

PLOKTAGAMER

Applying Superfluous Technology to Gaming Since 1976



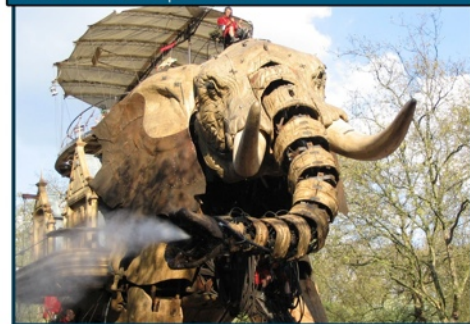
PLOKTAMARI DAMACY:

Didn't I put my keys down here somewhere ?



Sim Elephant:

we test the new squirt mode



Revolutionary:

we check out the eagerly awaited Ploкта console

Pii

PG Goes Retro:

Next Generation Missile Command



Melodeon Hero:

magic tunes from latest Link installment



REVIEWS!

OBLIVIOUS:

will Steve ever notice anything ever again?

PUB DASH:

rush to print, collate and staple your zine before the con. But watch out for late artists!

NINTENKIDS:

play with them, train them, and then turn them off!

Colophon

This is issue 35 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 *Melodeon Hero*.

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

The cabal also includes Flick, Giulia De Cesare, Sue Mason, Steven, Marianne and Jonathan Cain.

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CONTENTS

3. Editorial

4. Cabal Corrupt Youth

By **Abi Brown**

Or should that be Youth Corrupts Cabal?

5. Eye In The Sky

By **Steve Davies**

6. How To Fake It

By **Christopher J Garcia**

A second Interaction report.

7. On Treacle Sandwiches

By **Dr Dave Clements & Dr Amanda Baker**

Another Serious Scientific paper.

8. A Letter From Claire

By **Claire Brialey**

10. Lokta Plokta

12. French Trojan Elephant Shock

By **Alison Scott**



Editorial

A brief list of things this fanzine is not as late as: *The Last Dangerous Visions*, Duke Nukem Forever, Windows Vista, *The Splendor and Misery of Bodies of Cities*, Tony Blair's retirement and Jonathan's bath.

Welcome back to *Plokta*. We used to be a fanzine. We even won a Hugo once, way back in the ancient times of 2005. Have we told you about it? Shiny! Sorry, Pat, we'll shut up about it now. [You are kidding—Ed.]

Anyway, winning the <censored>, not to mention the effects of running the fanroom at Interaction, left us completely shattered. For months we have been teetering on the brink of gafiation, holding on only by our toenails and occasional transfusions of LiveJournal.



We've lent our name to a small one day con in London designed to coincide with the close of voting for TAFF and raise money for TAFF and other fan funds. But it's on the last Saturday in May, and by the time you read this <plokta.con> π: The Dangercon will already have happened.

Alison and Steven were so traumatised by Worldcon that they went to Belgium over Easter rather than return to Glasgow. What's Belgian CenterParcs like? Like British CenterParcs except with better beer. And chips with mayonnaise.

Steve and Giulia have taken to going around garden centres and buying plants. Mike and Flick are getting married, with Flick in particular having fallen subject to the dreaded bride 'flu. Symptoms include

cake angst, frock flaunting, and worrying about whether the bridesmaids are evenly matched. In severe cases victims may decide that nothing commercially available is remotely good enough. Flick starts a millinery course on Monday. Since this condition is considered highly infectious, we have had to quarantine Sue as being the only nubile member of the cabal.

Alison has taken up the melodeon—melodeon is the English name for a two row diatonic accordion that plays

different notes on push and pull. [Yawn —Ed] However, she was quickly distracted by *Guitar Hero*, a video game where you can bypass all the hard effort of actually learning to play an instrument and just skip straight to the stadiums and wild living bit.

But now things are going to be different. We have stopped resting on our pointy laurels. We are making one last effort at recovering our fannish streetcred. *Plokta* is back, returned to its former glory.

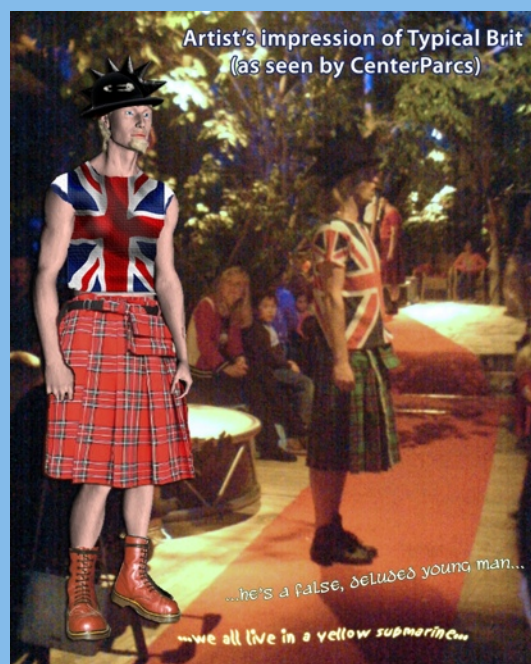
Look At The Mussels On That

While you lot were in Glasgow for Eastercon, we went to CenterParcs in Belgium for our Easter holiday. The unexpected highlight of our trip was the grand CenterParcs cabaret, *Around The World*. I know, I know, you think I've been channelling the dear departed Bruce Pelz. But no. We tried to escape but the kids brought us back, explaining that they'd never seen the grand cabaret before.

"The first stop on our around the world tour..." announced the presenter, all Eurotrashy, "...is Mexico!"

On came the redcoats, dressed as Mexicans. "Hey!" said Marianne. "They were the pirates at the Easter Egg Hunt!" I contemplate the dedication to showbusiness that makes you help children hunt down the Easter Hare at 10am, and don a sombrero for a spot of dodgy flamenco at 10pm. After a brief medley of dubious origins, the Mexicans toddled off to the strains of La Cucaracha.

"The next stop on our Around the World Tour..."—as you can imagine we were breathless with anticipation at this point— "is Antarctica!" On bounced the redcoats, dressed as giant pregnant penguins. Off waddled the penguins.



"And now... the United Kingdom!" As the redcoats trooped back out after another quick change, I am not at all sure what stereotype we were expecting for a song and dance routine based around traditional English music. It wasn't, however, a previously-a-pirate-redcoat wearing a Union Jack t-shirt, a kilt and a pair of Doctor Marten's boots, topped off with a bowler hat sporting a mohican and a safety pin. Our brains only truly hit TILT, however, when they moved seamlessly from a medley of Beatles tunes into a rendition of "All Around My Hat".

—Alison Scott

Cabal Corrupt Youth

No. of units alcohol consumed—57 (v. good or v. bad, depending on viewpoint)

No. of cigarettes smoked—121 (now have nasty cough)

No. of calories consumed—20,124

No. of ribbons acquired—5 (could do better)

No. of stickers acquired—11

No. of times fell off stilettos—approx. 27 (v. bad, in future must not drink anything blue or green)

Thurs: After long hot train journey, arrive in Glasgow only to discover that it is raining. Am slightly thrown by fact that everyone is speaking in Scottish but am aware that am in Scotland and so it is only to be expected. V. nice hotel but sadly no room service—but v. good in one way as will not find self ordering extortionately priced chocolate cake when roll in drunk at 3AM.

Go to SECC to sign in and am presented with a badge, a programme, a few leaflets and a CD—am v. impressed by hi-techness of CD-ROM provision. Am introduced to slightly squiffy Roving Party Reporter who will soon be regretting the presence of cider and Bourbon in Hilton parties. I sympathise and stick with gin.

Am puzzled by sign on bar: “If you didn’t want crottled greeps, why did you order them?” Could this be some kind of fannish in-joke?

Fri: After last night’s entertainment, feel that Roving Party Reporter needs an escort to ensure that cider is avoided. Was very exciting to travel to Hilton on open-top bus with cigarette! Discover: a) am not v. good at being an Official Escort and b) must never, ever drink aquavit again.

Sat: Wake up with head pounding and cannot decide how best to cure it—by consuming copious amounts of coffee and ibuprofen or by consuming copious amounts of gin. Eventually choose both and float through most of the day in fluffy pink haze, and consequently only attend one panel.



Abi and Roving Party Reporter

That evening, am given fluffy penguin by Con Co-Chair who insists on personally making sure that it is securely positioned in my cleavage (so that it is warm and can see out, obviously). Have very interesting first-time experience with absinthe at the hands of the Blonde Mafia. Sadly do not encounter Kylie dressed as a green fairy, but do giggle a lot. Return to hotel and find self sprawling over in lift. Thankfully am able to scramble up before the doors open, leaving dignity at least partially intact—although possibly not heel of stiletto. Must never, ever drink absinthe again.

Sun: Upon waking up, spend a full fifteen minutes wondering if I can actually move or if hangover has paralysed me completely. Accidentally find v. funny panel on the provision of content and am astonished to discover that I am good at it—perhaps I have indeed found my place in fandom?

Hang around in Fan Room and drink gin (hair of dog is only way to go at this stage). Day is marred only by presence of Annoying Glaswegian hanging around outside bar making ham-fisted attempt at chatting me up and apologising profusely when hears me calling the bloke I had been sitting with ‘dad’. Escape into large

Armadillo-like object to witness the distribution of shiny things.

Am v. impressed by the Hugos; they are indeed v. shiny and some of them are given to people I know. After usual pilgrimage to Hilton and discovery that if James Bacon comes up to you with the bag from a wine box and tells you to tip your head back you should refuse, Roving Party Reporter and I return to Fan Room and she introduces me to Astral Pole, Nurdling and Towel Foo, all of which I am astonishingly bad at. However, this may be because when James Bacon came up to me with the bag from a wine box and told me to tip my head back I obliged.

Go to bar (with other people’s money) on a mission to acquire champagne. To my dismay, Annoying Glaswegian is still in there. As I lean over the bar to pick up a tray of champagne flutes, he slides a cigar down my cleavage. Say nothing as do not want to cause fuss with seventy pounds worth of champagne in my hands. Drink champagne until six. Upon return to hotel, discover that people are actually getting up. Lunatics. Fall into bed.

Mon: Wake up, wishing that I hadn’t. As I neglected to remove makeup last night, it is now mostly adorning the hotel’s once startlingly white pillowcase. As I neglected to remove clothes, jewellery and shoes last night, am covered in rather interesting sleep creases. Look at time and am dismayed to discover that have missed breakfast. Spend entire day sitting on grass outside Fan Room with Lillian and various others, consuming copious amounts of gin and talking. Spend entire evening—and most of night—sitting on floor inside with Roving Party Reporter and others, again consuming copious amounts of gin and playing Fluxx and another card game the name of which I can’t remember due to copious amounts of gin.

Tues: Have formed opinion that fandom may be my ‘niche’. Have had a wonderful weekend. See you all in Walkers.

—Abi Brown

Eye In The Sky

If you go to <http://earth.google.com> you'll find a time machine. Not the kind of whirling blue police box you might think, but satellite photos from all round the world, mapped onto a globe. You can zoom in to almost anywhere you want. I'm looking at... 1967. We were living on Long Island. There's the school in Kings Point I used to walk to, so the house must be round here somewhere. I can remember the name of our road, but if only I could remember the colour of our roof. Things like that tend not to stick in your mind, but photos taken from 100 miles up aren't so hot on walls and woodpiles.

Back to the present day, and things aren't so hot. It turns out not everywhere is photographed in great detail, especially outside the US. You can see the rough shape of our neighbourhood in Reading, but if you couldn't overlay a roadmap onto the picture you'd have a hard time telling which blur was which. Mind you, just down the road is 1984, Bracknell, where I lived for three years after starting my first job after leaving university. It's got a high resolution strip and I can see the building I used to work in. Not many cars in the car park, it must be the weekend. I can see where I used to walk to work, past that bus stop, take that cycle path, things don't change that much. I think I can spot the house in Great Hollands that I shared with two other guys. Maybe.

Back before I went to university, we lived in Rome for a couple of years. I can make out the places I walked around, the restaurant I used to eat lunch in, the place where I got picked up by an American bloke, until I realised what was going on and chickened out. I can follow the Via Cassia north to our house in Olgiata... which is in a fuzzy bit. I can tell roughly where the house was by the position of the nearby golf course; nothing like golf for making ineradicable signs on the Earth's surface, visible from space. There's not nearly enough detail to emulate the guy who recently found a Roman ruin near his house from Google Earth. Mind you, there was an old Etruscan city called Veii or Veio, nobody

quite knows which, somewhere near our house. It was the first place the Romans wiped out after they built Rome and decided to conquer the world for an encore, but now it's in the fuzzy bit and even the ruins are forgotten.

What about further back? Google's never heard of Aynab, Lebanon, the place where we lived after I was born. Maybe it got wiped out in an air raid or something. Google also claims never to have heard of Mukalla, the place we moved to after Lebanon. Of course, there's been several wars since then and the countries have all changed their names, their borders and their political systems. These days that part of the world is Yemen, instead of the Aden Protectorate. A bit of slow scrolling up the south coast of Arabia shows that, as far as Google is concerned, it's called al-Mukalla today. Not much detail either. It looks something like the place I remember, but the place where our house used to be, out on the edge of the beach where they used to careen the dhows and across the wadi from the real town, so it wasn't even a suburb but more of an outlier, now seems to be surrounded by buildings.

The cities we lived in in India have all got new names. Calcutta is now Kolkatta, but I can see roughly where our house in Ballygunge was from the nearby golf course in Tollygunge. Later we moved to Bombay, which is now Mumbai, but the Towers of Silence are still a reasonable landmark to find our apartment.

How about Abu Dhabi? We lived there when I was 6 and it was pretty desolate, a small port on a small island surrounded by sand. Google thinks it's now called Abu Zabi, it's even got high definition pictures that practically let you pick out individual camels. Of course, these days it's expensive sports cars rather than camels filling the streets. It's kind of hard relating the satellite photos to my memories though. If I've got it right, our house was about where the Sheraton Hotel is now, or maybe the Hilton. It's so hard to tell, they've built entire new islands since we lived there. It could be a different place entirely, they could have

moved up the coast and I'd never know. When they say that you can't go back, you never really imagine places not existing any more. But the Abu Dhabi in my head is so far removed from this bustling Chicago of the sands that stands there now, it might as well be one with Veii. Or Veio.

—Steve Davies

A Plokta Primer

Here is Alison.

See Alison Photoshop.

Here are Marianne and Jonathan.

See Alison Photoshop.

"We love you mummy," say Marianne and Jonathan.

See Alison Photoshop.

Here is Daddy.

Daddy makes dinner.

See Alison Photoshop.

"Alison. Dinner is ready."

See Alison Photoshop.

"It's getting cold."

See Alison Photoshop.

Here is Miss Smith.

Miss Smith is a social worker.

See Alison Photoshop.

Daddy suggests an early night.

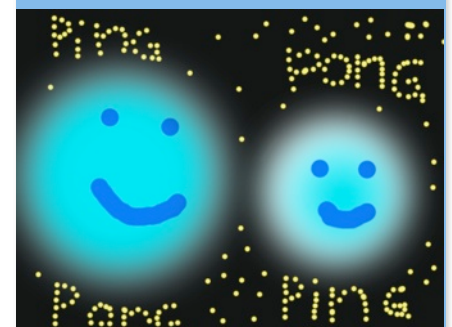
See Alison Photoshop.

"Mummy, why do you never spend any time with us?"

See Alison Photoshop.

...

See Marianne Photoshop.



Marianne's first Photoshop

How To Fake It

It had to be the highlight of Interaction for me. Easily the most entertaining thing I've seen at a convention in ages. There I was, sitting in on a panel on the Future of Fandom. For the first time in recorded history, Niall Harrison, Frank Wu, Flick, myself, Pete Young and Geneva Melzack were in the same room, an occurrence that probably wouldn't be repeated until we all showed up at Riverworld. As it really got going, about half an hour or so in, kids brandishing boppers ran in and attacked the panel and many in the audience. The Panel was ready, though, and came up shooting with their hidden water pistols. Niall was firing like he was Hunter trying to stop a perp's car by blowing out the tires. It was brilliant to watch and the younglings came back for more attacks.

That is a great story with only one minor flaw: I wasn't actually there. In fact, I was in Northern California reading LiveJournal and drinking sodas flavored with High Fructose Corn Syrup. It was by reading these LJ entries that I first heard of the YAFA attack on the panel and by reading various posts and other blogs and talking with folks who were there, I can now tell the story as if it were my own.

Now, it's fairly well-known that I wasn't there, I even did a fanzine with Cheryl Morgan where we reviewed the con

which we didn't even attend, but in 20 or even 10 years, who's gonna remember that trivial piece of information? This is the fact: you can get away with claiming anything so long as you have done your research.

To begin: find an event you'd like to make people think you were at. Let's say it was the 1968 BayCon Tourney during WorldCon. This is the most famous of the early SCA events in SF fandom. Let's say you're about 50 and you've decided that you want to be able to say you were there to impress a nubile young lady at a con wearing a lovely bodice and dancing something resembling a 16th Century Hornpipe. What do you do?

Well, first you get your hands on as much original material as you can. Fanzines of the day ran a lot of reportage of the con and most mentioned the Tourney. Pick those up and give them an intense read. Look up all the oral history sites and find out what there is to learn there. If you can manage it, discreetly hold a conversation with one of the folks who really were there. In that case, be polite and hope that they have a better memory for things that happened in the 1960s than they do for things that happened recently or you may be sunk.

When it comes time to drop your knowledge, just give her a well-worn

story and then challenge it. You see, she'll undoubtedly know a little bit about the Tourney if she's heavily involved in the SCA. If she's not at all familiar, you're set in stone and can easily impress her, but if she knows a thing or two and she brings something up, you can easily say something like 'That's how folks seem to remember it, but I'm fairly certain it went like this' and give a slightly different version. She may call you on it, but more than likely everything she'll know will be as second-hand as everything you know, so more than likely, you'll end up with a well-worked line and who knows, maybe an entire relationship made from a fabric of lies!

There are troubles that one might encounter. The best one is that you must know your audience. If you're a first century goat farmer, there are eleven people that you shouldn't tell the story of the time you drank that fellow Judas under the table while your buddy Jesus was busy moping. If you're claiming you were best friends with Forrest J. Ackerman in the 1950s, it's best to do it when he's out of earshot. There are other pitfalls, like claiming to be too close to a situation by saying something like it was you what sold out the Futurians to SaM and company at the first WorldCon. Just getting the dates wrong can make things even stickier. If I were to claim that I had been the guy who delivered the Insurgents the 'Dave Kyle says you can't sit here' message, I'd expect to be laughed at since my Dad would only have been a year or two old at the time. A good poker face is required, but you also gotta know when to fold 'em. A good story has been known to unravel like a cheap sweater when an extra fact was slipped in to gild the lily. The pitfalls are many, which only makes a successful bluff that much sweeter.

Is there an application of this talent which doesn't end up being evil? Well... no, but it's a talent. I can remember when I was at Chicon II and Walt Willis and I were chatting about these very same issues...

—Christopher J Garcia



Chris Garcia at the Future of Fandom panel

On Treacle Sandwiches

[Due to deadline pressures, we've not yet had this article peer-reviewed. All comments from suitably qualified treacle scientists are welcome.]

Introduction

Prompted by recent speculation in the *Journal of Superfluous Technology* (vol. 10 no. 1, March 2005) we have conducted an investigation of the culinary qualities of Treacle Sandwiches. These initial experiments were carried out using the only test subject prepared to volunteer.

Preparation

The treacle sandwich, shown in Figs. 1 and 2, was prepared using Morrison's wholemeal bread and Organic Black Strap Molasses. The sandwich was prepared without butter or other fat-based spread to ensure the unadulterated experience of a treacle sandwich was achieved.



Fig. 1: Preparation of the Sandwich



Fig. 2: Measurements of the Sandwich

Ingestion

Once constructed, the sandwich was consumed by the test subject.



Fig. 3: Before consumption

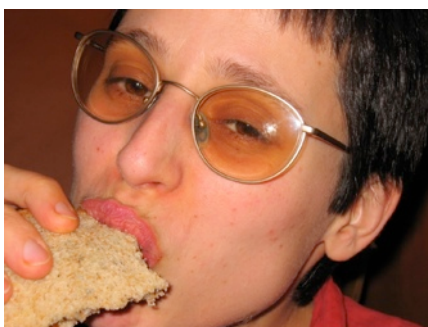


Fig. 4: During Consumption

Appreciation

The test subject described the sandwich as quite delicious. No ill effects were apparent, despite any appearances to the contrary in Fig. 5.

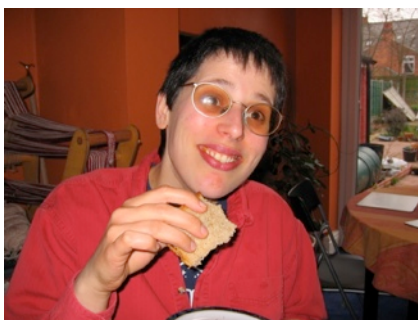


Fig. 5: The Effects of Consumption

Discussion

Treacle sandwiches would appear safe to consume, at least in controlled quantities and circumstances, and appear to be at least adequately enjoyable and nutritious. The test subject has been known to eat both bread and molasses separately, so there may be some level of acclimatisation to the separate ingredients.

Conclusion

It would seem that treacle sandwiches are an acceptable form of nourishment, possibly even tasty if one believes the reports of the test subject. The comment 'Can I have another one' is also indication that they may have some culinary merit.

—Dr Dave Clements & Dr Amanda Baker



The Three Little Minotaurs

Once upon a time there were three little Minotaurs. One day they went out to seek their fortunes.

The first little Minotaur built his labyrinth out of sand. It was quite happy until the tide came in and washed it away.

The second little Minotaur built his labyrinth out of sticks. It was minding its own business when a tornado came by and blew its home away.

The third little Minotaur built its labyrinth out of stone. It was feeling very safe when an idiot came in and chopped off its head.

—Marianne Cain



A Letter From Claire

You gave me Plokta #32 last Novacon and I realised I'd lost track of how long it had been since I even sent you a postcard of comment.

Variant on standard disclaimer follows (the one about shagging was much more interesting, but why do you think I've had no time to write to fanzines for a few years?). This is a letter of comment i.e. it's a letter I wanted to send to you in thanks and response after reading a few issues of *Plokta*. But it's not sent in the expectation that you'll want to publish all or any of it. The main reason for this is that I'm writing to you, and so I'm not trying to write something that will be a worthwhile contribution to your letter column, and thus I'm not expecting you to want to publish it. You're obviously welcome to use any sections of it that you think stand alone and will still be of interest to other readers given how far back some of it goes, but I'm not expecting you to sweat blood turning this into something you'll want to print. This is particularly so in *Plokta's* case because I know you have limited space for your letter column, and indeed edit it far harder than I think retains much sense of engagement with and from your readers; but I think it's obvious to all of us that we take a different approach to letter columns! Basically I'm happy to be the longest waf of you've ever had—and if you want, there's the line you can use for it.

So, then, congratulations! You have devised a solution to the fanzine-as-beermat problem by providing a nice glossy wipe-clean fanzine! (Er, probably. I wasn't prepared to risk it by trying.) Meanwhile Ang Rosin and Max each addressed the problem another way, producing fanzines that could be folded into beermats; after some tactical negotiations at Worldcon I gather it is official that Ang thought of it first.

Oh, and congratulations on the Hugo too. Looking at the way so many votes transferred to *Plokta* when *Banana Wings* was knocked out, moving you above *Emerald City* which had led all the way, I wonder whether we should be trying to produce an Alison-style (or rather *Sun-*

style) cover for our next issue with the screaming headline 'It Woz Us Wot Won It!' But it's much easier to just tell you instead.

At Novacon last year, Alison exercised her usual summarising skills to accuse me of listing in *Banana Wings* loads of fanzines I liked and thought should win awards, and not mentioning *Plokta* once. Actually, I'd meant my reference to the Hugos early on in that article ('which as usual aren't of relevance to anyone in British fandom except Dave Langford ... Sue Mason and the rest of the *Plokta* cabal') to stand as a marker that I expected you to continue on the Hugo shortlist virtually automatically; and similarly I'd already mentioned that you'd won two Novas, and indeed had done so in a way which bucked the usual trend. (I also thought it pretty likely that you would finally win your first Hugo at Interthingy, but didn't want to damn you with that expectation in a fanzine article, especially an article about just that; if only I'd finished my letter of comment earlier I could still have been prophetic.) But my article simply included a personal list which attempted to define the category of fanzines which I enjoy and which I think deserve greater recognition. *Plokta* already has that recognition—and now even more so.

I did think I needed to put down a marker to indicate that I didn't think *Emerald City* winning last year was actually a bad thing, given that some parts of fanzine fandom had been acting as though it were the final indicator of imminent apocalypse but, yeah, I guess that in particular made *Plokta* look conspicuous by its absence in my list. Look, if someone starts a backlash against you in turn I promise I'll write something, ok?

Still, when Alison tackled me on this point I thought I should at least read the latest *Plokta* all the way through and answer the charge that I don't like it. So I lay on the bed at Novacon while my hair dried after a shower and read it all. And I realised that it has nothing to do with whether I like it or not; it's that *Plokta* isn't really intended for me. *Plokta's* target

audience seems pretty clear: people who are interested in the aesthetic of technology as well as in innovation; people who don't like to take everything too seriously; people who are sf fans, or who at least hang out in sf fandom, but who use that community and events like conventions as a jumping-off point for the social (and perhaps intellectual) activities they really enjoy rather than being an end in themselves; people who are more interested in fans than in sf, and in the *Plokta* Cabal in particular; people who want fanzines, and fandom, to fit into their lives rather than actually taking it over. Because for you Fandom Is Just A Goddamn Hobby, right? And you'd feel justified in being a bit sneery towards anyone who felt differently about that. Not so that they run away and cry, but so that it's clear you're cooler than them. Or at least cool for geeky kids!

Basically, I suspect the target audience for any fanzine starts at its own editors and works outwards, and since in your case there are three editors and then the rest of the Cabal before you hit any actual readers, it's not surprising that it seems to be intended for people just like you. I was discussing this theory—which of course I hadn't got so far, three months later, as writing down in a form I could send to you—with Spike Parsons while she was driving us around the Bay Area in ever increasing circles after Corflu. On the basis of the summarised version I was able to deliver then (*Plokta* seems to be aimed at people who are relatively fannish, who are into cool technology, and who like fanzines but don't want them to require too much effort) Spike concluded that she is in fact your target audience; I think Damien Warman self-identifies on this description too. Personally I'd take all that as being a pretty good thing.

I think Jaine Weddell's article in #32 demonstrates pretty well what *Plokta* is about; as you subtitle it, this is 'an Eastercon report that doesn't mention the con at all'. And it's a fun article, well-written, the sort of thing that I wouldn't be too surprised to see in a guest column

in *The Guardian's* Weekend magazine or *G2* supplement except that it was by and about people I know, about events that occurred during a convention that I also attended, and showed an aspect of that trip which I totally missed out on myself. And yet I find myself missing something here too.

Alison commented at Worldcon that *Chunga* is a very good fanzine but if someone new to fanzines were to pick it up they wouldn't necessarily find anything in it that would be accessible to them and make them want to read more. In *Plokta*, by way of contrast, Alison mentioned the 'five portions' picture in #34 as being something that anyone could get, and thus tempt them into the fanzine more generally. Although Jaïne's article works partly by referencing some of the fannish cast of characters, I think it could do the same thing. It's just that I see that person new to fanzines as being a science fiction fan, and *Chunga* would tell them about fandom and often about sf; *Plokta* would instead tend to tell them something about what fans do when they're not doing fandom. (Or sf, which I know you mostly choose to write about elsewhere these days.) But then in your latest issue you have that long article by Max in response to Peter Weston's review of the Eastercon on trufen.net — which I think actually isn't accessible to someone new unless they first stop reading, follow the link you included, and read Peter's original article. So maybe it's not as clear-cut as either Alison or I have tried to present it as being.

And anyway it is all a choice, and I don't think there's a single 'right' choice. I'm not even really sure where we fit on a *Plokta-Chunga* spectrum in that context, especially as I'm looking for another axis to add some perspective, and trying to sort out how I can work in my aspirations towards fanzines like *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk* and *The Metaphysical Review* as well as *SF Commentary*. In practice, *Plokta* contains a lot of the conversations I enjoy having at parties and conventions and down the pub — but I personally look for something a bit different in a fanzine itself. Fortunately for you I am, as so often, in a cultural minority on this one.

In fact, I think the sense I get from reading *Plokta* is that it's like being

invited to a party by some people you don't know too well. You're welcome enough, and the overall atmosphere's quite friendly—but the people who invited you are having a much better time, know everyone, get all the jokes and are playing their choice of music. It is, after all, their party. And it's your fanzine—and it's clearly a pretty big party where lots of people are having a good time. And, y'know, I'm pleased to keep being invited because every now and again I happen across a really good conversation; but I'm under no illusion that any of this is being done specifically for my benefit.

I think in this respect I have to count as a sort of anti-Hooper, in that I just don't quite get it.

So, before I extend the party metaphor to the point where I drink too much and end up in several people's embarrassing photographs, one of the stand-out features of *Plokta* that I really wanted to compliment you on is the cover artwork. That could sound like damning with faint praise, if the covers weren't so good; to me, they're the part of the fanzine where you're prepared to admit that you've spent time and effort getting it right, and it really pays off. I've got the latest four issues here—the ones with the iPlokta, Skype Captain, round black things with a hole in the middle and Doctor Who designs—and the covers are all really good: fun concepts, well-executed, an idea that's immediately accessible, details that repay a closer look, and a lot of in-jokes that I'm surprised to find I do get after all. (Actually I'd be prepared to accept that the iPlokta idea took more time in the collective brainstorming than in the artistic execution, but the others are masterly; Alison really should be getting a lot more recognition as a fan artist.) And they're all different to one another rather than mining the same vein. This obviously isn't just a recent thing; the Middle Earth parody still sticks in my mind, for instance, but it's clear you've always taken a lot of trouble over your covers. What they say about good first impressions is probably true.

And despite all my comments about not always getting it, I was wildly entertained by the track listing for the very splendid cover for #33½. Less so, though, with

Flick filking in your letter column; I am only relieved by Alison's earlier comment that you cannot yet distribute audio files with *Plokta*.

In #34 I like the headlice particularly. (How often is that sentence likely to be used anywhere? I think you've probably altered the possibility significantly.)

I tested Giulia's theory on the tame Australians we had for a while around Worldcon (they followed us home; can we keep them? Can we can we can we?) as to whether 'dandelion', like 'daffodil', is a three-syllable word starting with 'D'. Where they come from, too, 'dandelion' has more than three syllables; I may now follow Giulia around for a bit asking her to say certain test words. Experience with a Gloucestershire-born friend suggests that an interesting experimental sentence is 'The almond yoghurt is in the kettle.' This, too, is otherwise unlikely to be used very often.

Steve Stiles's letter about flushing books down the loo was a marvel; I'm only surprised you didn't run it as a short article. Some years ago Noel Collyer accidentally experimented with dropping the mass market paperback of Peter F Hamilton's *The Reality Dysfunction* into his toilet. It expanded to fit very quickly, in a manner disturbingly similar to tampon adverts (an image Steve's letter also conjures up). I believe Noel dried out the book but then bought a new copy to read. We didn't ask what he did with the old one.

Of course, one of the fascinating things about reading several issues of a fanzine together is to see how themes and ideas develop between them. Like the *Plokta* Shuffle joke, which you used in #33½ and recycled in the #34 editorial. And to spot stuff like the letter from Henry Welch that you printed in both #31 and #32. And the one from Lloyd Penney where you did the same, although you edited it less the second time around. Honestly, do you think people don't read your fanzine or something? You should try it, really; I hear it's very popular and wins awards.

—Claire Brialey

Lokta Plokta

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Mention of Skype in one of the letters reminds me to tell you — in a belated response to the Skype Captain cover of issue 32—that the Sky Captain two-disc “special edition” DVD is a bit disappointing. We get the film, which is terrific fun; but the bonus disc, instead of the alternate-historical background notes one might have expected, has naught but the usual bog-standard collection of deleted scenes (one complete, the other

partially processed), interviews with selected cast-members, and dull-as-ditchwater “making-of” featurettes, all demonstrating that the film-makers weren’t nearly as clever or as intellectually reflective as those of us who’d enjoyed and speculated about the film on its cinema release had hoped. No cogent and learned pictorial essays and documentaries on public perceptions of the role of the airman, or the ambiguous relationship between the pioneers of the skies and the rise of fascism in the 1930s, or even train-spotterish stuff on late model P40 Warhawks or why Kimball Kinnison wore a leather flying helmet; just some cocaine-munching, hamburger-snorting US geek enthusing about the size of his ram and how bluescreen works. Grump.

Alison writing about Kansas reminds me that I too once owned copies of their first two albums, but they went in the early nineties, when pressure on storage space meant that I had to weed out some of my less treasured vinyl (and books). A year later, we bought our present house, and thus acquired more space—but although I bought back some of the books I’d disposed of, I never felt any urge to replace the sold-off records. I think, in the case of the two Kansas albums, that it was probably because the two songs Alison mentions—probably the best two they ever did, and probably the only two that non-Kansas fans will recognise (except for those who recognise only “Dust In The Wind” because the lyric was quoted in Bill And Ted’s

Excellent Adventure)—weren’t sufficiently strong enough to make me want permanent copies of them. (Not even now that I could probably get hold of them on a “Greatest Hits” CD.) But I do wonder at some of the vinyl I then chose to keep while disposing of Kansas et al—Boston’s first album, for example, although it only has one really good song (“More Than A Feeling”). All three albums by The Rainmakers, although there again only the first of them has one stand-out track (“Let My People Go-Go”, which I think slightly troubled the British charts in 1988 or thereabouts). Everything by The Mission, aka the musicians from The Sisters Of Mercy (we leave aside for the present the implications of this phraseology that Andrew Eldritch is not a musician), who were briefly vogue-ish but are now unlistenable pomp-goth rubbish. Und so weiter.

Reading Alison’s article reminds me of the one thing about vinyl albums which the CD format killed off and is the one thing we all miss: gatefold sleeve art. Yes, you can get more into a jewel case booklet (and even more into a box set); but the gatefold sleeve presented an artistic possibility which CD booklets simply can’t replicate. On the smaller scale, it simply looks silly—half the attraction, after all, was the size of the thing. And, indeed, all the other things designers could do with LP sleeves—the working zipper on the front of The Rolling Stones’s Sticky Fingers, for instance. One comes over all nostalgic just at the thought of it.



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Mes tres chers caballiers,

Not that I wish to cause alarm or anything, but I have to report that I have Lost My Feet. I last saw them about ten days before Interaction, but by the preceding Thursday, they were playing coy and now seem to have gone entirely. They are of no particular value, but I find them useful and would quite like to know their whereabouts. They have no distinguishing marks, but will probably be wearing black ballet pumps, size 5 and a half.

I am rather inclined to blame my employer, the lovely Naomi, for this. She insisted that my job includes, along with typing and filing, accompanying her to a Certain Brassiere Outlet where staff advised me that contrary to the opinion of the exulted Marks and Spencer, I was not, in fact, a size 34B, but rather a size 32C, a fact I already knew. However, at the time of the original diagnosis said size was not commonly available, owing to lack of demand or something. This, it transpires has changed, and, being an official Good Girl, I have diligently acquired a selection of garments of the said size.

Health & Efficiency

At the Health, Work and Wellbeing summit, the Department of Health was giving out pedometers. “We prescribe 10,000 steps a day for general good health”, they explained.

Alison clipped one to her waistband. On the first day, she went to work, to a couple of meetings, to a restaurant, to the Tun, and went home. Total 9,599 steps. Hey, that’s not bad!

On the second day, she took the kids to school, picked the kids up from school, and traipsed round after a giant elephant for hours on end. Total way over 10,000 steps. She’s getting the hang of this.

On the third day, she got out of bed, went to her computer, and photoshopped for 19 straight hours. Total 63 steps.

Perhaps something’s broken?

And as a result, my blasted feet have gone awol. This is ridiculous, since the mammary glands in question have not changed size at all (although Phil informs me that they have changed orientation somewhat), and I can only assume that the feet have become shy or nervous or something (or have run off with a fetching pair of size nines). Anyway, I should rather like them back, and would be grateful if any of your estimable correspondents has any information.

yours in perplexity,

kari

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In *Plokta Who* v10.2 (release date 08/05) I noted the familiar dilemma of Flick (p20). Blue bottles I always place in the green glass bin. Something to do with living in Wales, where strictly translated, the grass is blue (there was in earlier times no word for green, or so I have been told). I am led to believe this is consistent in many Gaelic and some other

older languages. Problem solved!

Paul Cornell
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Hi, it's me, the chap who asked if *Plokta* was an entry level fanzine. You're right, it's not: I got one word in three. But they were good words, and the ones inbetween are probably cool too.

We loved Worldcon, and now want to do it every year. It seemed to be a very welcoming and kind culture, which means, from a close reading of the material, that we must be doing something wrong. Not only was there no sign of that wonderfully retro big fleas and little fleas 'anti-media bias' (which would surely have been lost amongst all that Klingon anime Galactica stuff at the con), but I didn't get into any feuds either. So I really need to. Give me some advice: which bigtime author should I pick on? Which Hard SF author is *really* hard? Could we run some kind of Celebrity SF Author Deathmatch and find out?

("This is incredible! Charlie's compacted him to a singularity and... is that a punchbowl?") I'll seek out and feud with the weakest examples. Providing I've still heard of them.

*Buy for TAFF
Collect the Set!*



Jerry Kaufman
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It's surprising but this ensmalled issue has lost some of the distinct *Plokta* features so feels almost like a different zine. Without the sidebars and bollocks, I had to concentrate on the writing!

Giulia should have a nice chat with Judith Hanna about dandelions. I saw a pamphlet in Judith's upstairs hallway about the many benefits of dandelions, which she had written. I'm just sorry I didn't ask for a copy to quote at Giulia.

Jan Stinson
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I have a note here, affixed to page 3, that says "Thanks to your wide-ranging tastes in music and generous TAFF support, *Plokta* can now be described as eclectic and ubiquitous—my two favorite words." I have no idea what I meant when I wrote that, but there you go. Those are, indeed, my two favorite words, though.

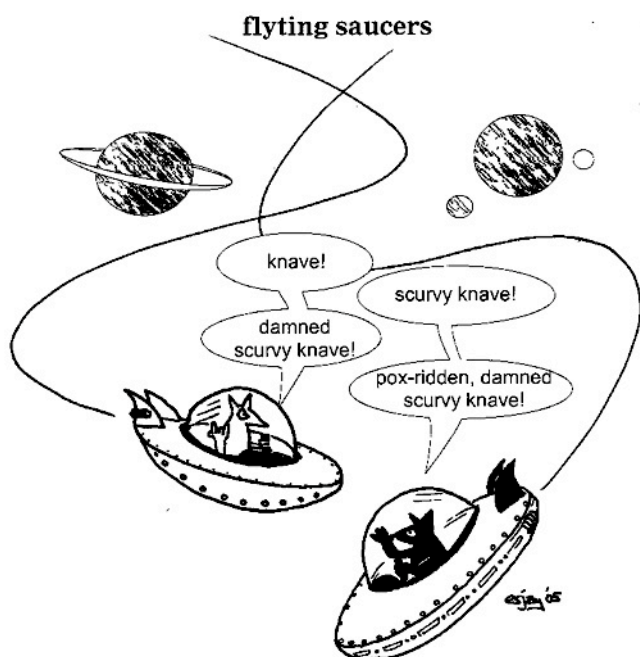
Thanks for the tip on the new Steeleye Span recording—they're longtime favorites of mine. I enjoyed the Vienna

Teng article. What are monkey nuts? [*Peanuts—Ed*]

Flick's reminiscence of Omar reminded me of my Grandma Agnes, who would always have Rice Krispie treats and lemon bisque ready for us rug rats when my family visited on our annual summer vacations years ago. I've since learned how to make both desserts; the lemon bisque can also be made with cherry gelatin and still tastes lovely, but other flavors don't seem to work so well. Not sure why. Oh, the bisque is made with flavored gelatin and evaporated milk and sugar, and topped with crushed graham cracker crumbs. Yum. One can eat half a pan's worth and still not feel full, that's the beauty of it.



WAHF: Patience Blythe (who recoloured the Domestic Goddess illo from many issues ago), **Steve Jeffery** ("Do you all get shiny rockets, or do pass it around so everyone keeps it for a week at a time?"), **Susan Francis** ("I should loc *Plokta* sometime"), **Dwain Kaiser** (attaching an article about his bookstore), **Tim Kirk** (sending us moose pictures), **Luca Oleastri** (plugging his SF art), **Steve Green** ("Alison's superlative cover for *Plokta* #3 1/3"), **Jason K Burnett** ("I've never received a *Plokta*") and several people whose locs are still buried deep in Alison's study. Sorry.



French Trojan Elephant Shock

They say you never grow tired of London, and it's true. Just when you think you've seen all the city has to offer, you find yourself face to face with a 42-foot-high mechanical elephant.



In truth, the elephant was French, the product of a street theatre company that works on an immense scale. Its first outing was in Nantes last year, as part of the Verne Centenary. The steam-driven habitable elephant, its riders, and its friend the little giantess, all appear in Verne's "La Maison à Vapeur". The elephant, and the sultan who controls it, travel in time. I am sure there was an explanation for why they turned up in London, but it's not entirely clear.

This particular re-creation wasn't steam-driven, but otherwise was very true to the spirit of Verne. It's made largely of wood, with metal underpinnings and enormous leather ears.

They snuck it into Horseguards in the dead of night, stopping traffic to do it.

The first sign of the elephant on Flickr was from astonished motorists who, after being stuck for ages in queues, had turned to look at the inevitable accident only to be confronted by an elephant staring back at them.

We went to see the beastie on the hottest day of the year, dragging our tired, sweaty and fractious children onto the tube after school. "But Mummy," whined Marianne, "why would I want to go and see a giant mechanical elephant?" "Yeah," added Jonathan. "Giant elephants are *boring*."



The little giant girl had arrived in a spaceship, and you could still see it in Waterloo Place, embedded cone-down in the road. "Don't be silly, Mummy" said Marianne. "It's not a real spaceship." I pointed out the broken parking spaces and the smoking tarmac, but she wasn't having any of it. We bought ice creams from a van doing unusually good trade. "Aren't you going to drive around after the elephant?" asked Marianne. "My license doesn't allow me to move,"

explained the ice cream seller. "If only it were less sunny I'd close for a bit and go and watch."

There were a lot of people in St James's Park and we were worried that we wouldn't get a good view. But we saw the elephant from miles off, and there was plenty of space. The little girl climbed on board an open-topped Routemaster bus and went off for a sightseeing trip. The destination board read, inevitably, Elephant & Castle.

We were interviewed by BBC London; but in truth there's not that much to say. It's a giant elephant. The interviewer had various questions—"doesn't it look real?" "Is it bigger than you were expecting?" But it was very much as I expected; the powers of the searchable web remove surprise.

When still, the elephant is just an impressive statue. But every part of the elephant moves, controlled by an army of actors with pulleys, wires and hydraulic controls. And its motions are like a real elephant's, only bigger [*Sic—Ed*]. There are numerous rooms and platforms in its side, from which the Sultan and his various wives and hangers-on emerged to do bits of performance art. But they were completely overshadowed by the elephant. We kept walking along, trying to get ahead of it, watching as it sprayed water on the crowd from its trunk, or picked up the odd passing car.



Eventually we rounded up our exhausted kids and headed home, thereby missing out on delights like the elephant turning up to Trafalgar Square in parade dress, and the little girl betraying her French origins by pissing in the street. The elephant stayed around for two further days, causing general mayhem.

—Alison Scott

I'll Have A Pii Please, Bob

Ploktendo today announced their innovative new games console, the Pii.

"Pii can easily be remembered by people around the world, no matter what sort of bollocks they speak. No confusion. No need to be shy. Just Pii" said Ploktendo's Chief Incontinence Engineer, Dr Mikhail Plokta (106), in a multimedia, multi-gigabyte presentation emailed to every journalist in the world.

The Pii has been eagerly awaited by games-playing fans who have now followed the Ploktendo System for over 10 years. Famous for games such as 'Moose Kong' with its iconic plumber heroine Marianne, later translated into the film 'Super Marianne's Brother', Ploktendo has a longstanding reputation for puerile humour and innovative branding. Despite this, the name for the new system has taken fans by surprise. Many of them were expecting the system, code-named Oscillation, to be rebranded along the same lines as Microsoft's XBox360 and Sony's PS3.

Ploktendo says the name was chosen to symbolise the way people play on their machines and the distinctive look of its controllers.