spliced super-intelligent squirrels in an underground cavern nearby. Sometimes the latest lots knock the perches out, neatly reducing their avian competition. And a few years back Queen Maureen bought a new feeder with a "squirrel-proof" cap plugging the top. It did take the little vermin half a day each time to pry said cap loose, toss it contemptuously on the ground, and vacuum up the good stuff for hours before Her Highness noticed, retrieved, and replaced it. Here's the scary part. After a few days, one sciuridaedal da Vinci hit on the brilliant expedient of simply taking the cap *up the tree* with him...

Rob Jackson's cool little piece on rooting around for an SF-ish record from a band he liked back in the day had a nice climax: Phil Collins ... But all reading is subjective. Now, Queen Maureen and I are contemplating our first English vacation the last week or two of May. So naturally I'm alarmed that Rob's mother's car was stolen outside their hotel in South Yorkshire in 1970. We're actually staying in a town called London, you may have heard of it. Can we believe our travel agent's assurance to expect much less crime than in S Yorks?

Kerstin Pinschower

I have come across your chocolate teapot paper from issue 23 and would like to reproduce it in our (mountaineering) club newsletter. Is that o.k.? (Will give proper reference...)

As it is a 'real' paper type of newsletter, I can't just put a web link in...

Thog The Mighty

I have passed your map of *Middle Plokta* to **Thog the Mighty**, who wishes to express his displeasure at the diminutive size thereon of **Thog's Deep**. I quote:

Thog say, If **Thog** dislike your geographical features, he rearrange them.

Pamela Boal

What a lovely long letter col this ish. Particularly amused by SMS noting the name change for the Harry Potter film and his rightful claim to the title of Sorcerer. Perhaps some American fans can explain why Hollywood persists in dumbing down everything. Surely the publishers didn't change the book title, so why do the film distributors assume that the word Philosopher would confuse?

[The other way around, actually. The intellectual movie industry didn't quite feel able to reverse a dumbing-down made by the lowest-common-denominator publishing industry.]

Steve Jeffery

Pre-edited version: Dear thanks *Plokta* splendid jokes cover usual brilliant Nova wishes Steve

If Sue lived near a canal, she might find Spooky bringing back dragonflies. We've had two delivered so far, almost in pristine condition (well, apart from the being dead bit), though a bit soggy round the wingtips. Unfortunately the gorgeous metallic colours faded after about a week so that what looked impressive, and presumably all-too-tempting when it was batted out of the air, ended up resembling an undistinguished brown stick.

I don't know about mice, but we can confirm that Nutella is the favoured breakfast of German Goths, so you if you ever do get an infestation, you know how to bait the traps. Love Sue's drawing of the little diving mouse.

Rob Jackson

Even before I opened the latest *Plokta* you made me feel really old. To read the place-names I had to look at the map of *Middle-Plokta* with one of those specialist magnifying glasses Coral uses for her textile work, which has an extra powerful bubble just off-centre. Is that Chip'n'Dale or Chas'n'Dave, by the way? I looked in vain for the Castle of Ruman-Cokh, which years ago would have had the well known river Pickers Gill flowing vigorously through its foundations. (That has mostly dried up now.)

The test of visual acuity involved in reading your map makes me hark back to Oxford again. I first had my eyes tested in a physiology practical there, and at that stage they were damn good—both 20/10 minus 1, i.e. twice as good as average. I was told my eyes were astronaut standard—but I was damn sure they were the only part of me that was.

You seem puzzled as to why I sent you the Flaming Youth article. Well, it's. Firstly, when I thought through the sequence of events that coalesced into the article it seemed like the sort of interaction between stfnal sensibilities and real life that *Plokta* is good at, and also.. *Plokta* is Damn Good, and you had just threatened to withdraw my supply after sending me a few issues without significant response from me. I do know there's no such thing as a free *Plokta* in life, you know.

Sadly, the Flaming Youth saga itself has currently

entered a phase of anticlimactic boredom once again, as the Japanese reissue I mentioned in the article turned out to have been deleted too. Sod it sod it sod it. Anybody got any copies of *Ark 2* for sale? Good price, honest.

I see wot Andy Sawyer mean about Molesworth. Very few kno about him chiz chiz chiz. Education is nessessessery.

Steve Green

Sincere sympathies on Steve and Alison's rodent invasion. Our property backs onto a shared drive, and then a field which I played in as a child but which was subsequently hijacked by the local Air Training Corps and a handful of allotment-holders. Needless to say, our back garden is no stranger to local wildlife, particularly house mice, and we had a minor infestation about four years ago, as the little buggers sought refuge from the winter snow in the crawspace beneath our lounge floor. I think the final killcount was five or six, and we've thankfully had no such problem since (maybe they've been scared off by the foxes I've seen sneaking back into the drive from the side of our garage). The funniest thing about the entire affair was watching Baldrick (then circa 14 years old) suddenly tap into his terrior species memory and go into hyperdrive, tracking down their hidey-holes like a farmyard pup.

Judith Hanna

Greetings, from a well nigh forgotten greenish land that lies just west of Walthamstow and the River Avedon, which fen say is but a myth, lost in the mists of fafia, inhabited by slender folk who live among trees and greenery... You have fallen into error by mistranslating it Lilian. Lilian

is, of course, equally elegant but lies far to the north, the other side of the mountains, among towering wrought stone—an alternative name for what some call Swindondell.

Pat McMurray

*One Zine to Rule them all,
One Zine to Bind them,
One Zine to Bring them all,
And in the Darkness File Them.*

Eastercons are interesting things. I've spent about 18 months on the committee of Helicon II, the next Eastercon, on Jersey. You don't do this sort of thing with any expectation of reward or hope of recognition, which is good, because having done this four times in seven years; I know you don't get any. It can be fun, I've learned a lot, and I've on balance enjoyed it. As someone who wouldn't be comfortable producing a fanzine, and isn't madly keen on writing, it seemed my sort of contribution to fandom. It also supported my really fannish passion, collecting convention memorabilia—all oddments gladly received.

So, everything's going along happily, I'm doing my thing, and then I bump into little Ms Tactful herself (that would be Alison, of course), who announces to me that *Plokta* are considering removing me from the mailing list because I haven't been doing any fanac. Oddly enough, from Alison this wasn't as rude as it sounds, or no worse than expected anyway, and at least she had the courtesy to warn me. Looking back over the years, fanzines have become much rarer on my doorstep than they used to be—I suspect Alison isn't the only fanzine editor who thinks that running conventions doesn't really qualify as fanac.

Anyway, don't feel bothered about it. I've given about as much response to the fanzines I've had as I've got from the conventions I've run, the very occasional thank you, and even rarer little note. The only two people I've known who consistently *write* thank you notes are Fiona Anderson and Janice Gelbl!

I'm not going to be doing conventions or fanzines for a while, as I'm one year into that MBA I've always wanted to do, and my spare time is getting even rarer. I intend to carry on with my convention memorabilia, see <http://www.cooky.demon.co.uk/> and very little else.

So, so long *Plokta*, and thanks for all the fish. [*Not quite yet, as you're now good for several more issues.*]

Kari (again)

I write to your esteemed publication to request enlightenment on a matter of some serious public concern:

to wit, the effects on living organisms of paper products applied to, umm, well, the nether parts. Thanks to the careful observations of Mr Ben Elton, it has been known for some while that the use of tampons causes hyperactivity in women, notably leading to uncontrollable desires to go in-line skating, hang-gliding or indulge in water-sports, while a related (if not paper) product, the razor, apparently creates pilot fantasies in the male. (Curiously, a recent trend suggests that where tampons are concerned, men experience an urge to eat them.) I have noted of late, however, a disturbing increase in the abuse of toilet tissue by our furry friends: no longer is it solely golden labrador puppies who are incited to acts of random vandalism by this soft, strong, very-very-long stuff, but now, it appears, it induces states of near ecstasy in species as diverse as elephants, flamingoes and ring-tailed

lemurs. Surely Something Should Be Done?

Mary Smith

Front cover—yeah—it worked for me. I may be (temporarily) an Essex girl but I got it!!! Walthamstow was given a little too much prominence but that's poetic licence (justice?) innit?

Editorial—good. A late fanzine—I don't believe it. Surely not. I kinda rest on the laurels of a couple of issues pubbed (in all senses of the word) in the 70's. Mind you—they were meaty—64 and 66 pages in the first and second issues. Pity we didn't produce any more. I am currently thinking of publishing another (with a different title and possibly a different co-editor but with the same naive enthusiasm) and if I get enough interest, I shall.

It's very weird, being an old-time fan *and* a neo. I don't know the recent terminology and although I have met a few old-time fans, find it disorientating and quite strange to leap back into the water. It's good tho—fans are very tolerant and accepting of people. Even the newer ones! It's also good that blokes seem to outnumber us girly types in the same sort of proportions as in the 70s!!! And seem just as desperate (no names—unless pressed!)

WAHF

Eric Lindsay (again), **Jackie Duckhawk** (“We had many giggles over the map”), **Andy Sawyer** (“It's no use, I'm getting confused again”), **Lennart Uhlin** (“I'm a foreigner and allowed not to make sense occasionally”), **Alex McLintock** (“Holdstock has gone down on me”) and **Jim Caughran** (“It took me a while to loc”).

John Meaney: Who he?

WHEN the customers disappear, to go swimming or listen to the GOH or some other inconvenience in our road to world financial domination, what do the poor dealers do? Why, we buy each other's stock, of course. So I wamble across the dealers room to talk to Yvonne Meaney and ogle her stall. Yvonne has been a purveyor of fine waistcoats for years along with cute fluffy animals, cushions and other such delights.

This time she had a stack of books on the stall. *To Hold Infinity* by John Meaney, with a rather spiffy Jim Burns cover. I'd bought a copy only a couple of weeks before. It was languishing on the vast and teetering 'to read' pile.

“Oh,” sez I, “I just bought this, is he a relation of yours?”

I'm clueless most of the time, but not clueless enough not to remember Yvonne's surname.

She looked at me strangely. “Sue, he's my husband, you've known him for years.”

Oops, how terribly embarrassing. The old “I'm sorry, I didn't realise that your husband was a published author” gaffe.

Of course, Yvonne told John this. Bugger. John Meaney is many things. Bright, witty, charming, karate black belt and an utter and unspeakable tease.

He bounded across the Adelphi main lounge, tapped me on the shoulder. “Do I know you?” he asked suspiciously.

Argh. How long can keep this up? Years, I suspect. So I apologised for being a twit and bought a new copy of *To Hold Infinity* just so he could write abuse on the title page for me.

But John is no stranger to mistaken identity. Mr and Mrs Meaney Senior were blessed with more than one son and

happened to call John's brother Colm. No problem there, one might think, perfectly normal name, Colm Meaney.

He's a nice chap, quieter than John (not difficult, of course), lives in the United States. Steve Davies has worked with him. He's a computer consultant. He's not, and this is sort of important to keep in mind, an actor.

I mean, he may act, for all I know he might be a luminary of his local amateur dramatic society. But he isn't by profession an actor. More specifically, he isn't by profession a well-known actor who has been in lots of Hollywood movies, several smaller classy independent films and some TV series or other.

British ‘Sci-Fi’ magazine *SFX* did a review of *To Hold Infinity* and were very complimentary (so they should be, it's a good book); they were most impressed that the publicity engines of his publishers hadn't cashed in on John's famous brother.

When John, Yvonne and Colm turned up at the Worldcon in Chicago in 2000, they found that they had been upgraded to a suite with champagne and fruit and flowers and Chicon had issued an invitation for Colm to be on any program item he wanted at the con.

Colm Meaney is deeply embarrassed by all this. John, scandalous creature that he is, takes perverse delight in such mix-ups and will run with the joke as long as he can.

And he is never, ever, ever going to let me forget that I don't know who he is.

—Sue Mason

Does Exactly What It Says On The Tin

WHILE tidying up the study, I found a sheet of paper in the handwriting of Bridget Plokta, now a trainee FBI agent (think Clarice Starling).

"Diane. I'm heading South on the A316 towards Shepperton, where I'm investigating strange goings on at the Great Northern Hotel. Unfortunately, I seem to have forgotten my Dictaphone."



Meanwhile, we arrived at Damn Fine Con shagged out after a long squawk. There were large numbers of men in charcoal suits and dark glasses running around. One stopped us. "You're not drinking! There's 3000 bottles of beer to get through, you know. It's not just a good idea, it's the law!" And there certainly appeared to be plenty of police officers present.

"It's the law enforcement disco", explained Mark and Claire Fishlifter. Mark in particular had really got into the costuming thing.



I'm just wearing it for a friend

Claire leaned over. "I'm trying to persuade faneds not to use my real name in things that are going to appear on the web." "OK, then," I agreed. We'll just refer to you as Mark and Claire Fishlifter from now on."

We braved the disco to get to the con bar for the promised Real Ale in Bottles. "Two bottles of Wadworths 6X." "Ah. It's too warm," said the barman. "Come back later."

Max appeared, dressed as a convict and dragging her ball and chain along behind her, and gave us each a tattoo saying "Tobes for TAFF." She also introduced us to Ang Rosin, new to our bit of fandom but shortly to become indispensable.

And then Alison Freebairn turned up, demonstrating that her contribution to law enforcement would be to hold up traffic. Stef was wearing a similar outfit, but without the comedy boobies.



I'm afraid you're causing a breach of the peace

James Bacon wandered over. "You missed the opening ceremony. We crucified Tobes. But he'll rise again on the third day." Tobes appeared to be his normal dissolute self. "How can you tell?" I went back for the beer, expecting it to be cold now. "Sorry, we've run out. They're just getting some more."

The con badges were brilliant in every respect apart from completely failing to function as a name badge; the teeny tiny text invisible without a prolonged peer. For some reason loads of people seemed to have forgotten Flick's name.



Is that a pistol in your Playtex or are you just pleased to see me?

The photo ID was sufficiently realistic that they got us excellent service at all points at Sainsbury's the following morning. The checkout boy refused to believe that we weren't actually FBI agents, despite repeated denials. It was only when we showed him Jonathan's badge that he started to suspect that our toddler was not in fact a trained killer. Ah, how wrong he was.

After breakfast, there was a concerted effort to fatten us all up. First there was a cherry pie baking contest. Pies of all shapes and descriptions appeared. A few showed distinct signs of having been homebaked in a local supermarket, but the winner was highly authentic, with great flaky pastry and sharp, flavourful cherries. All we needed was some coffee, and the con had laid on damn fine coffee in the programme hall, along with 700 donuts, arrayed in massive boxes, and ambient music based on Angelo Badalamenti.

It was all very civilised really, apart from a suspicion that we'd be eating donuts until they were coming out of our ears. Robert Newman was overcome with emotion. "When I had the idea for a Twin Peaks convention, I just imagined a load of fans wearing FBI badges, standing around drinking coffee and eating donuts."

People kept wandering past with Great Big Guns. "It's brilliant," explained an FBI agent, codenamed "Toolman". "They're airguns; they're completely unlicensed and can be sold to anyone over the age of 12. And this one,"—and at this point he gestures to a machine gun only slightly smaller than a howitzer—"fires 200 rounds a minute and can drill holes in inch-thick plasterboard". We contemplated the notion of guns of this kind in the hands of the DFC membership, and went off for a beer. "Fullers 1845, please." "I'm sorry," said the barman. "It hasn't settled yet."

You can tell it's the sort of convention where young people enjoy themselves; there was a disco every night. The second disco was the High School Prom. Very many people dressed up in appropriate clothes.

We never established whether Lesley Meade was an active fan in general, but she was highly active at this con. She turned up for the school prom dressed as a cheerleader and cheerfully demonstrated her range of routines for us: "V-O-T-E F-O-R T-O-B-E-S".



"Give us an X"

Pushing in our earplugs, we wandered past the prommers to buy some beer. "Two Waggledance, please." "Ah. Can't get the bees, you know."

Flick wore a proper prom dress, and quickly demonstrated her Laura Palmer prom queen impersonation – drinking, carousing, and generally hanging around with unsuitable men.



"Does your mother know you're out?"

You could spot the trufen because they were sitting around the bar, with nary a petticoat or tiara between them.

James Bacon wandered over. "It's the Truffs!" he announced. "Having a good time?" Dr Plokta sucked in his breath sharply. "I think the con, um..."

"Yes?" said James hopefully, gearing up for a bit of programming guru egoboo.

"...lacks Narrative Momentum," explained the deranged scientist. He'd clearly recognised the overarching Lynchian theme of the con.

James' floppy ears looked distinctly droopy. For the rest of the con, he kept sidling up to people and asking them

whether they felt Damn Fine Convention had narrative momentum. Dr P, giggling maniacally, never felt the need to explain why a convention might need narrative momentum.



"Twin Geeks: 'It's so sad; they share a liver, you know'"

DFC was the con where the Cult of Live Journal really took off. The first ever CoLJ service included a recital of the creed, a great deal of interpretive dance, dishing out of little Livejournal figures, and Scooby snacks. Max gave me a tattoo saying "Cult of LiveJournal".

James Bacon turned up, planning to poke fun at the serious truffish sort of an item. "Looks far too weird to me," he said, watching the interpretive dance.

On Sunday morning we got up to discover we had lost the last traces of narrative momentum. "pohskrow sdrawkcab gniklat a s'tI", explained Robert Newman. Using the power of superfluous technology, and a left-over disco, we attempted to speak Black Lodge style into a microphone. Our words were then reversed, and the audience had to guess what we were saying.

"mees ycht tahw ton era slwo ehT," I explained urgently. Hazel, who had clearly seen Twin Peaks recently, guessed quickly what I was saying. This gave me an idea. "esaelp, dribleulB notsinoC fo selttob owT"

"ffo regguB", answered the barman, helpfully.

The ghost of JG Ballard permeated the convention, which was held in a decaying hotel with a drained swimming pool. This caused particular problems at the Miss Twin Peaks poolside event. With unusual presence of mind, James and Stef had procured an inflatable pool for the bevy of beauties to parade around.

This worked really well right up to the point where Jonathan spotted the pool, toddled purposefully over to it, and dragged it off with him. I felt thirsty. "Can I have an Old Speckled Hen?," I enquired optimistically. "I had to send it back; it looked a bit spotty."



"Don't fancy yours much"

Flick presided over the bondage workshop, in which Douglas Spencer proved to be startlingly well-informed on the issue of how to tie people up for fun and frolics, and Tobes and a young friend found it very difficult to drink beer while chained up with much of the stock of Pets Paradise. At this point I heard my favourite quote of the convention: "Did *nobody* think to bring any rope?"



"You've been a very, very naughty bear"

Sunday night's disco was a Karaoke Video Disco. This turned out to be surprisingly successful. Novacon could do with one of these, providing it was in a well-soundproofed bit of the hotel. I led the troops in a rousing chorus of "Lily the Pink", with Julian and Ian as my backing singers, while the rest of the truffs beat a path for the bar. Star turn was The Blues Brothers—Squaddie [*we're not allowed to call him that any more—Ed.*], Tony Keen and Alan Sullivan.



"Spot Alan Woodford's hat, glasses and tie."

On Monday morning I woke up seriously hung over. "Perhaps you're a character in *Memento*," explained Steven, helpfully. "Look! You have important messages tattooed on your body!" I looked. "Cult of Live Journal" said the first. "Tobes for TAFF" said the second. "James B is Evil. Kill Him and Wrap Him in Plastic," said the third. Luckily, they all came off in the shower.

I had spent most of the first part of the con fretting about what I would do at the League of Fan Funds event; as the other two-third of our triumvirate either weren't at the convention or weren't around on Monday. I decided we could get some plastic from Homebase and wrap the TAFF candidates in plastic. I had reckoned without three things:

- Tobes was sleeping off a hard night;
- Chris O'Shea didn't fancy doing a Laura Palmer impersonation; and
- the previous programme item had wrapped people in plastic.

We *did* have to explain TAFF to the uninitiated, which we did through the medium of interpretive dance.



"And she took all the money and disappeared in a puff of smoke"; Tony Keen, Alison and Ang embody the spirit of fan funds.

James Bacon wandered past, just as we got to the interpretive dance bit. This time he was so astonished he had to drag Stef in to see. Later, Claire Fishlifter and I discussed the phenomenon in the bar. "Every generation feels the need to reinvent fandom because the old guard are too boring. And it always turns out just the same way." "Yes," I agreed. "I bet if James and Stef were magically transported to a con in the early fifties, they'd find it was much more fun than they expected." "There'd even be water pistols." "Mmm." We mused for a moment. "Except that today's water pistols are Much Better." "If they went back in time carrying their water pistols, they'd be hailed as Gods." We mused a bit more.

In the end, it turned out that wrapping people in plastic and duck tape was entirely too much fun to be



Zen and the art of Lawnmower maintenance

dampened by a few little problems. Max slipped quickly into her natural role of Stunt Tobes. With little persuading, Ang joined in as a Stunt Chris. And Julie Rigby volunteered to be wrapped up in our spare sheet. "OK," I mused, once they were all safely cocooned. "How can we raise money for LFF now?" "I know!" cried Chris. "Slug-racing!" So the plastic-wrapped girls hopped out of the room and off to the main programme to raise money for LFF. Unfortunately, we burst into the main programme only to discover that we had invaded the one serious item of the entire convention, Stewart Reuben giving a lecture about chess. The slugs hopped out again quickly, and just about made it to the bar before the dust sheets gave way and they collapsed in a heap of torn, sweaty plastic. I needed a beer. "How about a couple of Black Sheep?" "Just took the last one to market," explained the barman.

The lawnmower racing was particularly Lynchian. Inspired by *The Straight Story*, a film with Absolutely No Lawnmower Racing of any kind, people ran a variety of elderly lawnmowers around a track while the committee made running repairs.

At the closing ceremony, they threatened to crucify Tobes again, but didn't. And they had presents for everyone who'd helped out in any way, no matter how small. I got a tube of amazing bubble mixture that produces bubbles that don't burst when you touch them. Watch out for it at <plokta.con>. They tried to thank Flick, but she'd gone. "What can we give her?" mused Stef. "I know! A leftover pair of comedy boobies." Suggestions of "coals to Newcastle" were shouted down, as Stef and James took the rare opportunity to massage Flick's breasts. "I'm not sure they're big enough," pronounced experts in the field. Julie Rigby was declared

"Miss Twin Peaks", for joining in with every single event. And they gave the "couple of the convention" a golden heart necklace that broke into two matching halves.

We gathered our things, and had a last drink. "Can I have a couple of bottles of Spitfire?" "Haven't had any of that around since the war." "Don't you sell any bottled bitter at all?" I asked, getting a bit frustrated. "Ah, yes. We had a pile in for the con, but we've sold every bottle."

"I've had a good time," I reflected. "It's been a great con. But I guess I won't get any more excitement for a while." Suddenly, there came a noise from the car park, similar to the sound of Concorde overflying Reading.

"Ah," explained Claire. "That's Liam, giving people rides up and down the byways of Shepperton on his cherry red custom trike, without benefit of a helmet or leathers."

—Alison Scott



Can I bring my beer with me?