



PLOKTA WHO

AND THE REVENGE OF THE iDALEKS



Colophon

This is issue 34 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 copy of Apple Pages 2.0.

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The cabal also includes Giulia De Cesare, Sue Mason, Steven, Marianne and Jonathan Cain. And not Flick. But we're working on her.

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Editorial

Welcome to the *Plokta*-Mini. Coming next, the *Plokta* Shuffle, in which all the articles, letters and artwork are presented in a random order. [*Aren't we doing that already?*—Ed]

Steve and Giulia have moved house, after about a year of trying. Their new address can be found in the colophon.

We're hoping to see all of you at the Worldcon in Glasgow, where we will be running the fan room and distributing this *Plokta*. Working on both at once has kept us quite busy, and we're now trying to get the G8 to forgive Alison's sleep debt.

In a change from our usual programme, we're putting this *Plokta* together in sunny Cambridge, where we're being put up by Kari and Phil. We've marvelled at their new extension, which doubles the size of their house, adds a better kitchen, utility room, dining room, study, bedroom, bathroom, walk in closet, a pile more bookshelves, and a priest hole. Which last should provide a handy place to hide their atheist friends in case of a future religious crackdown.

We'd like to be able to include lots of pictures of the children being sweet and charming and playing quietly with the cats, but we haven't been able to separate the children from the television, and the cats are refusing to enter the house in case Jonathan comes after them with his gas mask on.

It's not impossible that the free child care and amazing instant food and drink that keep appearing have meant that there was added time to lovingly hand craft this *Plokta*. It's after the Hugo voting deadline now, so there can't be any other reason for making an effort with the fanzine.

Jonathan has started school, despite being months away from his fifth birthday. His teachers extol his cleverness, his enthusiasm, and his energy, but all agree his behaviour leaves much to be desired. He's been sent home twice so far. The first time was for biting his best friend Nell; she was moderately upset at being bitten, but horrified that Jonathan was going away for the rest of the day.

And the second time? Head lice.

We were appalled. How could he have lice? Well, surely he didn't have more than one or two, a few eggs, and so on. We got out the collection of fine toothed combs. Ok, perhaps more than a couple. But how bad could it be? We'd noticed nothing.

358 lice later, we had the awful truth. There was a major, full on parasite colony on our tiny baby boy's angelic head. Two weeks of enthusiastic combing later, we'd eradicated the lot and warned all our friends, who all started itching psychosomatically. See, you're doing it now too.

Death to Dandelions, Confusion to Gladioli

by Giulia de Cesare

Ooh, a garden, I've never had a proper garden. "How long does it take for you to keep it looking nice?" I asked the sweet little old lady we bought the house from.

"Oh, we only spend an hour or so a day in it," she replied as we gazed over the green and flowery expanse.

I turned back to the lovely flowerbeds, wondering how they'd look concreted over.

But nearly a year later, when the house is finally ours, I am not working. I can wave Steve bye bye in the mornings then flit about the house in my frilly pink pinny, dusting and cleaning and generally behaving like the heroine's 50s fantasy sequence in *Little Shop of Horrors*.

And I can garden.

Well, I could, if I knew what I should be doing out there. Dandelions, I know what those look like, and that having loads of them in the lawn is not a good thing, so I tackle them, firstly with a trowel that leaves craters in the lawn, then a paint scraper and finally a small sharp kitchen knife. I gouge out bucketsful, only to have them sneer at me in a thick Austrian accent, "I'll be back," and sure enough there they are again, later that same day.

I enlist the help of Steve's mother, a keen gardener, and we play "Name that

Weed." It's too late to save the aquilegia that I mistook for clover, but in time to spare all the poppies I thought were just extra curly dandelions. I take her advice and equip myself with a specially-designed dandelion-buggering tool and the lawn is looking much better now.

Daisies are deaf, did you know? You're about to mow a great swathe of them down and so you shout, "Duck!" and do the little sods hear you? Nope, they're the blond bimbos of the lawn, smiling away in the sun until it's off with their heads. The dandelions hear me perfectly well, lifting their evil yellow heads again to sneer back at me from the lawnmower's wake with gap-toothed grins.

Shadow has to be encouraged out, as the alternative is to shovel kitty litter until we can get a cat flap fitted. He looks very dubious at first, but soon starts zooming across the lawn, climbing the apple tree and the shed and generally discovering his Inner Cat. This is good, as up 'til now he's been much more in touch with his inner Sofa Cushion.

The front garden is sprouting lots of little shoots that look like tiny asparagus, but grow up into the kind of thing my school books used to show being grazed on by dinosaurs, only mine are about a foot high. I harbour fantasies about the next Woolemi Pine until Sue comes to

visit. “That’s horsetail, oldest weed known to man. Once you’ve got it you’ll never get rid of it,” she tells me, with rather more relish than I feel the situation deserves. Other fans identify willow herb (“But it sounds really nice!”) and flowering buttercup. The convolvulus I can tell on my own, thanks to the intensive bindweed recognition training the entire Cabal received a few years ago at Steven Cain’s last house.

Steve and I have graduated from Ikea now, and spend our weekends in huge garden centres instead, feeling terribly grown up. We acquire gladioli. I like gladioli, they’re practically Australia’s national flower. But a problem arises when I go to plant them in two matching pots. I look at a bulb. It looks back at me. On one side is a small depression, not looking as if it’ll ever amount to anything much in this life. On the other is a cluster of little, cthuloid tentacular bits, waving hopefully. Ah, those must be the shoots. I plant accordingly.

Later, I accidentally pull out a few existing bulbs along with some weeds. At least, I’m pretty sure they were weeds. Anyway, I try to separate out the bulbs so I can put them back before they’ve noticed the sudden change in light, and realize that all the little tentacular bits are on the bottom. Drat. They must be the roots, after all. So I dig up my bulbs and turn them over.

Emboldened by this success, at the next garden centre I get a bag of about 300 bulbs, and a special bulb-planting device

called a dibber. I tell you, it’s a good thing fan fic writers aren’t generally gardeners or these dibber things would feature much more prominently in certain sorts of slash.

Off I go around the garden with the dibbler, careful to drop the bulbs in the right way up. After about three hours, the amount of bulbs in my bottomless bag o’ bulbs hasn’t noticeably decreased, the handle of the dribbler is getting loose and I don’t care which way up the bloody things go. In about six months’ time there’s going to be a lot of surprised folks over in Xiaoping Province.

I do everything my newly acquired *Plantonomicon* tells me to, and avidly read gardening porn. If the paper’s weekly column says now is the time to take cuttings of pinks (those are easy to recognise on account of their actually being pink) then I go and do it immediately.

Weeding has become a daily ritual. Shadow has learned to help by flattening clumps of daffodils. Look, daffodil | dandelion. Three syllable word, starts with “D”, bright yellow flower—what do you expect, he’s only a cat.

That sweet little old lady fibbed: I find that I am spending well more than an hour a day, armed with my Atlas Gauntlet, my Bucket Of Holding and my Plus Five Vorpal Trowel.

And if I get another job, there’s always the concrete.

I've Climbed the Mountains of the Sky

By Alison Scott

When I was young, I used to listen to a “modern rock” radio station, Wi-Fi 92 in Philadelphia. Good name, that. They had competitions, and my brother and I phoned into them. He won *Two for the Show*, a double live album by a band called Kansas, and, deciding it was nothing like enough heavy enough for him, passed it on to me.

At the time I only owned a few albums and played them each repeatedly. While listening, I'd stare at the covers for ages, looking at the art, reading the lyrics, spotting all the detail.

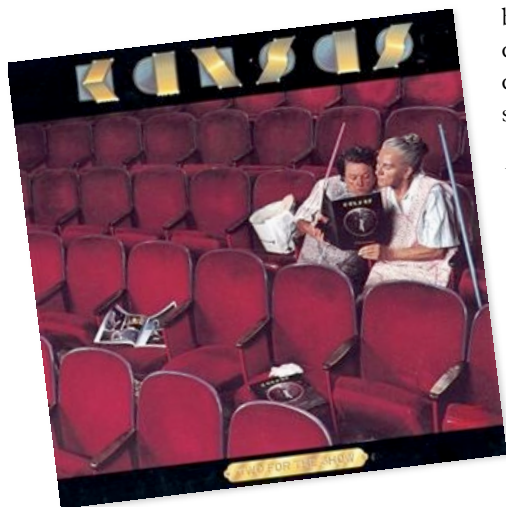
Two for the Show quickly became a favourite. I knew some of the tracks, the studio versions, from the radio. But the live versions were edgier and



more exciting, and I listened to them endlessly. I knew nothing of the band beyond the pictures on the sleeve; I couldn't have described the music more closely than to say 'I like this sort of stuff'.

And I loved the cover. It was a double gatefold, absolutely yards of cardboard. I had gatefolds with grander covers, but I couldn't get over how clever the album art on *Two for the Show* was. The cover is a sharp re-creation of Norman Rockwell's picture "The Charwomen". I've always loved parody art and I thought this was delicious.

I'll be forty in two weeks. Nostalgia is



sticking to my soul like treacle, glimpses of the choices I didn't make, the possibilities I didn't pursue. I played violin in my school orchestra, but never even considered using it to play rock. And I sat listening to music in my room for hours, but never went to see bands play live. Some of my friends did, and I heard some bands at other events, but going to live music wasn't what excited me then. So I never saw Kansas live. But their live album was one of my favourites.

Back in America, "classic rock" stations play just the same music that WiFi 92 did, but Kansas is now reduced to two tracks, 'Dust in the Wind' and 'Carry On Wayward Son'. My particular teenage favourite, 'Icarus (Borne on Wings of Steel)', is, well, dust in the wind. Now it seems, oh, a bit heavy handed, unsubtle. Then I was only just beginning to understand that some songs had content, created a mood, were trying to do something more than get you to the end in one piece having been amusing for a few minutes. And of course there was the electric violin.

I don't miss the vinyl records at all, our nostalgia trip last issue notwithstanding. My music is all stored digitally and streamed around my house at will. The physicality of finding the record and selecting a track has gone; none of my thousands of tracks is more than a few seconds' search away.

But how I miss the sleeves. So beautiful, so detailed, so large. I have substituted to

some extent by storing album art in iTunes, obsessively combing the internet for good copies of the artwork, tracking down artwork for even the most obscure albums I own, and making pictures in photoshop for white labels and gig recordings. My industry was rewarded by Apple, who produced a new screensaver that displays a selection of your album art, flipping over to a new cover every few seconds. My acres of cardboard have been replaced by a virtual collage of pixels.

In the mean time, I've learnt to peg some music better. I now know that Kansas slots in somewhere in between stadium rock and prog. Kansas is just the best, for me, of a few bands of this general type, and my love of their music is an artefact of my spending my teenage years in the States. I left the UK in 1978 despising nearly all of the urgent, shabby music in the charts and was delighted by the rock I discovered in the US. If I'd stayed I'd have been carried along as punk gave way to more musical forms; as it was I fitted in three years of dedication to grand-scale overblown music before changing my taste abruptly when MTV got going.

When we got rid of all that vinyl, I resolved to replace some of it. I did consider not giving up *Two for the Show*, keeping it just for the sleeve, but decided that would be silly. So I bought the CD, and I grabbed the front art for iTunes. But neither the CD sleeve nor the internet had the image from the middle of the gatefold sleeve. And I realised I



Kansas fan circa 1979

wanted it. So I went in search of it, and found Kansas's website, <http://www.kansasband.com>, and discovered it was modelled on the theatre theme from *Two For the Show*.

It's a live website, it's a live band, they tour. They do dozens of live shows every year. We live in an age where nearly every band that has ever existed is back together and touring. I clicked on the list of gigs, just on the offchance.

And there it was. "London, The Empire, June 12." Was it up to date? This year? In

two weeks' time? London. London, Idaho, perhaps? The Empire. Surely not the Shepherd's Bush Empire? It's a little theatre, takes a couple of thousand people provided they're friendly. Standing downstairs, seating upstairs, dirt everywhere; a basic London venue. But this is Kansas. Stadium rock. Music that is designed to fill a football stadium. They play football stadiums. Perhaps not, these days. I checked the venue's website. It was there. It wasn't sold out.

I could see Kansas live.



Kansas fan circa 2005



The Shepherd's Bush Empire

Well, if you're going to have a mid-life crisis, a gig ticket is a whole lot cheaper than a sports car. I bought a ticket, I found a website full of Kansas fans who call themselves Wheatheads, I caught up on 25 years of musical differences, and I became unduly excited about the concert.

The day arrived. I could persuade neither my husband nor any of my friends to come with me. Despite my enthusiasm, I did wonder if I was being a bit sad. The ticket was expensive and the band was surely past its prime. Nevertheless, my heart skipped a beat when I caught sight of the front of the Empire with KANSAS on the marquee; luckily not while crossing the deadly Shepherd's Bush gyratory (see *Ploktas* passim). I'd left my camera at home because of bag checks, but luckily other Wheatheads had also found it unduly exciting and there was a shot on the Internet. I found a single seat and surveyed the crowd.

Set List

- Belexes
- Paradox
- Opus Insert
- Miracles out of Nowhere
- Icarus (Borne on Wings of Steel)
- Magnum Opus
- Song For America
- The Wall
- Bringing it Back
- Point of Know Return
- Portrait (He Knew)
- Dust in the Wind
- Carry On My Wayward Son

Mostly mid-40s, mostly male, mostly wearing washed out black t-shirts that had seen better decades. There's a particularly unfortunate haircut that combines thinning rock god hair with completely bald on top. A lot of the crowd had that.

And most of the people there seemed at least as excited as me. Although I'd only known about the concert for a fortnight, it turned out that this was the first UK gig Kansas had played since they were famous, some 27 years ago. Shepherd's Bush Empire might only fit 2,000 people, but that Sunday night there were 2,000 rabid Kansas fans, most of whom knew every word to every song and had been wanting to see them live since they were teenagers.

And I was one of them.

Peter Weston Wouldn't Approve

By Max

After Paragon 2, this year's Eastercon, Peter Weston posted a critical review, entitled "Confused and Confounded!", on trufen.net. This article is Max's response. Peter's original review can be found at <<http://trufen.net/article.pl?sid=05/04/06/0211226>>.

I don't like action on screen masquerading as SF, I like SF about ideas and human reactions. I like science: figuring out how things work, from computer programs to the human mind and body, but astronomy leaves me cold and big fast machines from racing cars to rockets rarely impress me. I read short SF, I read computer magazines, and I read a variety of social forums and online. I think Greg Egan and Kristine Kathryn Rusch are fantastic writers but I've read little of their work. I read books I can dip into, rarely having time to maintain concentration on a whole novel and when I engage with a story I want plot, character and atmosphere. If you're the sort of fan who thinks novels are the be-all and end-all, and that hard SF is what fandom's all about then you probably won't like what I have to say, because I don't think it is.

What I like is magic and I don't mean fantasy stories with spells, wizards and big quests. We make tiny marks for people to pick up information without

even meeting us. We call it writing, but it's magic. It's magical when an octopus rolls across the ocean floor and changes colours to match its surroundings, or a community is formed by a couple of chance comments, or a replacement ear is grown on the back of a mouse.

In fandom I've found like minded individuals. Sometimes we talk about SF. Sometimes we jump around on a bouncy castle. People have told me this is a fannish outlook, the "sensawonder".

People say a hell of a lot, though, and the problem with "people" is it's nobody and everybody. People say fandom's welcoming then they say it's less welcoming and then they say it isn't welcoming at all but elitist and cliquey. They say the mailing lists are full of old pharts, that LiveJournal isn't sufficiently fannish but detracts from rec.arts.sf.fandom, which doesn't matter because all anyone ever posts is drivel. They say a convention is programmed too lightly and they say "Who the hell goes to the programme?" They say paper's dying out because of the internet and new fans don't give a damn about tradition, so fandom needs new blood, but somehow this isn't quite the right sort.

I let most of it pass me by but once in a while something makes me seethe. Today that was Peter Weston on trufen.net. One of the most welcoming places I

ever hung around in fandom was Corflu Valentine. On my way there I first met Peter when he wandered across the plane to say hello. “You must be Max,” he said. “Would that make you Peter?” I asked. He misheard me, apologised and left, later to reveal that he’d asked three people vaguely fitting my description before giving up.

It was a small Corflu but I didn’t really connect with Peter. I did connect with John and Eve Harvey among others. These days I can sit and chat with them but Peter remains someone I know of rather than someone I know. Peter and I pass each other in the bar, we say hello, and that’s as far as it goes. There are a lot of people around fandom in this category and it’s not a problem until Tobes tells me I should respect Peter just because he has a long history in fandom. I find that hard. You have to earn my respect and when Peter suggests, for example, that breakfast time is “too early in the morning to start costuming” my response is “According to who?”

Peter totally loses my sympathy in a meandering piece describing the disconnect he’s feeling at Paragon 2 having not even bothered to read the PR. His piece evokes thoughts along the lines of “Not many people at your party? Just who did you invite?” and “Bar prices were high? Is this news?” (Sources close to me say beer cost considerably less than quoted and was actually very reasonable).

Paragon 2 Photos

We’re taking advantage of Max’s article to put in a couple of sidebars of Steve’s photos from Paragon 2, which we fear will go some way towards convincing Peter that he was right.



*Multiple Hugo-nominated author
and former <plokta.com> GoH
Charles Stross*



The inevitable shot of Neptune

Peter had already started to lose some goodwill with me when I saw him badgering James Bacon in an interview in a quiet corner of Eastercon. “Why did you decide to run that convention?” he asked, referring to *Aliens Stole My Handbag*.

James told him “I thought it would be fun.”

“You don’t run a convention because you think it will be fun,” Peter retorted. “You go to the pub if you want to have some fun!”

James protested that this was exactly why but Peter kept on pressing him for more information, refusing answers then suddenly scribbled down a smaller detail James mentioned. I wondered if the article was already written and Peter was just collecting supporting quotes. I’m a cynic.

In the midst of his complaints about programme clashes Peter points out that he went out to dinner and missed things. He praises innovative ideas immediately after moaning about several of them, then complains “these people know each other better than they know us!” I wonder whose fault he thinks this is.

John and Eve poked some fun at Peter. “Look! He’s wearing a shirt and tie even there!”. On screen there was a picture of fans some decades ago on a dance floor. Peter protested, “Everybody wore ties then.” Several slides revealed otherwise.

I wonder, has Peter introduced himself to “these people” during the “chaos” of toga themed discos and the previous convention in Blackpool? Or has he kept doing what he does, expecting no change? Same tie, same bar prices, same panels, same party attendees. Is Pete Weston nothing but a fossil to be admired: A perfectly preserved example of a former species of a fandom, perhaps on the brink of change when this current one emerged?

Although we’re far from close, I know who Peter is and he knows who I am but there’s a reasonable chance that he doesn’t know half the people I sat around Eastercon with. Does he know Pepper? Jim de Liscard? James Brophy? When he sneers at media and its fans is he including the ZZ9 crowd? How about Dave Lally who, apparently, “Should know better” but supports inclusion of other media anyway?

Head Infestations Part 2

Following the head lice incident (see Editorial for details), Alison has formed the nervous habit of checking Jonathan’s hair for eggs at frequent intervals. And last night, she found some. Translucent orange eggs, with a suspicious resemblance to the *tobiko* sushi (flying-fish roe) that we had been eating. She’s now waiting for them to hatch out so that she can go through Jonathan’s hair with a fish-comb to remove them.

By whose mandate is Eastercon supposed to be about books alone? Why can't James and Stef run a convention for fun? What happened to the fannish outlook, embracing new experiences, revelling in the magic of the stuff around us?

What is Peter's problem?

I'm not entirely sure whether it's the "You're not doing it right" accusation or the "You're not including me in it" part struggling to carry most weight in his argument on Trufen. I can't decide which irritates me more. Five hundred and fifty people went to the convention and Peter grows depressed because one of them wrote a review and he didn't know that person or their friends. Did he try to get to know the strangers? No, but he felt uncomfortable that they didn't reach out to him for crib notes on old traditions and fan history.

Peter, how do you think you look to the incoming fans? The ones who go along and don't know five hundred and thirty of the attendees, who try to enjoy themselves but get nothing but suspicion from the elders. Elders who wail "Will they come to fan-panels [...] Are they interested in fanzines? Do they want to talk about books?" but never asks the strangers what they're there for, or can't accept the answers when he does?

You earn fannish credentials among your peers. Your peers age. Some die. Some gafiate. It's sad but inevitable. Meanwhile, the world changes and if you ignore that then one day you're as

Paragon 2 Photos



The Cyberdrome Circus Maximus crew preparing to start



Contestants in the arena



*Famous SF author Charles
Ian Watson*

anonymous as any other three hundred attendees, sitting complaining that they need a committee to cater to their whims but not actually volunteering to be on one.

Peter's defeatist response to the suggestion that he run the tightly focused convention he wants was "[it] isn't going to happen because too many people would be against the idea." He tells us that this was discovered in 1983 and I wonder what his complaint is. Paragon 2 is not the convention Peter expected, but he knew the sort of thing he would like to see "wouldn't fly". He worries for the incoming generation:

"What about [...] sensible, literate, intelligent people coming along for the first time? What will these people think if the convention gets turned into a non-stop jamboree of costumed cavorting? [...] And once upon a time didn't we want to make SF conventions a bit more respectable?"

The problem is that the new generation is different. The news media coined the term "kidults" a while back and pointed out how adults are increasingly the target audience for computer games.

Companies send staff on team-building paintball days. The average man in the street does not wear a shirt and tie unless he's going to work; many forego the tie. The generation I'm a part of didn't grow up calling only teachers "Mr Surname", and for most of us television and videotape has been there for as long as we can remember. Society encourages us

iChat Font Queen of the Month

PNH: "Of course, my fatal problem with the real SKY CAPTAIN movie was typographic.

PNH: "It's FULL OF FUCKING HELVETICA! A face that was designed in 1957! Drove me nuts.

PNH: "It's on the newspapers, the sides of buildings, and the Royal Air Force fighter planes. Dipshits."

to relax and have fun and fandom has a reputation of tolerance.

If I read a novel I may knock out a critical review. I'm happy to join fans in the old traditions of fanzines. I reject the stance that says this is somehow more worthy than writing a decent critique of a current television show online. I don't want a tightly focused serious critical convention (not because it shouldn't exist, just because I probably wouldn't enjoy it). I don't care if Peter wants to try to make SF conventions respectable, I want to go to them to have fun, to meet people, to play with magic like theremins, writing, and centrifuge demonstrations. While people like James Bacon and Fran Dowd want to keep on running the fun, I'm happy. I'm sorry if Peter Weston is appalled by this, he seems like a nice guy. The time may come when I don't like how things turn out, but at the moment I find Peter's article to be little more than outdated self-indulgent upset. Changes have passed Peter by because he hasn't

paid attention and the situation he portrays isn't even how things really are. Did Pete Young run away screaming at the "non-stop jamboree"? Are Third Row fandom so enamoured by TV that they won't or can't offer serious literary critiques? No. I think Peter's write up of the convention is, by necessity, an isolated view. He reports Greg Pickersgill as walking out of a panel due to a feeling that they were hostile. The story that had reached me agreed in effect but placed the cause as Greg's attempts to speak over the panelists. Peter reports Eastercon as having grown too large and broad, yet the figures say numbers have dropped off massively. Others are said to have been shocked by the toga effect, but my understanding is that costumes at cons are not new, so laying blame with James and his cohorts is unfair. At the

heart of it all, I think Peter wants a bit more respect and familiarity.

Unfortunately, what he grew up with isn't what I grew up with and he's doing nothing to engage me. The fandom he entered and shaped had already altered by the time I got here and I'm far from the youngest voluntary attendee at Eastercon.

I've been to three Eastercons and I plan to go to more. I've been involved in fanzines a short while and some people think I'm doing that all wrong. Well, maybe that's because I'm not worried about breaking with traditions if I like the result and I'm not afraid to call Peter Weston's views as I see them: fossilised. I have no plans at all to curtail my fun because Peter Weston wouldn't approve. I think he'd enjoy future conventions a lot more if could accept that.

Five Fruit & Veg the Plokta Way



1. Passion Fruit Margarita
2. Strawberry Margarita
3. Melon Margarita
4. Blueberry Margarita
5. All cocktails contain lime juice to guard against scurvy

The Smoke Alarm that Wouldn't Die

By Giulia de Cesare

Back at our last house we had a smoke alarm, one of those things you fit to a light. It was over the doorway to the kitchen, where, when vacuuming, I had to do some cumbersome manoeuvring to get the vac in through the door. Inevitably something about the noise of the vac, or the vibration or even the amount of dust I was tossing about, would make the thing emit an ear-piercingly loud shriek inches above my head, just in the middle of my usual pitched battle with the wretched intransigent vacuum cleaner. I used to fantasize about taking the metal snorkel of the vac and swinging it at the shrieking light with a satisfying WHACK!

Did I mention that I hate vacuuming?

Anyway, the new house has a couple of smoke alarms already fitted, so ours lay about, forgotten, while we unpacked.

One day a terrible and unfamiliar noise filled the house. Was it the burglar alarm? One of our cars? The smoke alarm? A neighbour's burglar alarm smoke alarm car alarm? None of Steve's superfluous technology was that loud and anyway we're both very familiar with every bleep and their timetable as well.

Finally, Steve did track it down, lying under a pile of clutter in the kitchen,

wrenched out its battery and put it on a shelf in the downstairs loo and we forgot about it again.

One day I was sitting there, contemplating Life, the Universe and Everything when there was a piercingly loud shriek inches from my head.

Steve took it upstairs to the study and tried to pull it apart. It continued to squawk. We stuffed it under some junk in the dining room. You could still hear it. We contemplated just binning it, but in the current political climate we'd start a massive bomb scare that would probably see all of Reading evacuated.

Now it's outside, in a cupboard under the back porch. It still squawks. But it's getting softer. More plaintive. But I'm only trying to do my job, it's crying. Why do you hate me?

I feel like a villain in a Virginia Andrews novel as we try to starve the bloody thing to death.

Maybe I'm reading too much into this, but I'm fighting an increasing urge to get it out of the cupboard and stroke it and go, there, there, we didn't mean it.

Whereupon it will surely emit a piercingly loud shriek inches from my head.

Lokta Plokta

Lloyd Penney
penneys@allstream.net

A veritable orchard of Apples on your collective laps. I am sure that by now, Lord Gates has targeted you all for Windows re-indoctrination. Just drop your drawers, lie on your stomachs, the pain shall pass quickly...

Of course, I've never read any of the Wooster and Jeeves books, so when I saw *Jeeves Drops It In*, I immediately thought of Terry. I miss *Erg*, and I've read about his health problems on Trufen.net, so I am thinking positive thoughts, and hoping that there will be some honours coming his way for his marathon of fannish endeavours.

Another IKEA... remember when IKEA had a moose with a Swedish flag cape as a mascot? Did I ever tell you I can see an IKEA from my balcony? Yes,



*Shadow demonstrates his gardening technique
 (See p. 4)*

I'm sure I have...

Jerry Kaufman
JAKaufman@aol.com

I've just Googled "skype" and found it's the name of an Internet telephony program, so that at least partially explains the "SkypeCaptain" pun on the cover. Yet I have this nagging feeling that "skype" is also a British slang term for something at least a little nasty or shady. Am I right? [No Ed.]

We saw a kookaburra at a local zoo recently, and I do not believe it could fairly be described as a "tiny little bird." I thought it was quite sizable. So I do not fault Pat for considering it with due respect and caution. (I may have seen one on my own trip to Australia, but that was many years back.)

I loved Jo Walton's story of Jon Singer. Many years ago, our crowd appointed various movie stars to portray ourselves and our friends when Hollywood

made films of our lives. I suggested that Jon would be played by all four Marx Brothers. (However, these days I'm not so sure, as I don't recall any of the Brothers being particularly into pottery.)

Steve Stiles
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I've been reading a lot in the media in the last few weeks about the shameful toilet tossing or flushing the Qur'an (or "Koran") down the toilet by those prison guards. They don't seem to get it straight—tossing or flushing?

If the latter, that raises a lot of questions. The Koran ("Qur'an") is

somewhat smaller than the New Testament. Amazon advertises a copy at 192 pages, but of course holy books come in all sizes. Typography often plays a big part in that. Still, at almost every place I've worked at, sooner or later someone tries to flush a tampon down the toilet and the place floods—and a book is much larger than most tampons! (But then most tampons are more absorbent than most books, I'm assuming.)

I decided to try an experiment, but it certainly wouldn't be a good idea, or in good taste, to use the Qur'an, Torah, or King James Bible. Not having any Wiccan material I decided to go with more secular works.

First try: "Being and Nothingness," Jean-Paul Sartre, 260 pages, hardcover. It didn't even get all the way down. The water swirled around it. Later on the book swelled up to twice its thickness—it looks like a little phone book. So we can forget about most

hardcovers.

Next try: "Beyond the Gates of Perception," Aldous Huxley, 190 pgs., trade paperback. Same deal. No go.

Okay, so maybe this was a pocketbook Koran. I had a little more luck with my next choice, a slim pb edition of "Zen For Summer Vacations" by Alan Watts. It got down to the narrowest part of the toilet, but not the lower part, the pipe itself. Like a tampon, however, it flooded our bathroom! Yike! Elaine will kill me!

Okay, later. Cleaned up the mess. While I was doing that it occurred to me: maybe these guards tore up the Qur'an a page at a time and flushed each page down the toilet individually.

After the flooding I decided not to try to do this with my copy of "Moby Dick," as I had originally planned, but just estimate it. Say it takes me 3 seconds to tear out a page, wad it up, and toss it in the john. The flushing and refilling of

Nutritional Guidelines Revisited

We've just discovered that we're supposed to incorporate *vegetables* in our five fruit and veg a day (cf p.15). So Dr Plokta is off in the kitchen whipping up a jug of Pimms and a couple of Bloody Marys.

the bowl takes 30 seconds. $33 \times 192 \text{ pages} = 6336 \text{ seconds}$ divided by sixty equals 105.6 minutes. That's a *lot* of time; do young Americans soldiers *really* have that kind of patience? Don't these guards have anything *better* to do, any other duties?

Eric Lindsay
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Sorry to hear of Sue's Spookie. But 22 years is astonishing.

How strange to find Pat McMurray reporting the Eumundi Market didn't have books. Even our little local market in Airlie Beach has two booksellers, plus several other people whose stalls include books. Maybe Pat didn't look hard enough.

I loved Lucy's story of the the library, and finding that crime did pay.

Brad Foster
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I'm a real fan of "Sky Captain", and even just

got the DVD for my birthday a few weeks back. When the first commercial for the flick showed up on TV, months in advance of the release, I shouted at Cindy in the other room "Retro Robots! I am THERE!!!!!"

Tat-on-a-Stick? Hey, been there and done that! We had a shop at the Texas Renaissance Festival for about eight years. (And the question of what is the British equivalent, if any, of the American "Renaissance Festival" is something we should really get into at some date....) One of the many on-going jokes when you work these things is how just about every type of food offering can be had "on a stick". So, while trying to come up with something I could use to lure the unsuspecting masses into my shop to spend their money on my artwork, I hit on the idea of "art on a stick". I printed up tiny versions of various pieces of art, carefully stapled them to the tops of Popsicles sticks with my shop

Plokta in Exile

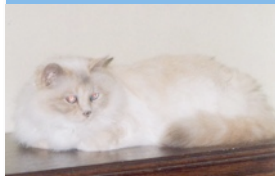
This issue of *Plokta* is being finished off in a secret location due to our desire to ~~go to a party~~ gain new ideas for the fanzine. Thanks to Kari and Phil for hosting us. This does mean that we have some different cats—instead of Shadow or Max(imum Damage), we have:



Iskander



Horus



Ah-Moon

[That's enough cute cat pictures for the next six years—Ed]

Modern Plokta Dilemmas



② Flick struggles with the recycling system

number on the back, and passed them out to folks throughout the Festival grounds. I must have handed out a couple of thousand of these, and as far as I know, only a few people came into the shop as a result of getting one. Though maybe no one wanted to admit it. It also said you could get a discount if you presented the art-on-a-stick with your purchase, but two people wanted to keep the stick-art, rather than obtain the discount. Ah, collectors....

Milt Stevens
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In *Plokta* #33 ¹/₃, Alison writes about going to a club that is reputedly full of beautiful people. With the film business in Los Angeles, we naturally have a major infestation of beautiful people. Along with the beautiful people comes all the clubs, restaurants, and boutiques that are supposed to appeal to beautiful people. It seems to be a basic rule of the universe that places that are

supposed to appeal to beautiful people charge really ugly prices. Personally, I try to avoid such places whenever possible. However, a few years ago, I slipped and wound up eating at Musso and Franks on Hollywood Blvd. You walked in the front door and were immediately up to your eyeballs in beautiful people. One look at the prices on the menu was enough to kill my appetite, but I was committed to eating there anyway. I had a bowl of soup which only cost the price of a full meal most anywhere else. So much for beautiful people.

A fütspa certainly sounds like superfluous technology if there ever was any. It's spelled with an umlaut. That's an ominous sign. The Germans are big on diabolical technology, and they use umlauts all the time. The fütspa sounds like a pretty good way of electrocuting yourself if you use it while sitting at the computer. That should count as a diabolical purpose.

Sarah S Prince
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Idling around in my office mail (part-time transcription work at a substance-abuse clinic) I found yet another annoyingly-styled email message from the head office about solstice and mid-summer etc, and noticed that the simpering fairy was a live link. Imagine my surprise to find it took me to Plokta.com:

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Paul Campbell
bitburgbonzo@gmail.com

bin tickled into a loc by the cover of *plokta* no 33 ¹/₃. see, i have a query - i really fancy the bonzo moose doo dah band record - and tales from typographic oceans - and never mind the bollocks here's the new *plokta*...

but i've yet to locate a single copy of any of 'em on ebay or gemm! can you help please?



i shall have to look back through the previous 78 issues since i seem to've forgot where the moose/elk/bambi thing came in. i've bin feeling quite deprived - but now i have the solution! iwoot has this *inflatable* moose's head - i've ordered one of course! Details attached...

Kathy Taylor
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In place of a proper LOC I send you a virtual blow up moose head, attached. It's from the fabulously named website www.ivantoneofthose.com which is full of stuff that

they claim you don't need but really really want.

Jerry Kaufman
 (again)

Eddie Cochrane's "con report" is a wonderful thing. I haven't read anything like since Gene Wolfe wrote a Midwestcon report in the voice of a piece of fried chicken at the Sunday Banquet. (We pubbed it in *The Spanish Inquisition* in the mid-1970s.)

Steve Jeffery
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I sympathise with Sue. We have a large (approximately the stretched-out size of a greyhound, and able to

occupy a disproportionate amount of duvet space) male grey tabby, named Enkidu—after the companion/lover of Gilgamesh which describes him as hairy and a hunter. It seemed sort of cute when Enki could sit in the palm of one hand and his first catch was a small worm from the garden. 13 years later, after crunching one too many dead mice underfoot on the stairs in the early hours of the morning, and coming

home after one con weekend to find the landing walls liberally spattered in blood, Amityville-like, and the dismembered remains of a large bird in various locations around the house, it seems a horribly appropriate choice.

John Dallman
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Lucy Huntzinger's *My Spy* prompted me to go out and buy the book, since the current paperback reprint isn't expensive. I bought a copy for Pam Wells, too, since Lucy has influenced her quite a lot, and I thought that getting a book into the amazon.co.uk sales charts on the basis of a *Plokta* article would be amusing. Then I noticed that *Plokta* 32 had had—let's call it a temporally well-distributed mailing, shall we?—and such plans were futile.

In any case, the book is good fun, though not quite so riveting as Lucy found it as a child. You see, it's been done since. There is a problem with

almost anything that marks a departure in style or spawns a new genre: the same things get done over and again, and sometimes better. Even if they don't exceed the original, they make it familiar when one finally catches up with it. I don't know when this style of writing about the military started, although it's clearly post-WWII.

Catch-22 may well have started it, a couple of years before *You're Stepping on my Cloak and Dagger*, and the form had crystallised by the time *M*A*S*H* was first published (yes, print was where it started) some time in the sixties. Mind you, there's a great deal been published that could use some irreverence. Wonder if we could get Iain Banks to write a technothriller this way?

Terry Jeeves
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Music... well as far as modern pop stuff goes you can include me out. It is the classical stuff which turns me on, Tchaikovsky, Chopin,

Stop Press

Mike and Flick are getting married. Next year some time, details to be arranged. "Does this mean that you'll stop referring to Alison as "Mike's wife", we asked Flick. "Oh yes", she replied, "I'll have to call her "Mike's *other* wife."

Here is a picture of the engagement ring. Flick would like you all to know that it's very shiny.



Rachmaninov are my tippie and I adore the adagio movement of Concerto d'Aranuez. Oh well, we can't all march to the same tune.

Pamela Boal
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It's kind of refreshing to know that computer competents can be hooked by the books even more than I a computer illiterate was. I soon found they were different versions of the same information which never seemed to cover the problems I experienced. What's more they tell me things that just ain't so. I have never been able to shut down a frozen computer with ctrl.alt.delete. I did find Windows for Dummies quite helpful but beyond that a grandson is not only cheaper but does not take up shelf space.

Ang Rosin
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As you are well aware I am not one for writing

letters of comment but I just had to put finger to keyboard and tell you that the idea of Dr Plokta campaigning to have no contact with Alison's children had me laughing so much I cried.

I can only blame this temporary loss of sight for the fact I left my copy of "Never Mind..." open on the sofa. A while later I returned to find Patsy sitting atop an article with a speculative look on her face. I swear I didn't leave my copy turned to Sue's article about Max and his beanie baby fixation. If a toy-snatching crime wave starts, well, I'm not taking all the blame.

We also heard from:

Henry L Welch ("I will never understand the British predilection for sitting on issues rather than sending them out"),

Rodney Leighton ("Hmm, perhaps it's Giulia with Mike on the cover"), **Sheryl Birkhead** ("Cat bites (not the little nips that everyone *thinks* is a bite—if you've been *bitten*, you know it) are

serious medical emergencies") and **Jim Caughran** ("I seem to read *Plokta*s in airports and airplanes").

One or two paper locs have been mislaid in Alison's study again; she promises she'll find them before the next issue.

Credits

Art by Alison Scott (cover, p.15, p.20), Sue Mason (p.8) and Norman Rockwell (p.6).

iPod Dalek desktop (p.2) courtesy of *ipodlounge.com*.

Photos by Steve Davies (p.11 & p.12), Mike Scott (p.15), Giulia de Cesare (p.17), Kari (p.19), Alison Scott (p.20) and some bloke with a camera phone (p.9).

Contributors

Max

Sue Mason

Giulia de Cesare

"wicked, gleaming, pitiless
Plokta" – Andy Hooper



"2-4-6-8 WHO DO WE EX-TER-MIN-ATE?"



PEDICULUS
HUMANUS
CAPITIS