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29th Edition
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Plokta XP Annoyances

O'REALLY?

Alison Scott, Steve Davies & Mike Scott

This is issue 29 of *Plokta*, edited by Steve Davies, Alison Scott and Mike Scott. It is available for letter of comment (one copy to Alison's address is fine, we pass them over to each other), trade (copies to each of our addresses if possible, please), contribution, editorial whim, or for a bulk discount deal on Apple PowerBooks.

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The *Plokta News Network* is at
www.plokta.com/pnn/

The cabal also includes Giulia De Cesare, Sue Mason, Steven, Marianne and Jonathan Cain. And not George. Waaah.

Art by Alison Scott & Sue Mason (cover), Sue Mason (2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 14), Sheryl Birkhead (11)

Photos by Steve Kyte (3), Jaine Weddell (6 & 7), SMS (12)

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Giulia de Cesare, as for
Steve Davies

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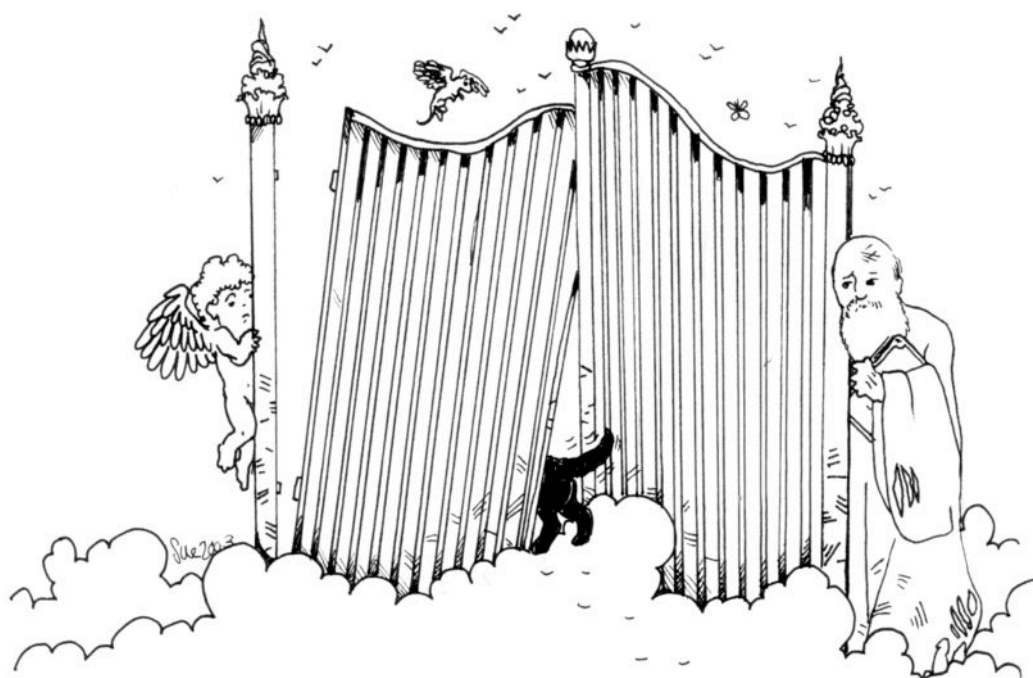
Others: See LoC column

Our mailing list has shrunk again. We were sad to hear of the deaths of fannish jiants Harry Warner Jr and John Foyster. They will both be much missed.

The official target reader of this
fanzine is Michael Abbott

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Editorial

THE *Plokta* cabal has lost its first member. Regular readers will be aware that George has been ill for some time and has been running up huge vet bills for beta blockers. We're afraid he lost his final battle against the forces of entropy. Nobody knows how old he was, but the woman next door says he used to sleep on her bed when she was a child so he was probably somewhere between 18 and 22 which is pretty good for a cat.

So now he's gone to a better place. Which has presumably become a worse place, with a mysterious black beast on the prowl, and dead cherubs being deposited on pillows overnight.

"Green Amber, the Indian goddess of hangovers"

We've gone over to the fruity side of the Force. Having been planning to get a Mac of some kind for a while, ever since seeing Alison's iMac, Mike bought a shiny new PowerBook with a built-in DVD burner. Then Steve got one. Then Alison got one. And *Plokta* is now produced 100% on Mac, although not by any means a Microsoft-free zone since we still use Word.

In fact, this issue of *Plokta* is brought to you by the new collaborative text editor for the Mac called Hydra, that uses Rendezvous zero-configuration networking to allow any user to share a document on the network. Everyone can then edit the document simultaneously, and Steve is adding more text onto this document even as I'm typing this sentence. This takes a bit of getting used to, but fits very well into the *Plokta* way of editing the fanzine. We don't think we should let Marianne and Jonathan try it out, though, given that they generally come to blows when sharing the same computer, never mind simultaneously editing the same document. Of course, the fact that Jonathan can't read or write yet will probably also limit the use he gets out of a text editor.



The official lubricant of the *Plokta* cabal, Coniston Bluebird, brewed by Brakspears brewery in Henley is now only a shadow of its former self. Brakspears, an old and traditional brewery has been taken over by suits who decided they could make more money by getting out of beer. The fact that Brakspears brewery occupied a prime site in the middle of Henley may have had something to do with it as well. Coniston Bluebird along with all the other great old

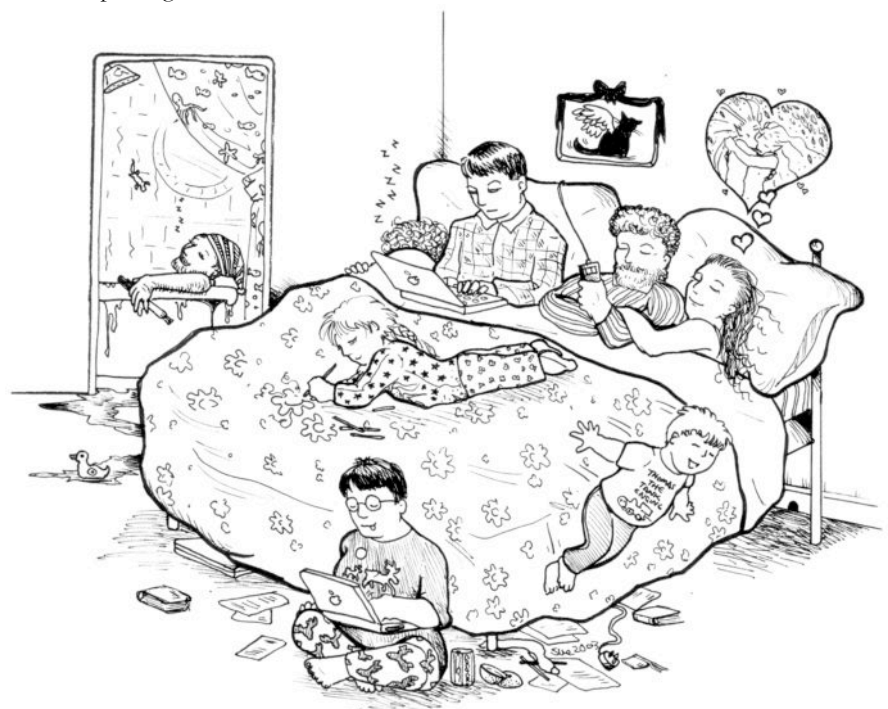
brands were sold off to another local brewery based out of a tin shed somewhere. It just doesn't taste the same. Although in a blind taste-test comparing the old and the new, three out of three members of the *Plokta* cabal proved to be unable to tell which was which.

Steve Kyte is still Photoshopping dodgy pictures of Sue, and kindly sent us his latest masterpiece.



E B Frohvet wonders in the latest *Twink* whether the *Plokta* Cabal actually read *Twink*. Well, we have been known to glance inside it from time to time. The question is, does E B Frohvet ever read *Plokta*?

Alison has been suffering from an unexplained virus for several months. Now that she's not running Windows any more she's expecting to feel better soon.



BOLLOCKS

"When Dr Plokta goes to bed, all the little websites go to bed..."

Are The *Plokta* Cabal Good in Bed?

The various members of the Cabal actually get up to all kinds of things in bed. Can you match the activity to the Caballero?

- Playing with the electronic bed controls ("Can you feel anything when I do this?")
- Huddling under 12 duvets (and complaining about the weight of the pea on top)
- Logging on to a web server (and debugging a problem with a RAID array)
- Jumping off the bed shrieking with laughter (and repeating *ad iritabilis extremis*)
- Sleeping in the bath (and getting wrinkly)
- Shedding (formerly, alas)
- Not going to bed at all (and playing computer games instead)
- "Oh Celeborn...!" "Oh Haldir...!"
- Colouring in the duvet cover (with gold felt tip pens)

BOLLOCKS

The Replicant Restaurant

Techno-Lust

Now that we've all purchased 15" PowerBooks, we've begun to faunch after the new 17" version. Never mind that it's larger than our first car, it's the theoretically portable computer of the moment. It's not the fast wireless networking, the Bluetooth support or the wide hi-res screen—the feature every true geek really wants is the blue LED circuitry under the keyboard that adjusts its brightness automatically depending on the ambient light level. If the lights go out, the keyboard begins to gently glow.

"Isn't that a Jim Steinman song?", asked Giulia. "Paradise by the Keyboard Light." They'll never let her visit the Apple Store again.



"Your cherub's a bit tall and thin at the moment"

Dangerous When Wet

You cruise down the motorway at 90mph only to be confronted by a huge truck bearing the slogan "Danger! Horses!". You never knew they could be such a menace. Now it's amphibians. Every month my company pays some poor soul to spend their long dark nights in St Asaph on the Newt Patrol.

—Sue Mason



ONE of the features of modern life is the leisure complex, which combines shopping and entertainment in a concrete travesty of the notion of park. Car rather than Hyde. As a nation, the British spend a lot of time in various of these. Shopping includes DIY stores, branches of Halfords, Comet and PC World, and other shops of the sort that want to be warehouses when they grow up. There are cinemas; more expensive and less atmospheric than the local fleapit, but with better projection and sound and more comfortable seats. There's normally a bowling alley, to provide an evening destination for pre-drinking teens, which leavens bowling with videogames and *Dancing Stage Euromix* machines.

And there are, of course, restaurants. People who shop, bowl, or see films, normally also want to eat. Whether it's a family trying to all have a good time at once, a couple, or a crowd of kids, they're pretty much after the same sort of meal. They like to have feel they've eaten well, at somewhere a bit different, unusual; with good food and a good atmosphere. And most especially not too expensive; because the whole evening has to remain affordable. So the economics of putting restaurants in leisure parks means that you will make most money if you plonk an identical unique and charming bistro into every big box suburban spending farm in the country.

At the junction of the North Circular and the A13, there's a leisure park disturbingly known as the Beckton Triangle, on which stands a unique and charming New York Italian restaurant called Frankie & Benny's. Now, this is obviously a big box sort of chain. The giveaway is the menus; the range and descriptions of the food, and the graphic design, are those of a chain, not a single restaurant. There are separate children's menus with a gangster mice theme. The food cleverly combines burgers, pizza and pasta in a blatant attempt to feed every child in England.

The décor is clever; there's a diner-style counter and an open kitchen so you can see the pizza oven. There are some pizza restaurant style tables, but the external walls have bench seating. Somebody has done their homework here. There's nothing you can point to in the restaurant to say well, that's not right. The food's not bad, either; much better than the ordinary run of British American restaurants. The carefully selected music – which you can buy – is American hits of the 50s and 60s. There are cocktails, and sumptuous chain restaurant puddings.

I discover that Jonathan's menu doubles as origami and fold it up to make a little moneybox decorated with gangster mice. He instantly discards it and it lies forlorn on the floor.



The grownup menus do not fold up to make little mouse-hole money boxes. Instead they tell the story of how Frankie and Benny started out. From their website:

Frankie Giuliani was 10 years old when, with his Mamma and Poppa, he left Sicily and landed at Ellis Island, New York in 1924. They moved in with relatives in Brooklyn's "Little Italy", a predominately Italian neighbourhood. Poppa soon found work, but from the home country he'd brought a little money and a lot of ambition.

It was no surprise then, when the family opened a restaurant within a year, everybody helping with the building and the cooking in equal measure. Each of them had a favourite dish to contribute, but it was Mamma's home-style cooking that was the base from which the business prospered.

Frankie went to the nearby High School and became lifetime friends with Benny, already a third generation American. In 1953 Poppa retired and Frankie and Benny took over the business, combining the best of popular American food with traditional Italian dishes. The rest, as they say, is history.

Ah, so that's why we have both burgers and pizza, then. Not because they're trying to please all of the people all of the time, but because of Frankie Giuliani and Benny, er, Benny who? Well, anyway, because of their enduring friendship. So they've been a roaring success since 1925, and are now opening up everywhere in the UK where there's room to drop a unique and etc. bistro? In which case, why have I never heard of them? I cogitate on this while I eat my traditional New York Italian meal of blackened Cajun spiced burger with a blue cheese dressing.



I begin to become suspicious. But there are photos. All around the walls. Nearly all of people. Mostly framed. Often there are several photos in one frame, annotated by a shaky hand in fading blue ink with names and places. "Maria, Coney Island, 1931". "Uncle Fred, 1952." The frames are old and do not match; some are bashed. In others the pictures are not straight inside the frames or don't fit. Most are faded. So, either they're real photos, or somebody's worked very hard to make them look like real photos. But are they real photos of "Frankie" and "Benny" and their friends and relations? The official site is careful not to say so, and other sites are unreliable at best. We have, for example:

Frankie Giuliani's Italian upbringing gave him a love for intimate dining and fine wines, whereas Benny carefully selected each picture on the wall and every song which is played to provide the ideal setting for your large party or celebratory dinner.

This is the same Frankie Giuliani who arrived on Ellis Island in 1924, and had his formative years as the son of a Brooklyn restaurateur during the depression, right? And I'm sure that third generation American Benny (what was his last name, again?) had nothing but the comfort of twenty-first century cinema-goers in mind when taking those family photos.

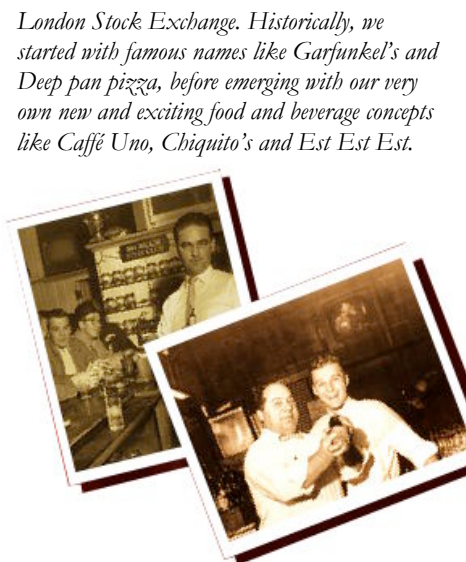
Another site says

The success of Frankie & Benny's speaks for itself. Our first restaurant opened in Leicester in September 1995...

No, surely. Your first restaurant opened in Brooklyn in 1925, didn't it? Look, I have all these photos to prove it. Everything starts to become clear. The restaurant has been given a ton of implanted memories. They provide a cushion for its emotions and stop it becoming insecure about its limited experience.

As I begin to wonder whether they've been picking up job lots of family photos in Brooklyn flea markets:

City Centre Restaurants are the largest independent restaurant group quoted on the



London Stock Exchange. Historically, we started with famous names like Garfunkel's and Deep pan pizza, before emerging with our very own new and exciting food and beverage concepts like Caffé Uno, Chiquito's and Est Est Est.

In 1995, the group developed a new original concept to be based on a themed restaurant combining the New York style, atmosphere and experience with an Italian influence in its cuisine.

From this Frankie & Benny's was born.

As we left the restaurant, I looked around at the photos one more time, and I caught sight of Jonathan's discarded origami money box. I wonder if the owners dream of enormous profits. Shame these concepts only have a four year lifespan, isn't it?

—Alison Scott

Cough, Cough

I'VE been watching the proceedings of the Millionaire case with interest. You see, about a year and a half ago, I went with Steven and my mum to watch *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* being filmed, over in Borehamwood. It was a bitterly cold Sunday, for all that it was only September, and we queued for ages outside, wondering whether it had been a good idea. Our tickets were free, but there was no guarantee that we'd actually be in the studio audience; so there was a risk that we would queue all this time and then not get in.

And so it proved; we were given the options of going home, or watching the filming from an overflow area on a big screen. In either case we'd get guaranteed passes into the studio audience another night. We decided to stay and watch; the right decision. The big screen gave us the flavour of the filming, plus the overlaid graphics that you see on TV. The warm-up man made jokes at the expense of the

overflow audience as well as the 'proper' audience, suggesting, for example, that the shine from Steven's head was messing up the cameras.

We saw someone win a few thousand, and then someone terribly nervous scrape their way to £1000. And then Major Ingram came on; a man whose wife and brother-in-law had already had big wins. Chris Tarrant remarked on that, and Ingram, who has a very plummy accent, said he was expecting to 'crash and burn'. Crashing and burning became a theme of the show after that, with Tarrant making jokes like 'We're going down! Mayday! Mayday! Binky's bought it.' Much hilarity. Ingram answered the first seven questions or so, and hardly a question went by without some reference to 'bandits' or 'going down in flames'.

Listening to the radio a couple of days later, we heard that he'd gone on to win the million. We were surprised,

because he'd been very nervous; not confident at all. We assumed that he was actually a clever man who'd got over his nerves and got a grip. But then, later that day, thousands of people died in New York and Washington, and suddenly nobody cared that someone had won a million pounds on the telly.

I didn't make any connection at first; I was too busy being appalled. But a day or so later, when I was beginning to recover from the shock, I suddenly thought, 'Gosh, they won't be able to show the edition of *Millionaire* that we saw being filmed.' Or they'd have to edit out all those jokes about crashes, at the very least; and there wouldn't be a lot left. And if they couldn't broadcast the show, they wouldn't have seen much return for their million quid, would they? Unless, of course, they could prove that there was something dodgy about the winner.

—Alison Scott

BOLLOCKS

Escaping to the Village

But Is It Art?

Sue rang me in a bit of a tizzy. "What are you doing on April 10th?" she asked. One afternoon last year she drew a picture of herself belly-dancing in a quiet moment at work. In biro. Liking the result, she sent it in as an entry to "Self-Portrait UK", a national contest to encourage as many Britons as possible to draw themselves in various multi-media ways. Of course, as they were mostly about demonstrating how art had been reformed through superfluous technology, biro was probably a bit *infra dig*. So she thought no more of it.

Until last week, when they wrote to her to say that her picture had been chosen, out of several thousand, to be one of ninety in a touring exhibition. For some reason, the notion of a belly dancing Sue tickled their fancies. Or something like that. We're looking forward to the grand launch on April 10th, where Sue and I will go to the National Portrait Gallery, drink free wine, spot her portrait hanging amongst all the Holbeins, and look around to see if we can match the other attendees to *their* self-portraits.

Of course, now that Sue's been hung in the National Portrait Gallery, she's acquired a load of airs and graces. For example, she won't let us refer to the little pictures she does for *Plokta* as "fillos" any more, but as "interior artwork" or "miniatures". And she's made it clear that we're never to rescale any of her delicate studies of waterfowl.

—Alison Scott



WE love the Village.

What originally drew us to Portmeirion was not the architecture (fabulous though it is), nor the gardens (lovely though they are), nor the pottery (which is nice enough, if you like that kind of thing). It was *The Prisoner*.

For those too young or too American to have encountered it, *The Prisoner* is a cult (i.e. incomprehensible yet compelling) 1960s British TV series starring Patrick McGoohan as an ex-spy who is transported to an idyllic dystopia called the Village. The residents of the Village, known only as numbers, live lives of enforced leisure in a Mediterranean-style village by the sea. They can never leave, on pain of being chased by a giant weather balloon known as 'Rover', a fate which is much scarier than it sounds.

I'm not a huge *Prisoner* fan, but when I discovered that the Italianate porticoes, exotic fountains and delicate stucco houses of the Village were not a stage set in North London but a real village in North Wales, I had to see it for myself.



Dave and I first visited during a sweltering August bank holiday in 1991. The Village turned out to be not entirely real, as it was built as a folly, a 'home for fallen buildings' by a local eccentric. If anything this made it even more special, and despite the heat and the crowds we knew we'd found somewhere magical. Then, on the way out, under a brightly painted archway, I saw a notice board giving room rates and a sample menu. It might not be a real village, but it was a real hotel.



Bloody Hell.

We were hooked.

And so, for the last eleven years, we have spent between one and two weeks a year there: a week in April, staying self-catering in one of the largest 'cottages' (more like a small villa) high up on the cliffs and the odd couple of days for Xmas, birthdays and anniversaries staying either in the hotel itself, right on the edge of the beach, or in one of the serviced cottage rooms in the village. One of my ambitions is to stay in every hotel room and every cottage in the place. That's thirteen rooms in the main hotel, twenty six hotel rooms/suites in the village and seventeen self-catering cottages. At the time of writing, I'm about a quarter of the way through.

But what, you may ask, does any of this have to do with superfluous technology? Well, despite its whimsical air of rustic eccentricity, the village has well and truly entered the twenty first century. Or rather the castle has. Castell Deudraeth (Welsh for 'castle between two beaches') was, like much of the village, an empty shell at the time *The Prisoner* was filmed, though the façade was used to represent the hospital where 'Number 6' was taken to recover/be interrogated after Rover had got him. It's come on a bit from those days of iron beds, disorientating strobes and electroshock therapy, and since opening as a hotel in May 2001 has won numerous awards.

I have to admit being slightly less enthusiastic about staying in the Castell than I was about hotel or village rooms, as it's not in the Village itself, but a quarter of a mile above it on the wooded headland. But my ambition to stay in all the rooms technically includes the Castell (which adds another eleven rooms to my target), so when Dave said he'd buy me three days there for my birthday, I happily accepted. Little did I

realise that the dour grey exterior of the Castell hid a techno-palace of boy's toys.

With characteristic decadence, I started my birthday weekend with a manicure at the hotel beauty parlour while Dave dealt with mundane stuff like checking in. As my manicure took longer than expected, I phoned Dave to let him know I was on my way back. I said that I hoped I hadn't got him out of the bath, but he said that was not a problem as there was a phone in the bathroom. And the lounge. And the bedroom. There was also a wide screen TV and DVD player in the lounge. And the bedroom. They couldn't fit one in the bathroom, as it's in a turret. Due to the octagonal shape of the turret there wasn't anywhere to put a radiator either, so they'd installed heating under the white marble floor. The bathroom also boasted a magnifying self-lit mirror, to allow the pore-by-pore application of make-up, a rather frightening looking bidet (which I never had the nerve to use) and a whirlpool bath. I thought this latter item was a particularly intimidating example of superfluous technology; nowhere in the two-page laminated instruction sheet did it tell you how to make the plug stay in.



However once Dave had helped me master the basics, I soon discovered the delights of the vari-speed multi-angled jets. A girl could get used to this. And if you want to get clean, as opposed to just having fun, then there's always the shower, the only one I've been in where the temperature you request is always the one coming through the nozzle, even if someone on the floor below flushes the loo. And instead of the shower curtain there's a pair of curved Perspex doors which lock into place over the bath, in a way which made me think, the first time I saw Dave

behind them, that after the steam had cleared and he emerged he wouldn't just be clean, he'd be transformed. Into, say, Viggo Mortensen.



And the superfluous tech and luxury isn't confined to the smallest room. Every light fixture has an independent dimmer switch, the walls have inbuilt speakers and every soft surface appears to be covered in leather—including the bed, which had a leather headboard and leather bolster.

As someone who avoids eating or wearing animals, this was not a plus point; nor was the fire in the lounge which required one to pull, press or twiddle four separate knobs in order to get flame. Whatever happened to 'strike match and apply to paper'? But Dave distracted me from cursing the fire by casually mentioning that we could always phone room service and, along with champagne and lobster, get them to bring up the entire *Prisoner* TV series on DVD. Now that is service.

On balance, I decided that I was willing to put aside my Luddite tendencies and surrender to the luxury of the village—though I advise anyone thinking of staying in the Castell to bring their own techno-wizard to operate the bathroom (no, you can't have mine – he might not be Viggo Mortensen, but he has his uses). Then again, there was the beeping. A faint peep-peep-peep, just on edge of hearing, occurring at infrequent and random intervals. Dave assured me it was just the car alarm on the Audi parked below our window, but I wasn't so sure. If you ask me it was the Tech, reminding us that we were still in the Village.

—Jaine Weddell

BOLLOCKS

Fickle Fingers of Fate

It is alleged that the qwerty keyboard layout was designed to stop the keys on manual typewriters from locking together when people typed too quickly. It did this by having the most frequently used keys accessed by the least-used and least-nimble fingers, forcing typists to work inefficiently. In an average day's work on a qwerty keyboard, a typist's fingers cover twelve to twenty miles.

Folks weren't terribly bothered about this until World War II came along. Suddenly, fast typists were at a premium and having them work inefficiently was not conducive to, um, homeland security. So the navy did its military thing and implemented Commander Dvorak's Big Idea. In an average day's work on a Dvorak keyboard, a typist's fingers cover *one* mile a day. As with any fabulous idea that hugely increases human efficiency and comfort, the Dvorak layout was an overnight success and universally adopted.

What?

Oh, that was in the other alternate reality, sorry.

So, what has all this got to do with me? Well, you may recall my previous adventures in enriching the physiotherapists of Berkshire. I had another close encounter with an elastoplast X last month as the result of a trapped nerve in my neck, something to do with the C7-T1 vertebra. It was bloody agony, a pain relief from which could only be obtained in the classic hand-on-head posture associated with the children's rhyme "I'm a Little Teapot". What was even worse though was the numbness and loss of strength in my right hand, and the physio cheerfully telling me it could become permanent if I didn't smarten up my thinking, posture-wise. So, hello ergonomic keyboard, adjusted seating position and, let's go the whole hog while we're at it, Dvorak layout.

And how am I getting on with all this?

Let's just say that, while I can technically now touch-type, there'd be no danger whatsoever of my keys locking together.

—Giulia de Cesare

The Other White Meat

IT IS, as usual, Sue Mason's fault. Everything is Sue's fault. My possession of enough silver jewellery to sink a battleship and enough amber to re-float it is also Sue's fault. My brief forays into the world of Middle Eastern dance are Sue's fault. Ok, well, to be fair, the last might partly be Gail Courtney's fault. But my slash habit is Sue's fault. And Gail's. And Helen's.

And my Lord of the Rings elf-slash habit is definitely Sue's fault. And Alison's, for insisting I go to see the movie in the first place. Honestly, with friends like those, what's a girl to do except become an utterly evil and corrupt spawn of Satan?

Actually, there's a couple of other people I can blame. Steve, for installing a wireless network in the house then taking me to a computer fair and walking me down the aisle and stopping at a certain spot and whispering in my ear "Oh, look, it's a new Sony Vaio, and it's only mumblety-mumble hundred pounds and you've always said you wanted your very own computer." And my last employer, for making me redundant and giving me lots of lovely time of my own. Oh, yes, they're both guilty, too, as enablers of my new vice.

So I sit at home, rugged up nice and warm, and before my awe-struck eyes unfold great vistas of elves, tall and fair, silver hair sliding over skin white as marble, blue eyes full of anguish and torment, sensual lips parting softly as

they sigh with desire for their distant, unattainable lovers.

Actually, before my boggling eyes unfold ghastly images of elves speaking in modern American slang, hanging out in malls, living lives like the worst soap operas you can ever imagine in their unlikely pursuit of fat teenaged schoolgirls. Never was Sturgeon's Law more true than in slash. In fact, I'd like to propose the Slash Amendment to Sturgeon's Law: the old dear was a wild optimist. Characterisation, plot, grammar, spelling, punctuation—alien concepts all to the average slash writer. So, what's a girl to do after she's read the complete works of the dozen or so decent authors out there, but roll her own?

Now, I don't want to sit here with a head expanding like a balloon in a vacuum or anything, but I do think that I have some grasp of characterisation, plot, grammar, spelling and punctuation, at least. And it's such fun! You didn't think there was enough violence or pretty girls in Tolkien? Peter Jackson obviously didn't. Well, then, re-imagine it the way you want! After all, that's exactly what Jackson has done, only he had the benefit of a multi-million pound budget and the best CGI on the planet. The rest of us have words and our imagination, but we can still enjoy ourselves.

Me, I didn't think there was enough angst, heart-felt glances full of deep meaning and longing between beautiful male elves. Or torrid sex, torment, the anguish of loss and the ecstasy of reconciliation, the gentle love and companionship found in the embrace of one's true love... stop it!

Damn, this isn't the place.

Basically, it's a way to rewrite life into an idealised fantasy. It's fun, free and harmless. For instance, one day when we'd just come back from the supermarket, we had the following conversation while putting stuff in the fridge and waiting for the microwave to go ping.

Him: What's the date today? The 26th?

Me: Yes. It's my birthday. I'm 44 years and eight months old. Bah, humbug. (Pause.) You could console me. With a kiss.

Him: (smiling, kisses forehead.)

Me: I'm not feeling consoled yet.

Him: (Pecks on cheek.)

Me: Try harder.

Him: (Giggles and walks off.)

Now, on the one hand, I found this quite sweet. On the other hand, let's see how this would play in fantasy-relationship-land:

Haldir: What's the date today? The 26th?

Celeborn: Yes. It's my birthday. I'm 4,480 years old. Bah, humbug. (Pause.) You could console me. With a kiss.

Haldir: (smiling, kisses forehead, then each eyelid, then tip of nose, then mouth.)

Celeborn: I'm not feeling consoled yet.

Haldir: (Wraps arms around him, brushes his tongue over Celeborn's lips, then pushes it between them, kissing him deeply, caressing the inside of each cheek and the roof of his mouth.)

Celeborn: (Several minutes later, gasping for breath.): Try harder.

Haldir: (Laughs, sweeps him off his feet and carries him to their bed.)

See what I mean?

—Giulia de Cesare



Needs A Skip, Vern

I WAS due to go to Walthamstow to hammer out a new *Plokta*, Giulia staying home to look after the cat. As I'd warned Alison in email, I set off from Reading early to beat the traffic and arrived at their front door at around ten in the morning. After some time attempting to ring the doorbell and occasionally banging the flap of the letterbox, eventually a towel-clad and dripping Steven Cain emerged. It seemed that Alison had taken the opportunity to cart Marianne off to a concert, leaving Steven in charge of the *Plokta* production facility (and of Jonathan who is, unfortunately, still too young to open the front door to itinerant co-editors).

Apart from watching over his offspring from the safety of the bathtub, Steven was also supposed to be tidying up the study preparatory to us producing *Plokta* in there. The living-room is split-level with the study floor about 3 foot below the main level. Not that you could tell this from looking at the room. Somewhere down there, lost along with the treasures of the ancients, were three computers, two printers and the elephants' graveyard of children's toys. Plus more paper than you'd think possible, much of it LoCs to *Plokta*, fanzines and other things we really ought to try and find before attempting to produce another issue of the fanzine. After all, there's only so many times that you can use the excuse about having mislaid the LoC column.

We looked at the vast and seething heap of junk and decided we'd better make a start right away, before the house was declared a world archaeological site. Quite apart from anything else, doing it while Alison was out of the house could only make things easier. We fortified ourselves with massive amounts of coffee and set to.

I've never been one of those people who is obsessively tidy. On the other hand, I'm not particularly untidy. At least, I think so. Others may disagree. Giulia for instance is moderately house-proud and has been known to... well, be grateful that her mother is on the opposite side of the planet so she can't see what an awful tip the kitchen gets into from time to time. It was during one of those conversations which goes something like "why on earth didn't you do the washing up?" "I didn't think there was enough of it" "But there were unwashed plates in the sink!" "So?" that I evolved my theory of untidiness trigger levels.

While filling the sink with gallons of soapy water in order to wash the two offending plates, I realised that everybody has a natural level of tolerance for untidiness. Some people cannot even tolerate a single

misplaced ornament before their tidiness reaction kicks in. Others seem to be able to cope with almost unlimited chaos in their vicinity. If everyone in a house has the same trigger level, they react at the same time and take action against the rising tide of filth. If a couple have different trigger levels, one of them always gets harassed into cleaning up before they've even noticed that there is a problem. Like most men, I feel that the time to wash dishes is when there is a sink full of things to wash. My study gets tidied every couple of weeks when the piles of books on the desk start to become unstable. On the other hand, I did feel that a friend's leaving an old disconnected cooker in his kitchen for several months was excessive, likewise him carrying around a spare engine in the boot of his car.

Unfortunately, it seems that Alison's untidiness trigger level is way, way higher than mine. Not to mention her pathological need to hold onto every scrap of information that passes through the house. While Steven and I excavated our way through the accumulated toys and envelopes and bills and cheques and dead mice and beebears and CDs and old mail order catalogues and things saying "must reply by the end of December... 2001" we would occasionally come across something belonging to Alison. I'd go "do we keep it or throw it out?" and Steven would go "maybe we ought to put it in a crate in case she wants it". And it would go into a crate. As time went on, we had to start moving the stuff out of small crates and into bigger ones.

Eventually, we had shifted most of the rubbish out of the study and packed it into folding crates, hindered only slightly by Jonathan randomising the contents of the crates by pulling stuff out and scattering it over the floor. Anything that was incontrovertibly rubbish went in the bin. Most of the rest went in Alison's crate. Or crates. And of course the kitchen was now full of crates which we had to carefully pack back into the study. If Giulia had been there, she would have insisted on us first vacuuming the floor and wiping down all the exposed surfaces with a damp cloth. And scouring the stains off the computers. And possibly burning the carpet. You can take this tidying lark a bit too far though. We didn't want to give Alison a heart attack when she returned home.

—Steve Davies

BOLLOCKS

Email From Bossy American Women

I am not a naturally tidy person. There's just so many better things to do at any given moment than clean the house.

Luckily, help exists in the form of Flylady, a bossy American woman. Sign up for her free service, and she'll helpfully send you a couple of dozen haranguing e-mails each day, reminding you to get up off your arse, stop reading e-mail, and go and clean the house. Five minutes spent cleaning after each reminder will sort the house out in no time. And from time to time the reminders are interspersed with batches of folksy homespun American wisdom, which make cleaning the house feel positively pleasant by comparison.

The house is definitely improving. With the exception of the study, you can guess the intended use of each downstairs room. Our bedroom no longer looks like an Oxfam clearing house and the spare bedroom has nothing in it that is not wholly focused on the comfort of our guests. Apart from nine suitcases and all the camping equipment.

What I needed was *another* bossy American woman. Menu Mailer takes the whole thing a stage further. Once a week, it sends you a shopping list sufficient to cook six main meals for a family. Combined with a standard list of stuff your family needs for breakfasts and an internet grocery delivery service, this allows you to plan your menu and do your weekly shopping in about thirty minutes flat. The food's cheap, too; we've been saving a fortune. And some of the recipes have been delicious.

Others have been very strange indeed. I am now very skeptical of any recipe sponsored by the American {insert vegetable here} Producers Association. Menu Mailer recipes also tend to be lower in fat and higher in vegetables than the ones we cook if left to our own devices, even once we've resubstituted full-fat cheese and meat.

And they're easy; Steven can cook them. They are written in American though. So sometimes I arrive home to discover him searching the Internet to work out what a skillet is.

—Alison Scott

Lokta Plokta

Name withheld to protect the clueless

please, I read the entire *Plokta* 25th issue...it said that it had Viggo Mortensen's number in it, but I couldn't seem to find it. Please, if you could possibly point it out to me or give it to me that'd be great. Thanks so much.

Joseph Nicholas
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You will doubtless receive many letters complaining about Steve Davies's philistine approach to modern art—how he has missed its inherent irony, failed to grasp its subversion of reality, and all that. Well, I'm going to complain too—but my complaint is that his denunciation of modern art's fatuity and intellectual vacuity doesn't go far enough. Modern art is conceptual bullshit, and the more who take it upon themselves to vilify its works and abuse their perpetrators, the better.

I think my moment of epiphany came as long ago as 1982, when we followed our visit to the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam with a quick trip to the Modern Art Museum next door. To some extent, you could see the lineage from Van Gogh to the modernists—bright colours, simple lines, stark shapes—but there was no skill to it. Looking at the nonsense on display, it struck me that anyone could do it. And if anyone could do it, how then could it qualify as art, still less offer unique insights into the world?

And that was just paintings. Since then, the disease seems to have spread into other areas, with nonsense like Rachel Whiteread's "House" (a gang of brickies could have done the same, probably for a

tenth of the cost and in half as much time), people taking their trousers off in public, the projecting of classic black-and-white films such as *Psycho* (that is, *other people's work*) in super-slow-motion (gosh—wow—how original), Tracy Emin's unmade bed, and Christ knows what else ridiculous tat.

It must have been around then that I conceived my own modern art project, which would address both modern art's utter absence of talent and its apparent fascination with the seedier aspects of life, viz: wank over a small sheet of glass, slap another small sheet of glass on top of the result, frame it, and label it "The Transparency Of The Male Orgasm". The very fact that such a "work" would be infinitely repeatable (but for the infinite differences in each transparency) would undermine from the outset the supposed uniqueness of its creation. And of course demonstrate for once and for all that modern art really is nothing more than masturbation in public.

Changing the subject, we too have been to Carter's Steam Fair—as long ago as 1986 (or was it 1988?), when we were living in Pimlico and it had pitched up in Battersea Park, just across the river. This must have been before it acquired the antique slot machines referred to by Sue, as I don't remember anything other than the rides, gaily painted and puffing merrily away.

Although the rides weren't quite as, er, pleasant as they looked. We were in company with Rob Hansen, Avedon Carol, and visiting US fan Stu Shiffman, who was staying with them at the time, and we all elected to go on the swing boats—Judith and I at one end of a boat, they three at the other. The swing started

gently enough, but by the time it had worked up to full pitch the boat was swinging from (what felt like) one almost vertical to another, and we were hanging on for grim death, staring fixedly down the length of the vehicle at each other and wishing for the ride to stop. When it did, we got off and walked away without looking at any of the others. (Besides, they all seemed a bit sedate by comparison.)

Milt Stevens
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I'm a great proponent of fannish physical fitness and have helped many fans in this area. It's a little known fact that Mike Glycer was a 98 pound weakling when I first met him. If I hadn't kicked sand on him at the beach, he might not have become the publishing giant he is today. For several years, I worked out with Mike regularly, and I can tell you that lifting Mike Glycer ten times is a definite workout.

Someone online called Eric

Just fallen, delightedly, into your site from a Google search for chocolate teapot.

Then I found the article on the DS. It would have been complete if you'd mentioned: that an auto electrician would only agree to fix the starter motor if I removed it from the car, as he had no wish to get involved in removing the steering box and risking being drowned by the hydraulics or spending a couple of weeks re-aligning steering and lights, and that it was fun for driving over "level crossings".

Eric Lindsay
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The timely warning on corflu stocks unaccountably fails to

note the previous almost total exhaustion of ditto masters as well.

Despite the widespread acceptance of the Ego as a fannish currency, I can not help but feel it would be a sad day for British fandom when buying someone a pint no longer counts.

Ron Clarke
ronl_clarke@hotmail.com

I took my 2 youngest to a National Park a full drive away some year ago now, an area of extinct volcanoes, where the English/Aust telescope is, and spent a week there (being divorced, such events are special). So love putting up tents, especially when they go up on the first attempt. Mine has ribs on the outside.

However, I have gaffiated from fannish fandom. *The Mentor* is basically dead until I feel the enthusiasm for fannish fandom again

Andrew Plotkin
erkyrath@eblong.com

The world is experiencing a severe shortage of cake. I can tell because, no matter how much cake I make, I still come home in the evening and think "Damn. I feel like making a cake."

I go over to friends' houses and try to warn them about the widening cake deficit. I explain that I can solve their cake undersupply condition. Tragically, I am never believed. All my friends are in a state of pathological denial. One normally sane man insisted that "his fridge was still utterly packed from New Years", or some such pernicious delusion. I insist on leaving cake anyway, but I can tell my friends are only

humoring me. I am the Cassandra of Cake.

When I received *Plokta*, I realized that you too suffer the depths of a gaping hole in the cake gradient. I could sense it all the way from Pittsburgh. I stood in the kitchen, sorting the mail and staring at my mixing bowls, and I thought "*Plokta* needs cake."

Unfortunately I have no way to get cake to you, due to some nonsense called the Atlantic Ocean. [*Yes! We need cake! Send cake now! Don't let the Atlantic stop you.*]

Jaine Weddell
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As I recently confessed in the pages of *TWP*, I am the 'resolutely mono-lingual' English person referred to in Giulia's report of WOMAD a couple of issues ago who insisted on mis-pronouncing the name of the Mexican folk band 'Los de Abajos' as 'Lost Badgers'. I saw no harm in it at the time, but the faintly accusing tone of that phrase 'resolutely mono-lingual' has been gnawing at my conscience, and I must speak out. Yes, English is my only language (although I have recently learnt to say 'Merry Christmas' in Welsh, a fact of which I am disproportionately proud); but I am not one of those Brits who thinks that foreigners should all learn to speak English, and I don't believe that non-English speakers must understand me if I only speak loudly and slowly enough. No, my monolingualism is not due to arrogance, it is due to laziness and incompetence, which I think are far more acceptable vices. And my tendency to mangle and mispronounce words is not confined to other languages: to hear me speak you'd think that 'discretion' was a bodily function and that 'Clitheroe' was every girl's dream.

Pamela Boal

As the wheel chair using fraternity have been drawing cartoons and making jokes about Daleks (I won a prize one eastercon dressed as Davros) and stairs since the first episode I thought I was all smiled out on that one. But OK you have done it! Now we need a picture of an officious railperson making the Daleks travel in the guards van.

Paul Campbell
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(just to prove those particular braincells haven't died yet, even with all the technology. the envelope of the november (january?) *plokta* threatens to cut me off though you quote an emoc therein. actually it's the lists people threaten to put me *on* i worry about.)

well, i can't see *anyone* being fooled by this guff about ddr. for a start, with that name it'd have to've come from east germany as was, not japan. and as for the faked pic of alison suspended by the armpits superimposed on a couple of posterpainted teatowels with a lump of wire thrown around them. do you expect us to believe anyone's going to buy such a transparent sham, let alone jump up and down on top of it?

Brad W Foster
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And only slightly upset that I didn't even rate a WAHF this time. I was embarrassed at first, thinking I had neglected to send some sort of recognition of getting the previous issue. But, hey, I did. sigh.....But, as long as you guys still feel like sending me this wonderful zine every issue, I won't complain! [*You, and anyone else who fails to get a mention, can safely assume that*

this is the result of incompetence rather than deliberate intent.]

I've been applying to a wider range of juried art festivals around the country the past year or so. this procedure is usually pretty simple: you fill out a form with some info, write out a check for whatever exorbitant "jury fee" they require to even look at your submission, and send along several carefully labelled sample slides of art. Okay, good enough: you look at my stuff and decide if you want to let me pay you even more money to rent a 10' x 10' square in the middle of the street to set up and sell on. But now, more and more of them are asking that the artist also include some sort of "statement about your art". Aside from the idea that looking at what I have should be enough, most of these demands for "statements" also tell you to limit it to less than 20 words. Um, you want me to talk about my art, but only giving me 20 words? I've toyed with just giving them "Me like draw. Make pictures. Need to sell to pay bills."

Jim Caughran
caughran@rogers.com

I'm not sure I understand the advantage of a computerized dance exercise. Once you've made the habit of jumping up and down to music, does it help to earn points on a game screen? You can have your choice of music, if the box isn't turned on. Not that I'd interfere; you can do whatever turns you around.

Adventures in an art gallery: Seems like there are more clever inventions in any fanzine than the funny-once jokes that are the point of this artwork. If I were you, I'd return to the gallery with a copy of *Plokta* and insist they hang it up and give it proper reverence. Then you can sell copies to non-fans at artwork

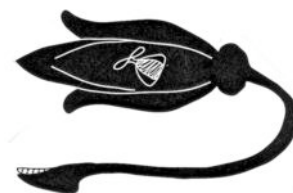
prices and finance the fandom-directed copies.

I'm just about to go to Melbourne, and will inquire about their fannish irreverence. Everyone knows that after Rick Sneary's Southgate in '58, it was "Southgate again in 2010!" In memory of Rick, the most creative speller fandom has seen, we should at least extend the city limits of Southgate to Melbourne (as was done, as far as LA, in '58).

Advances in technology don't make me feel old, they make me feel like I'm 13 again, reading science fiction. We're living in the future we read about 50 years ago!

Joseph T Major
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I just read Tom Wolfe's new book *Hooking Up* and he is even more dismissive of modern art than Steve is. One article describes the confrontation between the designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial designer and the sculptor who did the statue of the three grunts. The designer asked the sculptor if his models hadn't complained when the plaster was removed. The sculptor was amazed to learn that the designer had no idea that a human figure statue might be made by some means other than a life-cast.



Phil
Somewhere on the Internet

Your mistake was to place the teapot on such a thermodynamic surface as the metal containment vessel. Had you insulated the confectionary from the containment vessel by such

an expedient as, for example, a cork coaster, the results of your experiment may have been drastically different.

**Lindsey
erire@yahoo.com**

I read in your fanzine about cooking your placenta. I hate to sound umm...okay i'll just say it. Sweetbread is another name for placenta, so that recipe about cooking human sweetbead would probably work. *[Oh no it isn't. "Sweetbread" is normally used to refer to the testicles or the pancreas.]*

**Eloise Beltz-Decker
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I was reading quite a different publication recently when I thought, "Wow, I should tell *Plokta* about this." The publication was Scientific American, the December issue (remember the clutter? Right. I only just refound it and read it for the first time). There is an article in that issue describing the recent discovery that Jackson Pollock's drip paintings exhibit fractal patterning. In fact, the intrepid author of the piece has written some software that fairly simply can tell a Pollock from a fake, simply because the fakes are not fractal at all (and, more than that, Pollock's fractality progressed smoothly over his painting lifetime, and therefore his program can date a Pollock as well).

Milt Stevens (again)

After reading Alison's article on Dance Dance Revolution in *Plokta* #28, I found I had this mental image of Alison bouncing around her living room to the tune of the *Ride of the Valkyries*. I know she didn't mention any specific tunes, but fans naturally extend ideas. I suppose if you were bouncing around your living room to the tune of the *Ride of the Valkyries* it would be more fun if you wore a horned helmet and carried a

shield and spear while doing it. Of course, prolonged use of this exercise method could lead to a neighborhood Götterdämmerung. ("Officer, you wouldn't believe what the woman at 24 St. Mary Road had been doing in the weeks before their house collapsed.")

It sounds as if the people who manage the Tate Modern could really benefit from an infusion of fannish talent. After all, fannish art is as modern as anything else, since it is still being done. I can recall one example where fannish art captured the absolute essence of reality. It was at a Westercon in San Diego at the Starlight Inn. The food at the Starlight Inn was pretty darned awful. At breakfast Sunday, Harlan Ellison was horrified when he was presented with a particularly malevolent looking pair of fried eggs. Bill Rotsler, who was sitting at the same table, recognized this as an opportunity for artistic expression. He whipped out a felt tipped pen and drew a face on the eggs. An art critic, who just happened to be wandering by, took one look at the eggs and realized Rotsler had captured the very essence of the food at the Starlight Inn. The art critic grabbed the plate and rushed next door to the art auction where it sold for \$15.

Fannish art can also be remarkably functional. At another Westercon, Don Simpson had entered a piece in the art show which he called The Higher Ominous Machine. The Higher Ominous Machine consisted of a black sphere with a red photocell protruding out of one side. When plugged-in it rotated 180 degrees back and forth while stopping at intervals to make menacing beeps. When Larry Niven saw the Higher Ominous Machine he realized it was a piece of art he really needed. Previous to this, Larry had paid for a couple of different burglar

alarm systems for his home. The systems had proven to be effective against everything except burglars. After installing the Higher Ominous Machine at a rear window, his home was never burglarized again.

Lloyd Penney

Yvonne saw the front cover, and saw the words "moose organ" at the bottom. I cannot describe what colour she turned, nor the words she did use... *[It's a Bagpuss joke.]*

Kim Huett fails to mention the ultimate in cooking in your hotel room...grilled cheese sandwiches using the in-room steam iron! Bread, sliced cheese, a little margarine, and the iron, with no water in it, thank you...a little aluminum foil would be great, too, for preventing burnt cheese on the iron. For when there's no real food in the con suite or at the bar, one must do what one must.

Ulrika O'Brien

While I'm stuck at work with no work to do, I've been catching up on back issues of *Plokta* Online. (Unlike browsing Amazon.com, *Plokta* doesn't reliably cost me money; unlike bloghopping, *Plokta* doesn't reliably cause me to grind the tops off my molars. So there's two things you can get to work on fixing for next time.). What a revelation! It's like reading these zines for the first time. Well, okay, I am reading these zines for the first time.

Though there is something deeply right and compelling about the idea of TAFF as the One Ring, it makes me feel deeply schizophrenic. How can I maintain a righteous aspect as tall blonde Swedish sorceress when I'm simultaneously divided

between gaffial duties as shrunken TAFFwraith and the sudden urge to cower in the dark eating raw fish, and muttering "My Preciousssss..."? On the other hand, that same schizophrenia could well account for some of the longer blank spots in my recent fanac.

Don West retains his talent for the rhetorically emphatic, but I find myself strangely siding with Alison on the work of Glenn Brown. But then, I'm the sort of troglodyte who regularly employs the word "fillo" without regard for human life, so we know I sealed my fate long ago.

And so it goes. All I ask is a WAHF, guys. *[Too bad. No WAHF for you.]*

**SMS
eira.sms@virgin.net**

Today, we went to Rochdale Town Hall as a family outing.

Here's a picture of father and son. Started off freezing but finally warmed up. Still feel like death though.



**Jeff Schalles
jeffs@minn.net**

My interest in garden gauge railroading led me awhile back to some used carnival

ride sources that had small amusement park railroad equipment for sale. Some, listed as “needs work,” were downright cheap. Cheap compared, say, to maintaining a sailboat. I could see a lot of things to like about the hobby of collecting old amusement park train rides and such and making them operate... um... safely. Now steam stuff, that sounds like even more fun. Maybe I’ll find another Aveling & Porter chain engine in a Pennsylvania mine pit someday.

However, I set a lot of type for the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) when I lived in New York. I’d always taken them for granted, like they were a college fraternity or after-school club. Oh my god, no, I found from reading the stuff I was typesetting. The ASME was established by an act of the U.S. Congress in response to the hundreds of widows of boiler operators who marched on Washington one day to demand something be done about boilers blowing up and killing their husbands all the time.

So, since the invisible hand of the free market was taking a little too long to help these widows—in their cases, it was actually already too late—the government chartered the ASME to organize and administer a steam boiler standards and inspection program. They do lots of other stuff now, like designating historical mechanical engineering sites and putting out little brochures about them, thus providing me with work once upon a time. In a land far away. And so on and so forth.

The coolest part was their logo. Envision East was an audiovisual studio, mostly they made slides. They had a pre-Macintosh art workstation called a Genigraphics. This was 1983. We didn’t have a scanner. I was digitizing the ASME logo

from a stat. We did this by taping the stat to a big digital tablet and tracing points around the shape. The stat seemed to have been shot over and over from old artwork, the lines were broken, the edges jagged.

I spent a lot of time straightening out the logo, making all the 4-leaves of the big clover the same, nice and smooth, with proper initials matching the typeface inside the leaves. The slides came back from the ASME with a polite little note saying please leave the bumps in. Lucky I had a copy of the original file.

What I found out later from reading some brochure I was working on was that the logo came from their original steel punch, used to mark a tested boiler. The broken edges were from the years of pounding the die had taken before someone decided they needed a logo.

Eloise Mason (formerly Beltz-Decker) (again)

I bought a new handbag recently, a task complicated by the sheer mass of personal electronics I carry anymore (a non-exclusive list: digital camera, cellphone, Sony Clie PDA, spare batteries for phone and camera), and the thickness of my wallet. I found the winner at Sears, of all places, and did a careful ‘test drive’—packed it full of my stuff right there on the display floor, to make sure it would work. So, one might wonder, how can a purse be superfluously technological (aside from contents)? My new purse has a light in it. A bright-white LED, specifically, set to go on automatically when the purse is opened or closed, and stay on for 30 seconds. It can be removed from the tab on the side of the purse, and you can order different colors from the purse company. I must say I approve (as will anyone who’s tried to dig through the dark dreary mess at the bottom of a standard

handbag), but it gave me a thrill, so I thought I’d write to you folks and share.

Dale Speirs

I always thought DDR was the old East Germany but I guess they danced down the Berlin Wall. How expensive can it be to install a few more joists in the house so you can dance the night away? Use stacks of old zines to support the floor.

Eira Latham
eira.sms@virgin.net

If they have dancing games on the Playstation to keep fit—when will they devise a “Twister” version to get supple?

Michael Leigh

The article about the Wonkey Eye restaurant made us laugh as we used to frequent this amazing establishment when we lived in London. (In a hovel in Lambeth Walk to be exact!) We took some friends to the Wonkey once and were waiting in the queue, cringing, and in time to see some luckless patrons being ejected for having the temerity to complain about the stained table cloth—poor fools! I’m sorry to hear it has changed for the better (or worse?) Ah, happy days!

KRin Pender-Gunn

What Marianne is doing when she is telling you that the narrator of *The Clangers* is the same as *Bagpuss* is called *Voice Chasing*. This little known, but highly entertaining pass-time should be encouraged as it teaches the important of the human voice and its variations, teaches listening skills and most importantly means I am not the only

person I know who also has this hobby.

Martin Morse Wooster

Many thanks for *Plokta* 28. Reading the articles, I found that members of the Cabal were—um—a little *crunky*. I offer evidence that, in Japan, this condition is alleviated by the consumption of chocolate.



WAHF:

Tibs (pointing us at more about dance mania), **Sarah S Prince** (“The black fly is a small soft-bodied bloodsucker”), **Joseph Major** (forwarding a Yahoo News item about a moose hitting a car), **Neil Rest** (kindly inviting us to stay in Chicago around Corflu; alas we are unable to accept), **Madeleine McAfee Dart** (who stumbled on the treacle well article on the web), **Henry L Welch** (“I have negative interest in the ‘dance’ games”), **Steve Jeffery** (“Isn’t DDR just a bigger, noisier and more energetic version of Simon Says?”), **Vicki Rosenzweig** (“A longer loc may follow, but you may recall that I’ve said such things before”), **Marcus L Rowland** (“The killer application for VR is probably going to turn out to be a combination BDSM/exercise system”), **Evelyn C Leeper** (quoting Alberto Manguel), **Fred Lerner** (“Steve Davies has succeeded in quelling my desire to see Tate Modern”), **Eric Lindsay** (“I managed to miss the first *Lord of the Rings* film”), **Sheryl Birkhead** (enclosing artwork), **John Berry (UK)** (“I was very much taken with the Tate Modern item”) and **Cardinal Cox** (enclosing a flyer for a band called Moosejaw).

Less Sinister Ducks

THE other month, Lilian turned up with a small pile of CDs. iTunes sprang into action, and I got a chance to try out some modern music. Over a moderate quantity of red wine, we discussed our various musical tastes. Much of Lilian's stuff seemed, oh, I don't know, a bit subtle somehow. "Beautiful Noise", explained Lilian. But some of it grew on me. In particular, Lemon Jelly, who play light-hearted, soothing music for a modern age.



Lilian, being an organised sort, went to see them in Glasgow. But all their London gigs were sold out. "That's no problem," said Lilian. "They're doing a children's matinee, cheap tickets, all for charity, no adults allowed without kids in tow." Well, I had a child, who had taken to wandering around the house singing "All the Ducks are Swimming in the Water, la la la la la". So the following Saturday, Marianne and I turned up at the Forum and joined a very long queue. We were warned that the music would be live, and loud, and that children might want earplugs.

When we went in we got Lemon Jelly lucky bags, including postcards, badges and a Lemon Jelly Doodle Machine. Marianne was offered a licorice Blackjack. "Can I have one, Mummy?" "Yes, but they're horrible," I explained, having never liked licorice. "Mmm, yummy," she exclaimed, followed quickly by "why did you try to trick me, Mummy?"



Last time I went to the Forum it was for the Oysterband, and the room was empty apart from the bar and the audience. This time it was hard to see the stage for the forest of red balloons (far more than 99), bouncy castles, candy floss machines and children's entertainers. There was a bar, and it was staffed, but there was no queue at all. The queue for the face painting, on the other

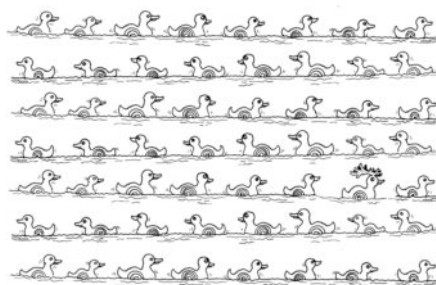
hand, was already extensive. "Can I have my face painted, please?" "No," said Mummy, calculating the waiting time and feeling grinchlike.

Lemon Jelly appeared, dressed up as Fred Flinstone and Barney Rubble, and started to play. The music's quite child-friendly, and they have lots of brightly coloured graphics to make up for the fact that they're pretty much a stand at the front and twiddle with computers-type band. It wasn't particularly loud, but I still quite fancied earplugs. For me, not Marianne; it was almost impossible to hear the band over the noise of several hundred children.

Marianne wanted candy floss, so we went and stood in the candy floss queue, which ran the entire length of the bar, and then turned a corner and went back again. We chatted to the bar staff about the way that nobody was buying drinks, and eventually one of them took pity on me and purloined some candy floss from the front for Marianne.

A child walked past in floods of tears. "No, you can't have your face painted," said a harried looking parent. "The people at the front of the queue have been waiting for an hour." I looked around. Free face painting, two face painters, 5-10 minutes per face, and the aforementioned several hundred children.

Just as Lemon Jelly's signature tune, "All the Ducks are Swimming in the Water", came on, Marianne decided to go on the bouncy castle. Luckily, I got to watch the animated dancing moose from the back of the room, but she missed the entire thing. In my excitement, I let go of Marianne's balloon, which I'd been holding for safekeeping while she bounced, and it drifted high out of reach.



Delicate study of waterfowl (actual size)

All in all, it was quite unlike any gig I've ever been to; and even with the addition of vast numbers of pre-teens, I think it was still better to see Lemon Jelly in the relatively small Forum than the stadium they'll no doubt be in next year.

—Alison Scott

BOLLOCKS



"Sue's being hung in the National Portrait Gallery." "Don't you mean 'hanged'?"

Isaac Q Newton

Dr Plokta writes: I was at the National Portrait Gallery recently, and couldn't help but be struck by the remarkable resemblance between Sir Isaac Newton and the meddling, god-like character Q from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.



Picard's bane



Renowned scientist

Could this possible explain all of human history?