

BAD GIFTS


"Together we can Change the World"




*£100 buys a field of seeds
for a poor Afghan opium farmer*




*For £60 we can acquire two
landmines and bury them
somewhere in Cambodia*



*£40 provides a big box of
Chinese fireworks for an East
London boy with an ASBO*



*£20 feeds a hungry Iclander
a hearty meal of whalemeat*




*Your £200 could help arm
child soldiers in Chechnya*

The 2006

PLOKTA

Christmas Catalogue



*£20,000 buys an
American family an SUV
that does 6 miles to the gallon*

Colophon

This is issue 36 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 a family-size carton of ritalin.

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

Art by Alison Scott (cover, 3, 11, 13), Sue Mason (4, back cover), John Berry (8), Brad W Foster (12, 13).

Neurotic Plokta Bride is from an original idea by Guy Lomas

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Happy Halloween from the Plokta Cabal

Photo Credits

Mike Scott (2, 11 (Abbott)), Alison Scott (5 (Hugo), 6 (Steve & Pat), 7 (James gurning, Noel & Pat), 8, 10, 11 (Bombay Sapphire)), Keith Stokes (5 (Pat)), Billy Abott (6 (Mike & Flick), 7 (seams, ceremony)), Steve Jolly (6 (cake, Cabal), 7 (leaving the ceremony, Flick dancing)), Pete Young (7 (happy couple)), Avedon Carol (7 (doll)), Feòrag NicBhrìde (13 (FluffCthulhu)), Steven Cain (13 (Marianne)) SMS (14), some people on the Internet (3) and some bloke in Edwin Jones Department Store (14).

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Editorial

The 2007 *Plokta* New Year's Resolution: we will print and mail out the fanzine promptly. Perhaps.

We all spent the summer going to festivals, sitting around in the blazing sunshine on the parched ground of Southern England, padlocking the children's paddling pools, and saving pints upon pints of water by drinking beer and Pimms instead. It's a good thing that the filling of hot tubs was permitted despite the drought.

At one such festival, Alison was sitting in a field. Hello clouds, hello sky. She skipped along merrily from melodeon workshop to Australian bloke choral singing to learning how to make talking bananas. At some point, she checked her mobile phone. Aha! A text message from Pat McMurray, who lives just round the corner from Alison and Steven. But why was he texting? Was there something wrong with the house? "Congratulations, Hugo Winner." Why would Pat joke about something like that?

Eventually the penny dropped. Oh, yes, there's a Worldcon on, and we nominated Pat as our acceptor, knowing that we had no chance of winning in L.A. So he's teasing us.

Eventually, the penny dropped a bit further.

Meanwhile, Flick and Mike were shocked to discover that the Apple Store on Regent Street isn't licensed for weddings. Instead, they used the very grand Glaziers Hall, the ~~Club House~~ Livery Hall of the Worshipful Companies of Glaziers, Scientific Instrument Makers, and Launderers. Did you hear the one about the glazier, the scientific instrument maker and the launderer who walked into the bar?

We've been watching the development of the Creative Commons principle for some time. Most fanzines have worked, we think, on an informal version of creative commons for about seventy years. We believe that the form of the Creative Commons that most closely matches our understanding of the potlatch economy of fandom is the

Attribution, Non-Commercial, Share Alike license, and, now that we've given you due warning, we're proposing that from next issue we will license *Plokta* in full in that way.

As you probably know, the Worldcon is in Japan next year. We're very conscious of our Hugo winning streak, and so have been doing extensive market research to work out what sort of content will work best for the Japanese market. This issue, look out for pictures of pre-pubescent girls being terrorised by alien tentacle monsters!

In Memoriam

It's been a rotten year. We've recently lost a number of *Plokta* readers and friends, including David Stewart, John M "Mike" Ford, rich brown and Wilson "Bob" Tucker. And just after we went to press with the previous issue, Gytha North died. Gytha had a huge influence on us all when we were first in fandom. She inadvertently formed the *Plokta* cabal when she ordered us to run Fourplay together, and there would have been no *Plokta* without her.

NEUROTIC PLOKTA BRIDE
SEPTEMBER 2006 AVAILABLE FOR FAIRY TALES

ALIEN RESURRECTION:
WE FIND BRITAIN'S SCARIEST HATS

ISN'T THE FLOWER GIRL ADORABLE?
OUR HIRING GUIDE INSIDE

VENUE CHOSEN?
DRESS MADE?
RINGS BOUGHT?
TIME TO FIND A GROOM!

NOT SURE YOU TRUST HIM?
10 TOP STAG NIGHT SURVEILLANCE TIPS

IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN:
PERFECT PANTONE SHOE DYEING

DRESSING YOUR BRIDESMAIDS:
KILT, GHO OR FUSTANELLA?

FIRST-RATE PHOTOS:
DELETE THOSE UGLY GUESTS IN PHOTOSHOP

EMBITTERED EX-WIFE PRODUCTIONS 2006

Bye Bye Kitty

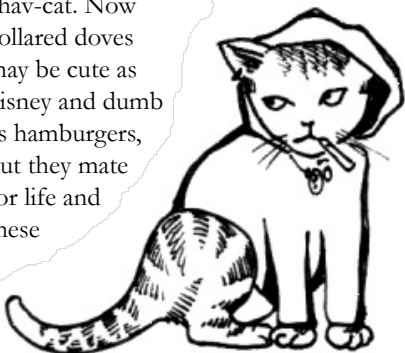
It's not that I don't like cats. I've owned cats in the past, and probably will again in future. In the meantime I continue to enjoy being shed on/ignored/scratched by other people's cats. Yes, cats are great.

Except when they use my garden as a combined gym, abattoir and public convenience.

Things were all right until the chav-neighbours moved in. Before, a lone fit-looking black cat would occasionally hang around the garden and face off the evil black budgies (a.k.a. starlings) who congregate in Hitchcockian numbers of an evening. The nice-neighbours on the other side said the little black cat had been known to dig up their petunias, but though he'd stare at me with the air of a beast quite capable of doing mischief, the sheer weight of starlings defeated him and if he relieved himself in our garden, I never found out about it.

But when the chav-neighbours arrived, as well as bringing about a dozen white vans and SUVs (parked in front of our house almost-but-not-quite blocking our drive) and a massive assortment of power tools (which they like to rev up in the garden on warm summer evenings), they brought one or more cats.

At least, I assume they did. I haven't actually seen the animal(s) in question, but the evidence is there. Just as the chavs were laying their first lot of decking, I began to find holes dug in, and poo deposited on, my vegetable patch, along with piles of feathers and the occasional avian body part in the rest of the garden. The clincher came when we found one of 'our' doves dead by the water butt, patently a victim of a cat who'd killed but not bothered to eat it. A chav-cat. Now collared doves may be cute as disney and dumb as hamburgers, but they mate for life and these



two had made our garden their home. Something would have to be done.

Initially I tried the cheap and ecologically unsound route of smelly pellets. On Day One, things looked OK. No poo, no digging. On Day Two some of the pellets had been dug up. On Day Three I found poo in a corner. By Day Four the pellets had all been dug up, kicked around and, in one case, crapped on.

Drastic measures were called for.

So I invested in a sonic cat scarer. This small green box generates a cone of sound which annoys cats into finding other places to make a nuisance of themselves but which is inaudible to human ears (unless you press the test button, which is something you only do once). It doesn't hurt the cats and it doesn't use nasty chemicals. Best of all it's a sonic weapon, which due to exposure to cyberpunk and Hawkwind in my misspent youth makes it cool tech. It is also surprisingly easy to use tech. Take it out the box, put the batteries in, put into test mode, clap hands over ears, take out of test mode, place in garden and wait for local wildlife to start bleeding from orifices. Well actually I didn't really want sonic destruction, just sonic deterrent.

And I got it.

On Day One the garden remained unpooed on, un-dug and altogether empty. I saw nothing all day, despite looking out the window far more than usual. I felt vaguely disappointed. How would I know my sonic weapon worked if I didn't see it working? Beloved kindly pointed out the logical flaw in that statement.

On Day Two I didn't look out the window so much, but whenever I did, I noticed rather more bird activity than usual: not just the evil black budgies, but blackbirds, the widowed dove and a smattering of sparrows. An evening survey of the garden confirmed no digging and no crap.

By Day Three word had obviously got around the local avian community that my place was a safe haven from felines. The garden teemed with birds, including rarer visitors like goldfinches and blue



tits. I did a last check of the veg patch that evening to be sure. Still no poo or holes. There was, however, a flattened patch in my beetroot the exact shape as an obese wood pigeon. If these waddling porkers had decided to hang out in my garden it really must be safe, as they aren't renowned for being able to evade predators (though I suspect a one of our local super-size pigeons might squash a cat if it managed to fall just right).

On Day Four, after having placed a few strategic canes to discourage any sitting on my veg patch, I noticed, amongst the other birds, a pair of pigeons who had relaxed enough in this new cat-free zone to carry on the charming mating ritual so peculiar to their species. (The one where he hangs around near her—and she ignores him; he ruffles his neck feathers, dips his head etc—and she ignores him; he sidles closer—and she ignores him; he sidles too close—and she pecks him on the head. Repeat till one partner gets bored and gives in.)

So my garden was transformed in a matter of days from cat toilet to bird sanctuary with a thriving community of different species living, loving (and, yes, occasionally crapping) in comfort. Overall, I'd say the cat-scarer is a success.

I've begun to wonder about the possibility of getting hold of a really big one, putting it on the fence facing into the chav-neighbours' garden, and pressing the test button.

—Jaine Weddell

How I Scored A Hugo

"You're going to LA for the Worldcon, right?" asked the Cabal. "Well, we need to nominate a Hugo acceptor 'cause none of us are going. We know we won in Glasgow, but that was local, we think we have no chance of winning in LA, but it should be a fun evening anyway."

"Sure", I said, "but you will give me a speech just in case." "Oh no, that won't be necessary, we've no chance of winning."

I asked for a speech a lot; Alison at a BBQ, Steve at the Reading meet, Mike at the Ton, Flick at her hen night. "Oh no", they all said, "that won't be necessary, we've no chance of winning."

I arrive in LA and set about acquiring the various ribbons, pins and invites. Quite a challenge, but I knew all three of them would really want their pins, ribbons and invites. After all they weren't going to win, so the pins, ribbons and invites would be all they'd get. It wasn't all bad from my perspective. Hugos are heavy and awkward shaped and extremely suspicious looking: really good that I had no possibility of having to carry three of the damn things back to London.

Kathryn Daugherty tracked me down in the Business Meeting, where I spent most of my time attempting to bring orderly minutes out of the chaos of the meetings. "Rehearsals are noon to 4 on Friday", she said, "and it'll only take five minutes." "They have no chance of winning, you know, they haven't even given me a speech, but I'll try and go along for the rehearsal anyway." "You must write something, just in case", she said.

At one of the parties, I bumped into TAFF delegate, Bridget Bradshaw. "I'm presenting the fanzine Hugo", she said. "Oh that's cool, in the unlikely event they

win, I'll have a friendly face. Oh, not that I mean I don't rate them of course, but they're so convinced they won't win, they haven't even give me a speech." "Oh", she said, "you have to write something, just in case."

I had some spare time on Friday, so I swung by the arena. Laurie Mann was acceptor wrangler, so that was cool, and I figured it would be my only chance to be on the stage. After all, they knew they had no chance of winning. "You must write a speech", she said, "just in case, really."

I'm a salesman, I believe in the power of rehearsal and preparation. So I did the speech thing, certain that I would never use it.

Julie looked amazing in her corset. The big challenge was figuring out how to tie it, but some effort and a quick Google sorted that. While I was waiting for her to finish her ablutions, I thought I'd better write something. It wasn't very likely, but I knew I'd feel more comfortable even with just a few words in my pocket.

I wore my tux, and felt about ten feet tall as we strolled from the hotel to the arena. I was with one of the most beautiful women at the convention, now her former future fiancé*, I was going to spend an hour or so at the pre-Hugo reception and chat to some friends, spend a couple of hours relaxing and listening to Connie Willis do her thing, and then hang out at the Japanese-organised post-Hugo reception. I had my speech in my pocket as a security blanket, though of course I wouldn't need it, and all was right with the world.

At the reception, I met Bridget and Simon, James and Simoné. I insisted on reading them my speech, not for rehearsal, but cause I thought it was a fun speech and no-one would ever get to hear it. After all, there was no chance they were going to win.

I had some nerves, when Susan de Guardiola asked me how I was feeling, I answered, "Frightened rabbit, oncoming train, frozen in the headlights." "Oh, that's almost a haiku," she said. "I'm actually fine you know, there's no chance

they're going to win. They didn't even give me a speech."

I listened to Bridget reading out the nominations, and felt nothing, just curiosity, that no chance of winning thing again. She opened the envelope, paused for effect and said, "The Hugo Award for Best Fanzine goes to *Plokta*."

I got up, managed to trip over James and Simoné on the way out, walked up on the stage, stared at the lights and thousands of people, took a deep breath and read:

Good evening.

My name is Pat McMurray and I'm here to accept this Hugo Award on behalf of the Plokta Cabal. The Cabal consists of the three editors, Alison Scott, Steve Davies and Mike Scott, and a vast supporting cast of Steven Cain, Giulia de Cesare, Flick, Sue Mason, Marianne, Jonathan and various cats and computers, none of whom could be here tonight.

They didn't give me a speech, not expecting to win. I presume they hoped my wit and wisdom would kick in if necessary... Oh well.

We had agreed I wouldn't ring until a reasonable hour in London, so I've texted them instead...

Thank you very much on their behalf, and good night.

* When she won her Chesley Award, Julie described me in her thank you speech as her future fiancé, despite having asked me to marry her in April. I rectified that by asking her to marry me later that evening.

—Pat McMurray



Flick & Mike's Wedding

On Friday 15th September 2006, I went to Mike and Flick's wedding. I had a really good time at the wedding, and this is what I did.



Mike & Flick

I wore my best dress, which is a dress with flowers on, and Jonathan wore his only smart clothes, and we went on the

train. On the train, we met some friends of my parents', Pat and Julie. Julie did my hair for me on the train, and when we got off the train she did her hair exactly like mine.



On the Tube: Steven & Pat

After we got off the train, we went to the pub. We sat in the pub and drank Sprite: we weren't allowed coke because it might stain our clothes. When we were there, we met Mike's family and we had a little chat with them, and then it was time for the wedding.

At the wedding, we met one of Jonathan's friends, Meriol. They played together for a little while and then we went upstairs for the wedding. It was a weird wedding, because the bridesmaids were men and the best man was a woman. I didn't understand most of

what they said, but I did understand the bit about the ring.

Afterwards, we went to dinner and there were a few speeches and then we started to eat. The first course was chicken paté with lumps of chicken in. I ate the chicken but not that paté and I still felt hungry so my Mum took me into the ladies' toilet to see if there was any chocolate left. There wasn't any chocolate, but there was some chewing gum, so I had that. The second course was much nicer. It was some duck and a confit of duck and mashed potato with herbs. Pudding was chocolate mousse, a sugar basket with fruit in and a lemon tart.



Meriol, Jonathan & Declan waiting for the cakes

After that we ate some little wedding cakes, and people started dancing. I then went upstairs to see if I could wave to my Mum from the gallery, and I met a friend and we started to talk. Then I went downstairs and did some dancing. After a while, we started to talk again and then she had to go. I started to eat some chips, and then Flick let me play on her Nintendo DS, and then we had to go. I gave the DS back to Flick and then we left.

—Marianne Cain

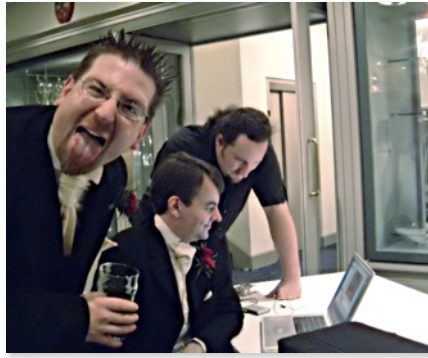


"Say Hugo!"

Steven, Alison, Marianne, Sue, Flick, Jonathan, Mike, Giulia & Steve



James Bacon adjusting Flick's seams



James expressing his opinion of superfluous technology to Mike and Simon Stacey



Flick dancing



During the ceremony



Bridal doll



Noel & Pat molesting the doll



Flick & Mike leaving the ceremony



The happy couple

The Cheeky Chappie

I was born in 1926 and reared in Birmingham. When World War 2 commenced I was evacuated to the safe rural area of Lydney, in the Forest of Dean, on the banks of the River Severn. I must have presented a dismal figure on arrival at Lydney in 1939; I wore my rather large-sized school cap, short trousers, mackintosh, a gas mask in a cardboard box draped across my body. With a packet of pilchard sandwiches and a few low denomination coins of the realm, I was, with the other school children, paraded before the local populace who made selections. My psychiatrist opines that my inferiority complex originated at this time, seeing that I was the last one to be picked.

I returned to Birmingham a few months later, and air raids commenced. I had a



Max Miller

quite exciting time; my father was a steel-helmeted air raid warden, and I accompanied him on his patrols during bombing, looking for shrapnel and bomb fragments. Fortunately, my school was bombed, and I made scant appearances at alternative school arrangements.

In pauses in the bombings, I used to lie on my bed listening to radio programmes, especially a weekly 'music hall' slot. One comedian I liked very much, although I couldn't understand all his jokes, was Max Miller, billed as 'The Cheeky Chappie'. The *Radio Times* magazine showed he wore a colourful harlequin-type jacket and baggy trousers, and had a round face like a moon with a really wide grin like a slice of melon. He was frequently banned from broadcasting on the BBC because of his alleged 'coarse' jokes. He received a three-month ban for the following joke.

He stated he was walking along a very narrow pathway with a steep slope on one side and a deep ravine on the other, and a very beautiful girl approached from the opposite direction. There wasn't any room for them to pass each other. He said he didn't know whether to toss himself off or block her passage!

Why this vital decision should cause him to be banned perplexed me... it was certainly a dilemma, but then, I was only

fourteen at the time!

One day, my friend Frank Adderley stated that our hero Max Miller was appearing at the Birmingham Hippodrome, and asked me to accompany him. My mother was somewhat dilatory in giving me permission to travel at night in the city centre, but realising I was a growing lad, she relented.

So Frank and I caught the yellow 32 double-decker bus to the Hippodrome, joined the queue, and I eventually made my first music hall attendance.

The first artiste was Vic Oliver, an American fiddle-playing comedian who later married one of Winston Churchill's daughters.

It seemed to me that the personnel of the chorus line included a number of delicate males, all rather mystifying.

And then, an excited voice announced that Max Miller would entertain us...

He pranced on... his personality pervaded the sweating audience before he even opened his mouth.

Sad Servile Slut

We've had an exclusive peek at some forthcoming TV series from Russell T Davies, coming soon to a random Freeview channel near you.

Hotrod Cow—Follow up to the very successful BBC Wales series *Pimp My Combine*. Set in Cardiff. Viewers will thrill at the racy scenes of cow-on-cow action.

O Two Chord—a tribute to the tunes played on the one-row melodeon. Set in Cardiff. Viewers should watch out for the forbidden love of Arnold the armadillo and Gladys the concertina*.

Hoot Crowd—we follow the fans who are given free tickets and merchandise in return for puffing their favourite bands. Eagle-owl-eyed viewers may well spot a gay snog. Or ten. Set in Cardiff.

How! Doctor—learn traditional Native American medicine from our traditional native American medicine man. Starring that bloke who was the Indian guy in the Village People. Set in *Arizona* Cardiff.

Hot Cod Row—[that's quite enough new RTD series—Ed.]

*Joke appears courtesy of Les Barker

Elves Trail Suds

The cabal were delighted to discover that Mike & Flick's wedding venue came with hot and cold running naked elf boys. Hot elf-boy on the left, cold on the right.



After a couple of quips, he left the stage and immediately returned with an arm.

“Hitler’s,” he said.

He repeated the movement, and returned with a leg.

“Hitler’s,” he repeated.

Then he appeared on stage with two large potatoes.

Everyone roared with laughter.

“You are all wrong,” he beamed triumphantly, “these are King Edwards.”

His next joke described how he was walking through the centre of Birmingham.

“A bastard stole my watch and chain,” he thundered, “but I chased him. I pursued him past the jeweller’s, past the greengrocer’s, past the confectioner’s, and caught him by the cobblers.”

Tremendous cheers and applause.

A stooge brought on a blackboard and easel, and Max Miller wrote a capital ‘K’ on it.

“What letter is that?” he asked.

We shouted out ‘K’.

He appeared stunned.

“WHAT LETTER IS THAT?” he screamed.

“K” we roared.

“No, it’s an ‘F’” he seethed.

“No, it’s a ‘K’” we answered.

“That’s funny,” he quipped, “I see ‘F’, you see ‘K’.”

Two old women stood up and pushed past Frank and myself, waving their umbrellas, muttering how disgusting it was.

He gave us a dramatic rendition of how he met the beautiful girl on the narrow path, and then sang a risqué song “I fell in love with Mary from the dairy”, and invited us to join in the chorus.

He concluded his act by announcing “we’ll all sing a chorus of Sally, and then I’ll go outside and do ‘Rose-Marie’.”

Prolonged applause was deafening, providing proof positive that in Birmingham a rather crude sense of

humour was abroad, especially amongst the younger generation.

He appeared on TV screens in the fifties and sixties, but his demeanour was somewhat dated, although he still managed to include a few crafty innuendos, although, through old age, his ‘cheeky’ sparkle had diminished.

Recently, a TV profile on Max Miller was shown—it revealed that when he wasn’t ‘on stage’ he was a morose character, parsimonious with his money. He usually

travelled from Brighton, where he lived, to London and the Provinces to perform, but he always snuggled in a First Class compartment and refused to speak to anyone who had the temerity to enter his compartment.

I feel privileged to have seen him perform at the peak of his professional career.

—John Berry

The Perils of Suburban Living

It was half past ten on a hot summer night and we looked at each other with one thought: hot tub.

I went downstairs first, in my dressing gown and thongs, that’s flip-flops to you Brits, and strolled across the patio with a box of matches to light the array of scented candles we have dotted about the garden. We do things in style here in leafy Tilehurst, you understand. Anyway, it was completely dark and my foot thumped against something disconcertingly soft and resilient, in a way that a cat might have been but for the fact that I’d just passed Shadow lounging indolently on his chair in the hall.

I ran back in for a torch and found a hedgehog, cowering under the steps to the tub. I felt awful. Surely I hadn’t kicked it that hard? It scuttled away into the darkness. Steve peered after it. “I’m sure it’s limping, you know.”

Thanks, Steve.

There being nothing much we could do, we lit the candles and settled in for a soak. After a while there was a characteristic scuttling sound and the spiny invalid headed under the back porch. We found it huddling among the clutter, and put out a bowl of milk and some cat biscuits. It shrank away from the torchlight. Steve also put a cardboard box in front of it, to protect it from potential cat-biscuit or hedgehog predators, and we went to bed feeling guilty.

Next morning the only sign of it was copious little puddles of hedgehog vomit.

I moved all our clutter and hosed everything down as an act of penance, haunted by the thought of a little hedgehog sick and dying out alone in the wilderness, well, our back garden somewhere, and it was all my fault.

We went out later to a garden centre, this being our Ikea replacement activity, and came across signs to a homes and gardens show. Drawn like wasps to beer, we parked Steve’s CRV among all the Chelsea Tractors outside.

What should we find in there but a very affable chap promoting the Berks, Bucks and Ox. wildlife trust? He reassured us that the glurt I had been hosing away that morning was just a sign of the dear little critters’ lactose intolerance, and that our hedgehog was probably fine. In relief, we signed up at once.

There’s certainly nothing wrong with the little sod’s appetite. The nightly saucer of cat biscuits I put out in atonement is cleaned up every time.

But I do have another worry. There have been stories lately that global warming is fooling hedgehogs around the country into producing second litters. I fully expect any night now to go out in the dark and kick a whole family—mama, papa and little baby hedgehogs—across the patio. I don’t know how I could cope with the guilt then.

—Giulia De Cesare

Towards A Taxonomy Of Crisp Flavouring

You'll have noticed a huge range of crisp flavours. Truly they're breaking out all over. Parmigiano Reggiano and Black Pepper. Sea Salt and Aged Modena Balsamic Vinegar. Thai Sweet Chili and Lemongrass. Quattro Formaggio and Roasted Red Onion. Sun Dried Ocelot with Banana Jam.

So, what's going on? Are we really seeing multiple new flavours? I think not. Instead, I believe we are seeing multiple new flavour descriptions.

The crisp was invented shortly after the Great Exhibition, by a chef with too much time on his hands. For a long time they had no flavours; you had to put your own salt on. Frank Smith of Smith's Crisps really started something when, in an effort to stop losing salt cellars, he put little twists of salt directly inside the packets of crisps that he sold to local pubs. Of the cabal, only Giulia remembers being unable to buy ready salted crisps.

It was over a century later when Golden Wonder introduced cheese and onion crisps and started us on the road to ruin that led to spiny anteater and sautéed walnut flavour crisps. Next, along with ready salted, came salt and vinegar, and for a good while that was that. Now, as all right-thinking people know, salt and vinegar crisps come in blue packets, redolent of the sea, and cheese and onion crisps come in green packets, redolent of the land. A quick test of cabal members showed that six out of seven *Plokta* adults believe that salt and vinegar crisps should come in blue packets, and the seventh is deluded, misguided and young.

At any rate, at some point the flavour floodgates opened. Smokey Bacon was a hot favourite with religious observants who weren't allowed pork, because it contains no meat whatsoever. Others followed. Roast chicken. Prawn cocktail. Marmite. Sea salt and cracked peppercorn.

I began to get suspicious. After all, how many different flavours are there? You only have four (or five) different sorts of tastebud, and crisps don't smell much different. But there are clearly some different flavours. There's salt. And

vinegar, a sort of generic acid. Spray-on cheese. Onion powder. Monosodium glutamate (look out for chicken, beef, ham, lamb or hedgehog). Sugar. Chilli. Sort of random herbs. Vaguely fishy.

And beyond that, we have inventive copywriters. Salt and MSG? Smoky bacon. Sugar and chili? Mango and chilli. Same with a bit of fish? Thai sweet chilli. Just the fish? Prawn cocktail. MSG, vinegar and herbs? Lamb and mint. In this way most crisp flavours, no matter how exciting, can be rendered into something much simpler. Lemongrass and chilli puffs? Easy; vinegar, herbs and chilli. Sour cream and shallot? Cheese and onion.



You can imagine the boffins back in the labs. "OK chaps, we've synthesised a new crisp flavour! What does this one taste like? Hmm, week-old socks? How about Beef and Blue Cheese?" They certainly don't have to have the thing listed on the packet. I was always deeply disappointed that Hedgehog crisps contain no hedgehogs. And years ago, when Trading Standards sued a Chinese restaurant whose prawn crackers contained no prawn, we were all astonished to discover that prawn crackers were supposed to contain prawn.

There is clearly a national bias in this. Other countries look on the British fetish for weird crisp flavours with astonishment. In the post-communist world, years of austerity have left them with only three flavours — salted, unsalted and paprika. Watch out for Hungarian goulash and sour cream coming soon to a crisp near you (paprika, onion powder, MSG and spray cheese).

Years ago I did some market research for a new savoury snack, under a non-disclosure agreement that I'm royally

breaking here, so let's hope the company in question doesn't read *Plokta*. They showed a picture of the concept, which was, essentially, bags of dehydrated shredded wheat minis. And then they showed two alternative presentations. Would I prefer "Italian Pasta Bakes" in Sun-dried Tomato and Parmesan flavour? Or "English Wheaten Crunchies" in Vintage Cheddar and Beef Tomato Ploughman's flavour? There were also two pictures; one of a basic Italian momma with check tablecloth and beaming bambinos in olive groves (i.e. Giulia); the other of a lusty ploughboy and shepherdesses eyeing up the sheep in a typical English field (see *Plokta's* passim). Online, I couldn't taste these products, but I'm fairly sure they were identical.

Meanwhile, I tested a couple of ordinary flavours from the shopping on the cabal. The only person who spotted 'Mango Chilli' had seen the bag beforehand, and nobody recognised the 'ultra-authentic' Patatas Bravas flavour crisps. Illuminating comments included 'er, they're a bit stale' and 'what are Patatas Bravas?'

And the companies are getting smarter. Boutique crisp manufacturer Burt's has taken the radical step of putting bacon in their bacon flavour crisps. Allegedly.

I've always wondered why there aren't Raspberry Ripple crisps, or salt and vinegar ice cream. And it seems that other people are coming to the same view. This year I have had mango and chilli ice cream, at a folk festival, and mango and chilli crisps (from Kettle Chips). Flick tells of vanilla flavoured Monster Munch (horrible), Rococo make sea salt chocolate (yummy), and we all remember chocolate pretzels (very nasty but somehow moreish). Just this weekend we have had Apple, Sage and Thyme crisps (i.e. sweet and herby) and Pear and Parsnip ice cream (really remarkably strongly parsnip-flavoured; hardly touched by the cabal). Soon you will be able to buy every product in every flavour. Just don't expect any of them to taste right.

—Alison Scott

Lokta Plokta

Colin Greenland
colin.greenland@ntlworld.com

Thanks for *Plokta Who and the Revenge of the iDaleks*, just arrived, dated "August 2005".

I think I get it. It's a time-travel joke, right?

Rob Jackson
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Do you realise glossy covers would have been outlawed in the early Pickersgill era? Fuzzy twiltone was the thing—a bit like Harris tweed, only in paper form. (Anyone aged less than about 45 will have no idea what I am talking about.) By comparison, the look of *Plokta* is like a fine silk print. Ain't technology wonderful.

Loved Pam Boal's comment about different computer maintenance aids: Windows for Dummies or a grandson. However, Pam—your grandson may take up less shelf

space, but I bet he eats more.

Now we come to Max's response to Peter Weston's sad disconnection from Eastercons at Paragon 2. I have a feeling that even Peter himself would in a way agree that he had slightly lost it in not feeling at the centre of things any more, but then there is an alternate response to the passage of time, which is not to rage, rage against the dying of the light, but to grow old along with me (to mix 2 quotes). Go with the flow, Peter. By which I mean—if you don't like the fact that Eastercons contain lots of people with oodles of different interests, then find a smaller con that brings together the sort of like-minded people you really wanted to meet in the first place. Or even found one.

Which is not a million miles from what a Rat-and-Gannet

nucleus of fans did in the 80s when we set up the Mexican series of cons, which were pretty successful in what they set out to do—bring together fans of written SF, just the group that Peter feels are marginalised at current Eastercons. (I can't remember how many Mexicons Peter came to—perhaps he should have come to more.) Peter is probably hankering for the Twiltone era (see above).

The reason fandom is so much more diffuse nowadays is that it is also more diverse. There are actually so many more ways to communicate than there used to be—some email lists cater for nostalgia freaks, others for—well, you name it. And then the very concept of email lists would have been stfnal when I was at university—probably implicit in the theme of books such as Brunner's *The Shockwave Rider*—but I'm not complaining about it, just going along for the ride, which is much more fun. That diffuseness, variety and diversity is a reflection of the fast pace of change in society as a whole—more holidays by air, more ethnic restaurants, more this, more that...

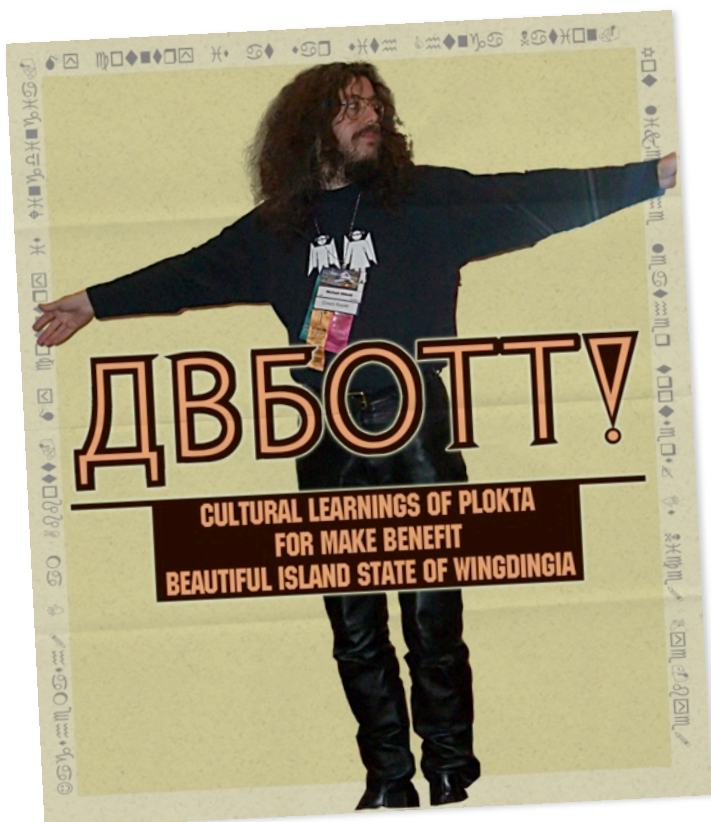
Either accept your fellow attendees at Eastercons for what they are, or go somewhere else. There is choice, you know. If you don't like Thai or Mexican food there is always an old-fashioned pub serving roast beef or fish & chips.

If you try and tell younger people that they can only have fun the same way you did, the response is going to be very dusty. My personal experience of this is that



Wedding table favour

Hugo (middle offspring) is 20, and since completing an intensive acting course he has written the screenplay for, co-directed and finished shooting a full-length romantic comedy as well as arranging the forthcoming premiere locally near Chichester. He has also got the plots for about 3 SF novels so far, probably drawing on experience from anime/manga (including Otaku) and mediaeval and Civil War re-enactment and stage-fighting—none of which are choices I would have made for him but he has done really well and determinedly in all of them. If I'd pushed him along predictable paths he'd probably be a cheesed-off (or even a failed) medical student by now.



So, Peter—let people have their heads! Creativity will out, and by definition, that will take you into unexpected places.

John Sila
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I don't approve of dressing up, either. I mean, will I get any further issues if I tell you this? Or should I shut up?

Vicki Rosenzweig
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I haven't read the Peter Weston article Max is responding to, but as far as I can tell, I agree with her entirely. If it isn't fun, why are we doing it? My idea of fun overlaps but isn't the same as Max's, but I'm not at all sure what Peter's is, since he seems to think that fun isn't a good reason to put on a con. (He surely knows that the people who run cons aren't in it for the money.)

I trust that if you find any further eggs in Jonathan's hair, they will be of quail, not lice.

P.S. I read the zine, and wrote the above loc, while drinking tea from a mug illustrated with a fine brown moose.

Terry Jeeves
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De Cesare on gardening was the best thing in the issue and as may be expected brought back memories of my own gardening start up when I cherished a strange plant for months, carefully weeding all round and watering it regularly. Then I proudly showed it to an expert front who told me it was a weed!

Music and listening to same. Before the war I would stay up late at night listening to the American station WGEO from Schenectady, a programme of organ music called "Chapel in the Wildwood". A year or so later the BBC did a rip off series called "Church in the Valley"; nowhere near as good.

I'm afraid Max lost me with his disagreement with Peter Weston; we all have points of view but not necessarily in agreement. To move to another item, you obviously enjoy pop (general term) whereas I go for classical stuff. *Chacun à son goût* is the phrase I believe.

That unkillable smoke alarm is obviously either an alien, or an alien data probe which periodically sends back a signal reporting its observations.

Ned Brooks
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I was disappointed in the otherwise excellent article about the band Kansas—after all the build-up, it ends with no hint whether the live concert was enjoyed at all.

They never showed a photo of the Korans supposedly flushed at the torture camp in Guantanamo, but I can well imagine that they were small enough—I have seen photos of demonstrators waving what were said to be Korans, and they were no more than 2 inches wide. These are meant to be carried about as objects of devotion I suppose—and the ones supplied to prisoners would no doubt be small to prevent them being used as weapons or hiding places. I don't collect miniature books, but from the trip to Aussiecon in 1975 I see that I still have a 576-page Maori-English/English-Maori dictionary that is 1.5x2x0.5 inches—quite likely room there for the Koran, and easily flushed down any modern toilet.

Gail Courtney
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I now know I am not alone in crediting inanimate objects as being anything BUT.... I would have felt guilty too, Giulia hearing your poor liddle fire alarm pleading for its freedom, (and its old job back). I blame it on the fact of us being women (or perhaps just a certain type of woman).

And as for lice Alison... I was scratching. When I was all of about 10 my mother

found that I was badly infested... a mere *two days* after Nitty Nora Head Explorer had been to the school and declared me louse-free. I went loopy and—for the first time ever—asked for my hair to be radically chopped. That's never happened again, but lice have.

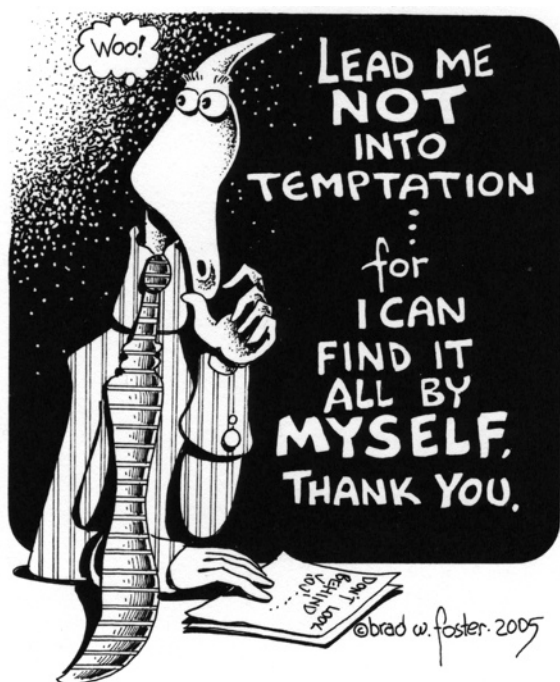
And Ed—you can never have too many cute cats, or their piccies.

Brad Foster
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It's always the highlight of any pile of mail here to find an issue of *Plokta* waiting. Though, noting the cover date of August 2005, looks like *Plokta* may be joining the odd time-travel schedule of zines like *Vanamonde* and *Thyme*. Now, is that extra-skiffy, or what?

The new Dr Who series just hit the airwaves over here recently, and I've had a lot of fun watching those, so the cover is, as usual, quite timely. It's no Sky Captain, but it will do.

With regards to Giulia's gardening notes: I used to refer to myself as a "Yard Nazi": someone who always made sure everything was neatly trimmed, lined up and precise, no weeds, no bald spots, hedges growing just so, grass always trimmed, etc. That was when I had a tiny little front yard in a house I rented half of. Since moving into a much larger house with a *much* larger yard, I have seen my opinion of yard work shift over the years. Now, it no longer matters if every growing item is the "correct" type, but that they are at least green. Thus if I keep it all cut to the same level, it *looks* good, even though most of it is evil weeds. But, from a distance, it'll pass, and I can



get on to the other things I need to do.

The other item in there was the throw-away line about Ikea. I've been reading about this store in Brit-zines for quite some time, and trying to figure how a store could be such a big deal. Then they opened one just north of Dallas this past year. Cindy and I decided to drop in a month or so back to see what it was all about. After being inside for half an hour, I turned to her and said "Well, damn. I was hoping to be able to make all kinds of snide comments, but this place has got some *great* stuff!"

I loved Steve Stiles' great experiment in the flushing of religious texts. Sounds like a perfect episode of "MythBusters" to me!

Milt Stevens
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When *Plokta* #34 arrived I immediately noticed something very strange about it. (How could I tell?) It appeared to have been mailed from England. That was silly. Everybody knows *Plokta* is the fanzine that may come from anywhere except where it really comes from. (Are you people now living in Borneo?)



Hello Japanese fans

Max's problem is her digestion is too good. That and still being packed full of vitamins and minerals. Give it a couple of decades for the vitamins and minerals to run out, and she'll be as much of a curmudgeon as any of us. Naturally, anything the young are having fun at must be immoral by definition. For the rest of us who don't have the energy for that sort of fun, we have the fun of objecting to it. ("We always gripe loudly, for are we not fen?") It's our Ghu given right to curmudgeonhood.

Alasdair Hepburn
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I decided to list the albums that the tracks Kansas played at Shepherd's Bush came from. So, I donned the caving light and... oh all right then, it wasn't that bad. It only involved moving the sofa to get to the cupboard, and rearranging some boxes of photographs to find the particular box containing all my Kansas albums. On the way, I discovered that I still had "Masque" on vinyl (as well as CD, so I can only think it was for comparison tests). In 1978, we went to Arizona, so I bought my own copy of "Point of Know Return" (complete with exquisite inner sleeve with all the lyrics) at a store in Phoenix. Of course, being a touring holiday, it had to be safely packed in a suitcase for a couple of weeks. Being Arizona in the summer, it was also very hot. Which meant that when we returned home, the heat had warped the record to the extent that most of it was unplayable (unless I was prepared to resort to putting a couple of kilos on top of the stylus). Over the next few months, I tried very, very carefully to iron the record flat (not totally daft—



I'd do it through several layers of tea towel and brown paper). It was almost getting there—the only unplayable tracks were the first on each side—when I made the fatal error of leaning just a bit too hard, which left an iron shaped mark on the record. Since irons have holes in the bottom to let the steam out, these act as heat concentrators, so a small section had the grooves melted. On the other hand, it was now flat enough to play the remainder, and, with still nothing in UK record shops under "K", I was pretty much stuck. The thought of repeating the experiment the next time I was in the states did not really appeal, so that was that until I bought the CD version in 1988 (in Florida).

On the "Peter Weston Wouldn't Approve", I think I'm with Max on this one. James Bacon, for example, is a total lunatic, who should be encouraged at every turn. How else would YAFA have happened at Worldcon? Or the Beyond Cyberdrome at Eastercon? OK, SMS and Eira would have done their usual organised chaos, but James certainly added to the mix.

SMS
eira.sms@virgin.net

[46] After three days they found him in the pub garden, sitting among the chavs, listening to them and asking them questions. [47] Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Luke 2:46-47



"So that's two cod and five chips, then."

Then again: [48] When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been keeping your orange juice and crisps on the bench for you."

[49] "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house and I am Skippy the Kangaroo" [50] But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

Luke: 2:48-50

SMS (again)
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In view of Mr Cameron's inspired private aeroplane trip to Svalbard to have his pic taken with some huskies, I realised that I had a chance at a political future.

So, I'm appealing for your vote on ... that date, whenever it is. No need for awkward questions, a picture

paints a thousand words and, heck, we're all busy people.

You know it makes sense.

PS: The pic is from Edwin Jones Department Store: December '61.

I've just realised that you might think I'd *actually* been to the North Pole.

And, yes, that's me. As was.

KRin
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I love my iPod. I have converted to the dark side. My iPod and my interesting assortment of music and podcasts are all that keeps my thin thread of sanity in tact while traveling on Melbourne's train system.

So, the iPod has been my saving grace. I keep that thin thread of sanity and don't

bite anyone. Often.

As to smoke alarms with a mind of their own. I once whacked the one off the roof in the dining room as it wouldn't stop screaming. I then whacked it several times while it lay on the floor just because I could and it was fun. Then I took the battery out. Mind you, I had hit it so hard it never worked again. As to what you do with old smoke alarms—you aren't supposed to put them in the garbage. Do you just hang onto them until someone lets you know where to put them?

Robert Lichtman
robertlichtman@yahoo.com

It was a source of a particularly perverse form of personal amusement to read of your son Jonathan coming down with head lice. Surely he picked them up at school, such places being a hotbed of disease and parasite transmission. When I lived on The Farm in Tennessee during the '70s, it was also a venue in which head lice were passed around freely. We lived in communal houses, closely packed together, and once they invaded a household they tended to migrate freely from head to head. It didn't help, either, that we all had long hippie-style hair. Not only did we have to deal with lots of probing with those fine-tooth lice combs used for such purposes, but *all* bedding had to be washed frequently in hot water until the infestation was gone. We went through gallons of Kwell, a non-prescription lice shampoo. Sound familiar? (I'm itching as I write this, psychosomatically of course.) (Did any of you get them, too?)

I know nothing about the rock group Kansas that Alison describes in her article,

but the pictures by Sue Mason on page 8 of Kansas fans in 1979 and 2005 could easily be transposed to fit just about *any* rock band that's persisted that long.

I laughed out loud at Steve Stiles's scientific experiments in flushing books down the toilet in order to check out the claims that prison guards were doing that to Korans at Guantanamo (or wherever it was). But I don't envy him the clean-up after the flooding he caused.

Andy Sawyer
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I read in my copy of *Plokta* that "We're hoping to see all of you at the Worldcon in Glasgow." Oh my god, they're organising *another*? Oh wait, the postmark on the envelope is 10th May. Oh dear . . .

Oh, at least it's 10th may 06. Still no chance of a belated few paragraphs on What I did at My Worldcon, then? No, I thought not.

Lloyd Penney
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Love the Dalek iPod ad. I am waiting for the iBorg, where resistance would be futile. The iBorg would also have lots of superfluous technology, and would be wearing it, too.

Giulia, I had no idea that anyone could ever graduate from Ikea. Resistance is truly futile here, too. Now, not only do we live just north of one, but now Yvonne works right beside another. The 99-cent breakfasts are the lure in, and as soon as we're in, the Marketplace grabs us, and doesn't let go until we're by the hot dog and ice cream stands at the cash registers, meant to clean out any small change you might have left in your wallets.



SMS (once more)
 eira.sms@virgin.net

Reliable info about the reclassification of the planets has been hard to obtain in the small village of Kiskossa, in S/W Hungary, so I've been a little slow in being able to evince a reliable reaction.

Still: Now I know the Truth.

So

Farewell then, planet Pluto.

'The boundary of the Solar system'

That was your catchphrase.

Keiths mum thought you were funnier than Mickey.

But now you're a dwarf, you get to hang out with Xena.

You lucky dog, you.

E J Thribb. Aged 14½

Martin Morse Wooster
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 Maryland 20907
 USA

Many thanks for *Plokta* 32 and 33 1/3. Now that you've made your LP joke, will *Plokta* 78 be a one-page issue that you have to read very fast?

But seriously, if young fen have a hard time understanding LP records, they'd have an even harder time understanding 78s. These were the first records I ever heard. My parents had somehow acquired a large set of them. What was great about 78s was that they were the crabs of music. Crabs require a large amount of effort to obtain a small amount of meat. (And of course all that exercise requires plenty of beer to

replenish vital nutrients lost during crab-cracking.). 78s were heavy ponderous objects that only delivered four minutes worth of music at a time. 78s could be stacked, but even if you put four of them on a turntable you only got sixteen minutes of music. To play a 45-minute symphony required playing a four-disc stack twice. So you really enjoyed that symphony. You had to, given all the work you put in.

And how about a nice word for the 45? When I was 7, I learned that 45s were ideal devices for throwing against a wall. One afternoon, my friend Sam and I had somehow acquired a stack of 45s and practiced throwing them against the wall in Sam's back yard.

Ben Yalow's letter prompts me to ask a question about the London Tube. Is it true there are tea stations in the Tube where drivers can stop and get their Thermoses of tea refilled? There's nothing like that in the Washington Metro system. In fact, there's only one place in the Washington subways that I know of where drivers can get off and transfer. But I like the idea that in London there are professional tea boilers whose job it is to keep drivers' teapots filled.

Eric Lindsay
 fijagh2006@ericlindsay.com

A wonderful Dr Who on the cover, complete with ? marks. I did like the 3D Apples on the Dalek, and the Plokta Box. Not at all sure about the symbolism of the gas mask, but perhaps it relates to some Dr Who show I have never seen. [Are you my mummy?—Ed] On the other hand, everyone knows about the Daleks. They are why we invented stairways.

iPod Resistance is useless. I managed to persuade myself that even I needed an iPod Nano. Not content with that, I am now building myself an amplifier to plug it into. One channel just soldered up today.

Cardinal Cox

Gardening? Don't get me started. About once a fortnight I go out and chop down random bits of twigs and branches and fill up the garden waste bin. Then once a fortnight I ring up the Council and ask why they haven't emptied the garden waste bin again. Before you know it, the assortment of Triffids, Audrey's and Krynoids have grown again. So far this year I've cut my way down to the garden gate and have now nailed it shut to stop the glue-sniffers from using that bit of an evening.

Sky Captain, my complaint was about how they kept talking about World War One. As far as I know, it was called The Great War until WW2 underway. Unless in their universe there was another World War in the early-thirties... started from Japan invading Manchuria....

We Also Heard From: Susan Francis ("I have watched somebody playing Katamari Damacy, and I didn't think it could get any weirder"), Ben Yalow ("I'm particularly impressed by Giulia's gardening article"), Sheryl Birkhead ("My experiences with a footspa have not been promising"), Rodney Leighton ("I was highly amused by Sue's depiction of Spooky's arrival in heaven. But I didn't understand why there was a cat door.") and Henry L Welch ("I wonder why someone hasn't simply taken a large hammer to the superfluous smoke detector?")



Thanks to Cardinal Cox who gave us this flier at <plokta.con> TT.
 We thought about taking our Hugo along.

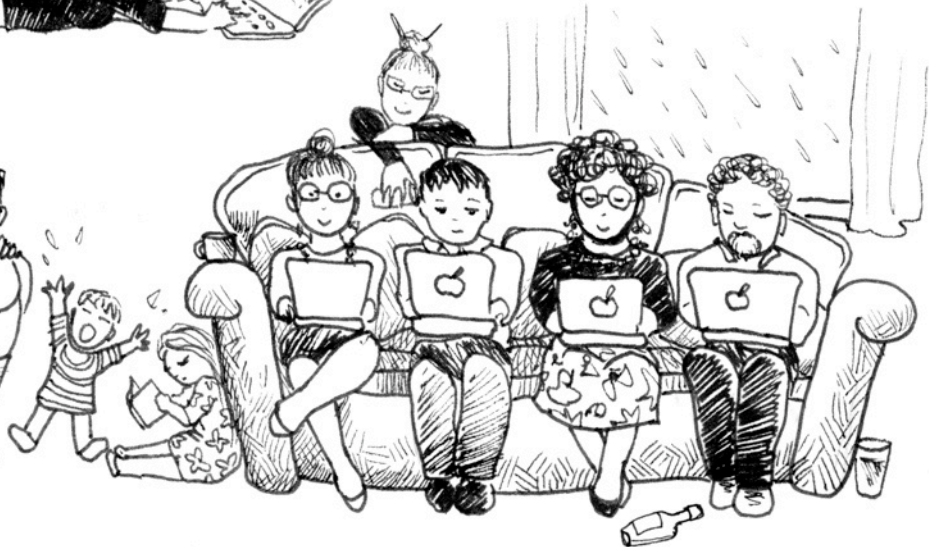
Steve & Giulia
Have the Plokka Summer Residence
in the leafy suburbs...



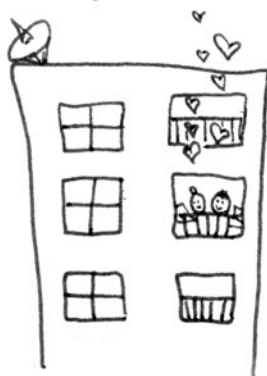
Where the Cabal
gather in fine weather
to gambol in the sun....



Alison &
Steven
Have the Plokka Winter
Residence where the
Cabal huddle together
for warmth in the
winter



Flick 'n Mike
Have the Bijou Love Nest in
the trendy part of town



Sometimes we even talk to
each other... but usually we e-mail
or im...

Sue lives in t' frozen North in
the salt mines with a mad cat.

