

PLOKTA
Reader
Offer

TranSylvanian Families



You'll need some of our great value families, such as the Huckleberry Werewolves, the Merryweather Zombies, and the Nibblers Villagers. Each figure sold separately. Contains small parts.



Meet TranSylvania's oldest residents, Vlad and Mina Honeypot! Nobody's quite sure how long they've been here, but they'll give you a warm welcome!



Giles Buttermilk is the resident vampire hunter. He's committed to battling evil with his garlic sidekick!



Remember that every TranSylvanian Family has lots of adorable babies and children to collect!



Your TranSylvanians will need somewhere to stay, and where better than "Cobnut Castle?" Comes complete with three creepy retainers, bats in the belfry, and realistic grass!



Add furniture to your castle for extra play value - like this enchanting bedroom set or our magical non-reflecting mirror (all sold separately)



New for 2009!
Optional Lighting pack for
Cobnut Castle for super
night-time play!

Alison Scott 2009

Colophon

This is issue 39¼ of *Plokta*, edited by Steve Davies, Alison Scott and Mike Scott. It is available for letter of comment (one copy to Mike'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 an amusing and innovative convention programme.

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

Photos by Microsoft (2), Steve Davies (5), SMS (6).

Art by Sue Mason (7, 9).

Cover: *TranSylvanian Families* by Alison Scott (with ideas from Marianne Cain). Thanks to the following Flickr users: magw21 (Sylvanian families), nh567 (mansion), JhudsonFCA (mansion at night), wonderlane (mirror), jenecklund (cross), hmmlargeart(fluffy garlic), sebastien.b (bottle).

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Spring is here! And we have more information about <plokta.con>. Still plenty of time to buy a membership and join us for three days of frolics in Sunningdale.

3. <plokta.con> Read Me!

This is not the at-con Read Me, but it has useful information that you will need before the con. Read it, and learn it by heart—there will be a test later.

4. Paul Cornell

By **James Bacon**

James's appreciation of Paul Cornell, our Guest of Honour for Sunday. We've added a bibliography, drawn (as ever) mostly from Wikipedia and IMDB.

6. A Dr Who Fan Writes

By **SMS**

A scintillating tale of superfluous technology, 1970s-style.

8. The Magic Pill

By **Alison Scott**

Who is this woman, and what has she done with Alison? Sponsor her next run in order to find out—<http://www.justgiving.com/alisonscott5k>.

10. Lokta Plokta

Our new publishing schedule seems to have surprised many of you, who were (justifiably) not expecting another issue until Christmas, so we don't have many locs this time. You'll all have to Try Harder.

I Can See My House From Here



Mike was showing Steve the 45-degree aerial photos on Microsoft Live Maps, and we had a look at Steve and Giulia's house. Hang on, aren't those all the Cabal's cars parked outside? And as well as the big umbrella over the hot-tub, and the gazebo, we can see Alison's big tent and Marianne's little tent in the garden. Looks like Microsoft's spy cameras caught us *in Plokta delicto*.

Editorial

The sun is shining, the birds are singing, and we have persuaded Dr Plokta to break his iron rule that we can't have margaritas until the clocks go forward. Fortunately, they've gone forward in America, so we can stave off scurvy for another season. Spring must be here. And that means it's less than two months until <plokta.con>.

We therefore went on a field trip yesterday to Sunningdale Park. It was gloriously sunny. ~~Bats~~ Bunny rabbits frolicked in the woodlands, ~~bunny rabbits~~ bats flew around the treetops, and we were all astonished to see that there were several square metres of open water with

no coots. Mind you, that was the swimming pool. Bemused grey-haired civil servants were wandering around trying to remember how it looked in their day (OK, that was only Alison).

Our last *Plokta* weekend was enlivened when Marianne was whisked away and admitted to hospital with acute tonsillitis, but she's better now. We're all praying that Jonathan will lose his voice next.

Marianne has taken up competitive spelling, much to everyone's delight. The computer keeps saying a word like 'eschew', 'cuckold' or 'floccinaucinihilipilification', and the whole cabal spends ten minutes arguing about how we

pronounce it. We don't think that competitive spelling contests are quite English.

In a change to our published schedule, the relative heights of the Cabal have changed. Marianne is now taller than Giulia or Alison, and is rapidly gaining on Sue.

Alison and Steven breathed a sigh of relief when they discovered that they'd be sleeping indoors at Steve and Giulia's for once, instead of being relegated to a tent in the garden. That was before they discovered that Shadow is now Reduced-Continence Cat, and the spare bedroom doubles as an occasional cat toilet!

<plokta.con> Read Me!

This is the last update before the convention, so feel free to berate us if we've omitted anything essential.

Let us know if you would like a dealers' room table or a con table; there's no charge, and we have plenty of space.

Saturday night is our "school stories" theme night (this is moved from Sunday night), so bring along your school uniform if you want to get into the spirit of the evening. We have 65 acres of outdoor space, so also bring your frisbees, your radio-controlled aircraft, and your running kit for Alison's Sunday morning fun-run (entirely at your own risk).

If anyone has any experience of restaurants in Sunningdale, Sunninghill, Ascot or Virginia Water, please let us

have your reviews now for the at-con restaurant guide.

They're having some website problems, and online booking may not work. If you can't book a room online, it doesn't mean we've run out; try phoning instead. If it's working, you can book your hotel room online at www.deverevenues.co.uk quoting code NCPLOB. Otherwise, call 01344 634395 and quote "Plokta". Twin or double rooms are £80 per night, single rooms are £60 per night, and parents can book an adjoining room for one or two children for £40 per night (on the phone only). These rates are valid for the Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday nights. You'll need a debit (phone only) or credit card to secure your reservation. If you want a disabled-accessible room, please let them know when you book.

To repeat the basic information, the convention will be held at Sunningdale Park in Berkshire from Saturday 23 May 2009 to Monday 25 May 2009, which is a bank holiday Monday. We plan to start programming at around 11am on the Saturday, and finish at around 6pm on the Monday, and we intend to be sitting in the bar on Friday night.

Attending membership is £30 payable either by cheque (payable to Plokta) posted to Mike Scott, 13 Collette Court,

Eleanor Close, London, SE16 6PW or by PayPal to mike@plokta.com. Free for under 12s, £15 for 12-17.

Getting There

Start with Sunningdale Park's own directions at <http://www.deverevenues.co.uk/find-venue/sunningdale-park/directions.html>.

By Train

Sunningdale is on the South-West Trains line from London Waterloo to Reading, and has two trains an hour in each direction. The station is about a mile from Sunningdale Park—you can walk or take a taxi. If you arrive between 4pm and 6pm on Friday, you may be able to get a free shuttle bus, but unfortunately it doesn't run at weekends or on Bank Holidays. Sunningdale Taxis are on 01344 970006.

By Car

The postcode is SL5 0QE. Note that most satellite navigation devices won't quite take you to the correct place. You want Sunningdale Park Main Reception, which is at 51.402252N, 0.642979W.

By Air

Heathrow is about 10 miles away, but there's no convenient public transport. We recommend a taxi, for about £35—Sunningdale Taxis' number is above.

New Members

Added up to 23 March:

Tom Becker
Alan Bellingham
Sandra Bond
Bridget Bradshaw
John Dallman
Dave Langford
Spike Parsons
Colette Reap
Yvonne Rowse
Ian Sorensen

Paul Cornell

By James Bacon

Choosing a guest is never an easy task for a conrunner, as there are so many things one must weigh up: Are they deserving of the honour? Will they be a popular choice? Will they bring members to the convention? In reality though there are two secret things that are really important and very personal: will they be good participants, and do they fit with the convention? If the answers to any of those questions is “no”, it can lead to self doubt and, of course, when something doesn't feel right it usually isn't.

Luckily, in Paul Cornell, there is a man who really does much more than tick the boxes. He is a conrunner's dream. He is multi-faceted, more so than any other current professional in the SF scene. Genre TV, comics, good literary science fiction and tie-ins all seem to be within his remit. His ability to write, and to write great stories, is inherent and he has a diversity that has seen him

go from the BBC's *Casualty* to writing for the classic *2000AD*.

He moved into the realm of professional writing, luckily in a genre he enjoyed.

He is also well known for his work on *Dr Who*. He was, and still is, a fan of the legendary BBC property that has spanned so many decades and media. Yet despite the impression that fans may have of writers who write new fiction for an established franchise, he is very original. He has a knack of getting good stories out of known characters, and also creating unique situations and characters in established environments. His current run of Marvel Comics' *Captain Britain* is an example of this new angle and brilliant originality applied to an existing character.

His work is not just prolific and popular, it's also intrinsically very good, a fact that is both unusual and important. Bolting “critically acclaimed” onto something that is already well loved is not a common occurrence. He is easy to read, yet he has some complex and stunning ideas in his work.

Cornell, like many other great professionals in the genre, is a fans' pro. He is not aloof, having come out of fandom and retained his links to it. He is really very pleasant and knowledgeable, excellent company around a table and he seems very relaxed and quietly confident. He shares the excitement that fans can have for other professionals, in a very appropriate yet sympathetic way.

On stage, I have seen him really come into his own on panels. He is no stage hog, instead being thoughtful, deliberate and open to discussion. He eases panels along and can hold an audience, but equally, when he is given centre stage, he is as entertaining in real life as he is on the page, and when he gets the mic his wicked sense of humour and the ability to entertain come to the fore.

There is no doubt that Paul Cornell will be a great guest of honour at <plokta.con>. As well as being entertaining at the con, it will hopefully and motivate people to find and read his works, something that will be rewarding in itself. He is perhaps one of the most perfect guests any convention could currently have. He is one of us, yet we don't own him, he fits in, yet he passes through many doors, he crosses genres and media with ease, and is a thoroughly decent bloke.

Bibliography

We've collated the following mainly from Wikipedia and IMDB.

Non-fiction

- *Avengers Dossier: The Definitive Unauthorised Guide* with Martin Day and Keith Topping
- *Licence Denied: Rumbblings from the Doctor Who Underground* (editor)
- *X-treme Possibilities: A Paranoid Rummage Through The X-files* with Day and Topping
- *The DIScontinuity Guide* with Day and Topping
- *The Guinness Book of Classic British TV* with Day and Topping
- *The New Trek Programme Guide* with Day and Topping

Novels

Virgin New Adventures

- *Doctor Who: Timenyrm: Revelation*
- *Doctor Who: Love and War*
- *Doctor Who: No Future*
- *Doctor Who: Human Nature*
- *Doctor Who: Happy Endings*

Virgin Missing Adventures

- *Doctor Who: Goth Opera*

Eighth Doctor Adventures

- *Doctor Who: The Shadows of Avalon*

Other Doctor Who novels

- *Doctor Who: Scream of the Shalka*
- *Bernice Summerfield: Oh No It Isn't!*

Hypochondriac's Corner

Impressed by the wide variety of diseases and syndromes available to the modern medical consumer, we've worked out what's *really* wrong with us:

- Pre-Breakfast Traumatic Dysfunction
- Nintendo DS Separation Anxiety
- Irritating Bitch Syndrome
- Plokta Drunken Stupor Syndrome
- Katastrofic Mispeling Sindroam
- Delayed Onset Breakfast Disorder
- Munchie-Fetching by Proxy
- Hugo Non-Nomination Denial Syndrome
- Bucolic Plague
- Twitter Misposting Intolerance
- Squid Deprivation Disorder
- Giant Blue Penis Envy
- Apple Acquisition Disorder

- *Bernice Summerfield: The Dead Men Diaries* (editor)
- *Bernice Summerfield: A Life of Surprises* (editor)
- *Bernice Summerfield: Life During Wartime* (editor)

Other novels

- *Something More*
- *British Summertime*
- *The Uninvited* (novelisation for Virgin of 1997 ITV science-fiction drama serial)

Audio plays

Doctor Who

- *The Shadow of the Scourge* (2000)
- *Seasons of Fear* with Caroline Symcox (2002)
- *Circular Time* with Mike Maddox (2007)

Professor Bernice Summerfield

- *Oh No It Isn't!* (audio adaptation by Jacqueline Rayner of novel) (1999)
- *Death and the Daleks* (2004)

Comics

Doctor Who

- "Stairway to Heaven" (with co-author John Freeman and pencils by Gerry Dolan and inks by Rex Ward, in *Doctor Who Magazine* #156, 1990)
- "Teenage Kicks" (illustrated text story, in *Doctor Who Magazine* #163, 1990)
- "The Chameleon Factor" (with pencils by Lee Sullivan and inks by Mark Farmer, in *Doctor Who Magazine* #174, 1991)
- "Emperor of the Daleks" (with co-author John Freeman and art by John Ridgway, in *Doctor Who Magazine* #197-202, 1993)
- "Time and Time Again" (with art by John Ridgway, in *Doctor Who Magazine* #207, 1993)
- "Metamorphosis" (with art by Lee Sullivan, in *Doctor Who Yearbook* 1993)
- "Blood Invocation" (with art by John Ridgway, in *Doctor Who Yearbook* 1995)

Judge Dredd

- *Pan-African Judges* (with Siku, in *Judge Dredd Magazine* #2.44-2.49, 1993-94)
- *Deathwatch*: "Faust & Falsehood" (with Adrian Salmon, in

- Judge Dredd Magazine* #3.8-3.13, 1995-96)
- *XTNCT* (with D'Israeli, in *Judge Dredd Magazine* #209-214, 2003-2004, trade paperback, *XTNCT: CM ND HV G F Y THINK YR HRD NGH!*, 48 pages, hardcover, December 2006)

Marvel

- *Wisdom* (with Trevor Hairsine and Manuel Garcia, 6-issue mini-series, Marvel Comics, 2006, tpb, 144 pages, August 2007)
- *Young Avengers Presents* #4 (with Mark Brooks, Marvel, April 2008, collected in *Young Avengers Presents*, 144 pages, October 2008)
- *Captain Britain and MI: 13* #1-ongoing (with Leonard Kirk, Marvel, May 2008-present)
- *Secret Invasion* (collects *Captain Britain and MI: 13* #1-4, 104 pages, Panini Comics, January 2009, Marvel Comics, March 2009)
- *Hell Comes To Birmingham* (collects *Captain Britain and MI: 13* #5-9, 120 pages, Marvel Comics, July 2009)
- *Fantastic Four: True Story* #1-4 (with Horacio Dominguez, Marvel, July-October 2008)
- *Dark Reign: Young Avengers* #1-5 (with Mark Brooks, Marvel Comics, May-September 2009)

TV Shows

Doctor Who

- *Scream of the Shalka* (animated webcast, 2003)
- *Father's Day* (2005)
- *The Family of Blood/Human Nature* (2007)

Other

- *Primeval* (Episode #2.6 (2008))
- *Robin Hood* (2 episodes, 2006)
- *Holly City* (1 episode, 2004)
- *Born and Bred* (1 episode, 2003)
- *Casualty* (5 episodes, 2001-2003)
- *Doctors* (1 episode, 2000)
- *Love in the 21st Century* (unknown episodes, 1999)
- *WaveLength* (1997)
- *Children's Ward* (unknown episodes, 1996-99)
- *Springhill* (unknown episodes, 1996)
- *Coronation Street* (1 episode, 1997)

Sunningdale Photos

Here are a few of Steve's photos from Sunningdale Park.



We know you lot, and no one is allowed to paint this blue



The conference centre



The extensive grounds



The lake pond



The pianos' graveyard. Don't ask us why they've got a pianos' graveyard.

A Dr Who Fan Writes

By SMS

I have a bit of a dilemma, which I'm sure many of you can relate to.

Around 1974 to 1980, I and some chums in the New Forest area used to record the soundtracks to *Dr Who* episodes.

<Pause>

In those days, as some older Fontmembers will recall, if ever you did see a repeat, it'd be the 'Anthology' edition of just one story that season in which all the interesting plot (And probably Ep3) was removed to leave the bare skeleton of the action which would be broadcast sometime in the Christmas Hols. Aside from a vague outline in the *Radio Times Special*, stories disappeared into a grey fog of "Wasn't there one where some creatures came out of...". Owning a video recorder was a little like owning a jetpack, and sound-only recordings (along with the occasional photo from the screen and some judicious sketching of the scenery, hardware etc) were the only surefire way of getting a record of these episodes before they headed (as far as we knew) down the BBC Memory Hole to the Erasure Room. Heck, it was a public duty! We were all Winston Smith!

Like any habit, it began innocently enough. Recording the Radio4 *Foundation* series, a half-serious recording of some theme music (along with other programmes), a snatch of particularly fruity dialogue (the Dalek account of their own history was an early one for me) and, gradually, initially shamefacedly, but with gathering self-assurance, recording a whole episode, just to see if it made sense... and discovering to your surprise, that *Dr Who* had music all the way through. So not quite wanting to erase it by the next week... Until, finally, you have an emergent electromagnetic archive of recent Who, akin to the Target books, but more Faithful and with better FX... and you want more.

So, you know what's coming...

I have a nice neat box which used to contain crockery, full of C90 (That's how many minutes on both sides of the tape) cassettes. Each contains 4 *Dr Who*

episodes. There's also the odd C60, which, yes, contains two DW episodes (As used for those pesky last two episodes of a 6 Episode story).

The problem with DW was that, at about 25 minutes, it wasted a lot of a C60 tape but was a few minutes short of a C90 (C120s either stretch or break, as any fule kno). Our solution (after a ghastly period of editing minutes out from the Master tape) was simple: Take a 'Victim' tape and splice an extra few minutes of tape from it to add on to each C90. Result: Any 4 episode story could be stored on a single cassette. These cassettes then begged to have a lovely design, with appropriate lettering, for each story.

I really don't appologise for this most Anorak-y of activities. When once, hardly anyone would have been interested in this stuff and you kept schtum about it to most Normal folk, in the C21st, the Holy Grail of '70's Fandom—actual recordings of the whole episodes—have a mass market and fannish Off-Telly recordings of the soundtracks of 'Missing' DW episodes are openly on sale even in 'Normal' shops.

These tapes are, of course, a tremendous part of my Mid-Teens and redolent with Nostalgia. My subconscious is still over-littered with quotes from these stories (Especially the unintentionally funny ones) and, when my mum moved away and my place in Journalist College fell through, I used the cassette designs to blag my way into Art College at the last moment (They worked. The Art College was worse than shyte and I spent a year there as they tried to chuck me out 'cos I didn't have a grant).

So, you know what comes next...

Thanks be to The Future, I no longer really need these things. The pics are nice and evocative, in a hamfisted teenage-sort of way but the content can be gained simply by playing the DVDs and closing my eyes (Until I can work out how to switch the screen off). There's nothing here of any real 'Archive' value as all the episodes still exist, safely in BBC custody

For the Benefit of our Younger Readers

This is a cassette box:



And this is a cassette tape:



(Aside from the odd one like *The Savages* which is, I presume, recorded from the same FanRecording as they used to make the BBC Audio CD from).

But they're taking up space. Not a great deal of space, no, but isn't that true of everything in our shrinking houses?

And, no, I've not listened to 'em for over a decade. Only yesterday, in looking for a Kate Bush tape for Eira to listen to in the car, did I come across the thing. They're like old teddies, but not nearly so cuddly. I plainly suffer from a congenital excess of Oxytocin.

Cassette tapes are little pieces of Wonder. Not for nothing does Jo talk to one at the beginning of Planet of the Daleks: they looked, felt, smelled and sounded (as you clicked 'em open) utterly of The Future and their sheer shinyness was never equalled by video. Each one looking like a component part of HAL's personality. Only now with DVD is

RIP

Dr Plokta, 1996-2009, died in a bizarre margarita-making accident.

recording tek really cool again. Like VHS, each cassette is a lovely little machine, somewhere between Vacouson and Warhole, with the near-to-nano machinery revolving in a variety of transparent or opaque cases. I'm sure folk who did pirate copies of live gigs felt much the same.

In addition, these things are made from plastic. Beautiful, pure, unnatural and future-smelling plastic. This stuff is the miracle that our species has wrought from the millenia of extinct Pre-Cambrian biota and made into something utterly alien, comprehensible only to our Noosphere. Like all plastics, as objects-in-space, these are works of wonder and worthy of respect. As landfill, they're ugly, inert and ultimately poisonous. Like much which is advertised as 'Recycling', plastic 'Recycling' is merely degradation, to a lower, less useful and less malleable

material for which the only purpose can be as sheer cheap bulk mass with neither beauty nor skill, destined, just as surely, to be a hazard to the biosphere. This is no way to treat the wonder material of our age. It's also a callous, ignorant, tasteless and flagrantly wasteful manner to treat the mortal remains of our earliest progenitors.

So, what the hell do I do with these things?

Thank you for listening.

I'm sure some of you will understand.

Best:

Sms

(Has been collecting plastics since he was a kid. Sadly, his historically fascinating collection of Late-'60-late '70's plastic was stolen in 1983 and probably ended up as landfill)



Things You Didn't Know about Sunningdale Park

1. The swimming pool retracts to reveal the UK's sole remaining nuclear deterrent.
2. Sunningdale is located on the migration route for the lesser upright piano. Although many have attempted to follow the migrating herds, none have ever succeeded in finding the elusive 'piano graveyard' reputed to lie somewhere in the heart of darkest Sunninghill. Their plaintive cry of 'plonk chopsticks plonk' can often be heard on a still evening.
3. Killer bunnies. Nuff said.
4. Alison has a bottomless fund of anecdotes about the old days of Sunningdale when it tended to emphasise the cheap beer and bad furniture aspects of government rather than its current incarnation as the PPP interpretation of a luxury hotel, although the table football remains unchanged from its previous incarnation.
5. Steven has a bottomless fund of anecdotes about the accounting treatment of Sunningdale Park, which Flick and Naomi find highly entertaining.
6. All the best bits of the site are reserved for wedding parties, so Plokta will be asking for volunteer couples to provide us with access to Northcote House....
7. Evelyn Sharp, Nelson Mandela and Lord Fulton walk into a bar....
8. *The Prisoner* was actually filmed at Sunningdale Park, with a couple of fake fake buildings to make it look like Portmeirion.
9. There is no truth to the rumour that Vince Docherty is using his petrochemical fortune to purchase Sunningdale Park and turn it into the National School of Conrunning.
10. The Berkshire edition of Cluedo is set at Sunningdale Park. Alison did it. With the Gestetner crank. In the bar.
11. At the bottom of the lake duck pond, dead Cthulhu lies dreaming.

The Magic Pill

By Alison Scott

Imagine a magic pill. The scientists have invented it. It really is magic. It makes you live longer, it improves a wide variety of health conditions, and it makes you feel happier. You take it three times a week; after you take it, you have to lie down for half an hour and then have a shower. It does not, to be fair, feel very good while you're lying down, but as soon as the half hour's up, it feels fantastic. Of course, there are side effects. You start to look better, you have more energy, and you tend to become a little smug. OK, seriously smug. But still, you'd take the pill, wouldn't you? I would.

Now imagine that, instead of lying down, you spent the half hour running. Not even running, more a sort of gentle jog interspersed with longish spells of walking. Ah. Not so magic anymore, is it?

A couple of years ago, when I was writing down 101 things to do in 1001 days, I wrote 'run a mile'. It seemed like a sensible sort of goal. And then I didn't think any more about it. I continued to not think about it until a note came round at work inviting us to take part in a Winter Fun Run. 1.1 miles round St James' Park, all abilities. I looked at it, remembered my alleged goal, checked that it was ok to walk, and signed up.

The only catch was, of course, that I couldn't run 1.1 miles. I couldn't run at all. And the race was two weeks away. So the next day I put on my shabby old trainers, and when I dropped Jonathan off at school I kept going. I walked a bit, and jogged a bit, and carried on for about a mile and a half. It did not feel very nice.

But the really strange thing is that two days later I did it again. This time, I focused on the time in the morning between when the alarm goes off and when I get up; normally some 45 minutes. When I got back, Marianne was getting ready for school. She looked at me, puffing and wheezing a bit. She went a little pale. "Did you go running?" I explained that I did. She

went a little paler. "Did you see... anybody we know?" "Oh, yes," I explained, "I saw Zara's mum." She went white.

And then a third time. And after my third run, I thought I should mix in some cross-training. My previous bike was stolen before Christmas; my new one is full of modern technology, and light as a feather. It allows me to explore even more of the surrounding area; riverside, reservoir, and miles upon miles of industrial parks. At work, I walked around the fun run route, in my work clothes and long spotty coat. I wasn't very fast, but I was faster than three girls who were power walking. How could I tell they were power walking? They were carrying water

bottles and wearing tracksuits and leggings.

One morning, I got up, pulled on my neatly stacked running things, grabbed the GPS and iPod, and opened the front door. And it was raining. I hadn't really thought about rain. Horrid stuff. But then I thought about the rapidly approaching fun run and set off anyway. And quickly discovered that running already feels so bad that rain doesn't really make it any worse.

It didn't rain on the day of the fun run. I had targets! My targets were to (a) finish, and (b) jog at least a little. I also had stretch goals; to (c) Not Be Dead Flat Last and (d) break 20 minutes (for 1.1 miles, remember). I hit all my targets, and I was faster than both the

Something Fishy

We discover from Google's automated translation from Polish that "Plotka" is the plural of the name of a fish of the Cyprinid family.

Or in other words: Waah, we're carp!

Plokta Venture Capital: Interim Report

Dr Plokta's loyal minion Jordin Kare has been all over the press recently with reports of his mosquito-zapping laser, which works by detecting the frequency of the mosquito's wings, and so (hopefully) avoids incinerating other insects, birds, or Boeing 747s. Actually, Flick would rather have one set to Wasp.

Your Powers Are Weak, Old Man...

Shadow is a Cat of Increasing Decrepitude. As reported elsewhere, he finds the stairs a bit too much when needing to answer his frequent calls of nature. His own solution to this conundrum necessitated the removal of the carpet and underlay in my study. We now have a litter tray in the bathroom.

The Catlets, our two new(ish, we've had them just over two years) little grey cat sisters, are relaxed around Shadow these days. They still run away from him, but Just Far Enough. Then they sit watching him, daring him to do his worst. They've worked out that he doesn't do stairs so well any more so Just Far Enough is usually a few steps down. Their other bolt hole has always been under our rather low bed, because Shadow doesn't do Bending Down very well either. It's the arthritis, you know.

He's eleventy-tumpteem in people years. He has kidney pills, special food, glucosamine and quarterly blood tests. He has to be brushed and have his ears cleaned out. His whiskers are now white and droop like a Fu Manchu moustache. He limps and his joints click, rather like a lot of us these days.

It's a good job we're fond of him.

—Giulia de Cesare

woman who walked all way round and the woman who put her back out the previous weekend.

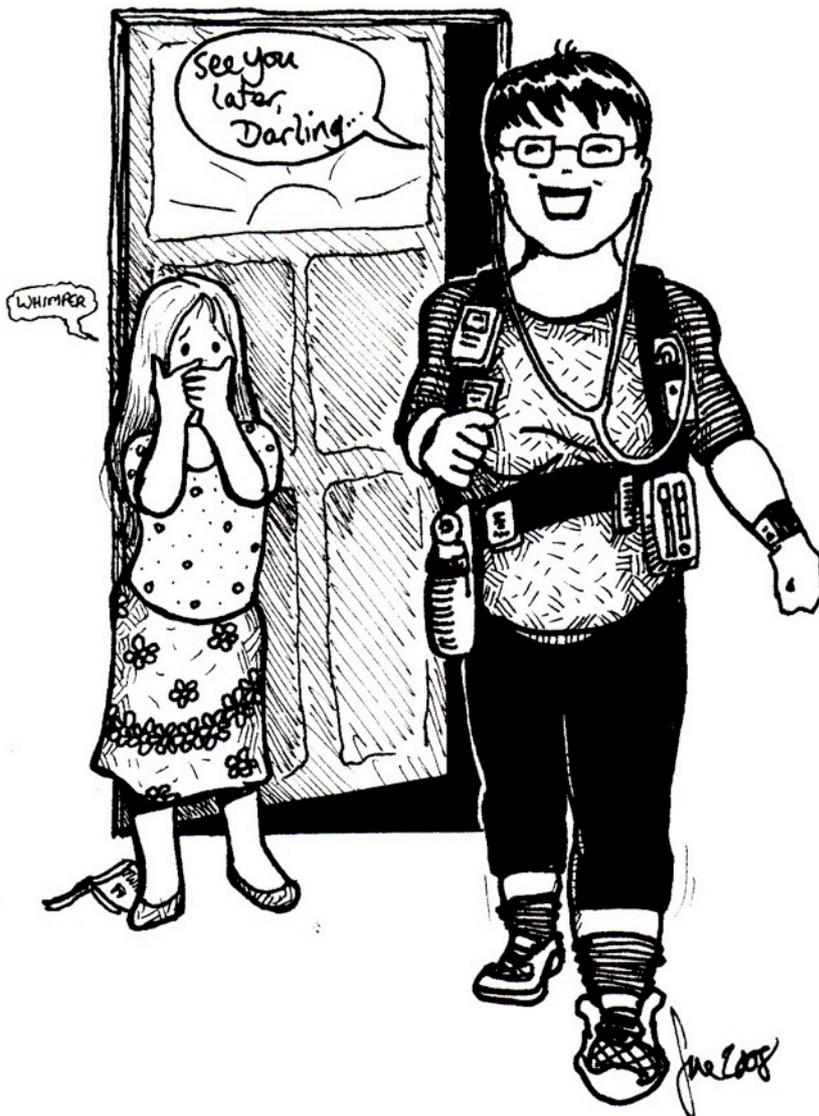
I rewarded myself by buying running shoes, and carrying on. According to the internet, I should aim for consistency rather than speed or distance. I can walk and jog for a bit longer before knacking myself, but I don't seem to be getting any faster or managing to increase the proportion of my run that I spend jogging rather than walking. I've learned the layout of lots of the local streets. I've taken to packing my running shoes whenever I head off to Furrin Parts. It turns out that running is marginally less

unpleasant if you're doing it somewhere new.

I'm doing a 5k too, the Hyde Park jog, just after Easter. So you might see me training at Eastercon. Might, I said. And you can sponsor me too! At <http://www.justgiving.com/alisonscott5k>

The other day I mistimed my run, and arrived back just as Marianne's friends came to pick her up. She was appalled. She asked me to ensure that, in future, I hide around the corner if any of her friends are anywhere near the house. Obviously, I refused.

Bwahahahaha...



Marianne wishes it to be known that in this picture she is not drawn to scale

How to Run More Geekily

Obviously, you look for ways to make running more fun. Running's a fine way to spend the time, apart from being somewhat painful and incredibly boring.

You'll want a good pair of shoes, and how better to choose them than to go to a shop that analyses your gait before taking your money? I went to the deliciously woo-woo Run and Become in Palmer St, London, who dispense philosophy with your kit. I learnt that I have a neutral gait, and I now have lovely cushiony soft New Balance trainers.

Running is much less boring if you have music to listen to. I use a shiny red iPod nano engraved with a loving message from my children. For added geek value, I used a program called Tangerine to analyse my music collection and select a playlist of music with a fast, intense beat. Imagine my joy when, halfway round my next run, it burst into Agadoo, a song I didn't realise I owned.

With an iPod nano or iPod touch, you can use the Nike+ iPod kit, which is a pedometer

I like to know where I've run, so I borrowed Steven's Garmin Edge 305 bike GPS. That's a very expensive solution, but for nothing you can track your routes at <http://www.gmap-pedometer.com> and give them persistent web addresses.

Heart rate monitors are handy when running, so that you can prove to yourself that you were really working quite hard, even though your average speed is slower than walkit.com's brisk walking place. The Edge comes with a heart rate monitor, but you can buy the same monitor with a run-recording watch for far less.

I like to store and analyse my runs — I use the very Maclike rubiTrack, but there are lots of programs that do this.

— Alison Scott

Lokta Plokta

Kari ambariel (at) ntlworld.com

Joseph Nicholas might like to know that Mark Lester's films *The Three* and *The Four Musketeers* were in fact originally made as one film, but subsequently released as two due to length constraints. The delay between their appearance was caused by contractual problems.

Phil and I are glad that Joseph Major found *The Four Musketeers: the True Story of d'Artagnan, Porthos, Aramis and Athos* useful and interesting. We found writing it interesting, too!

Anders Holmström anders.holmstrom (at) gmail.com

Yes, I have spent a good deal of time in the UK but it still took me a minute to decode the cover. Nice one. There is a Swedish version where all it says is Chainstores logo in blue and what it is, spaghetti, tomato sauce, fishfingers, also in blue on a plain white label. It's what they call their blueandwhite line of products. At first it, the fanzine that is, looked a bit thin and not that nutritious. I was delighted to find it not only both tasty and filling but also quite wellrounded with most of the food/fanzine groups present.

Steve Jeffery srjeffery (at) aol.com

That's a spookily accurate cover this this ish. Almost too accurate, since when I got home and found it sitting on my chair (Vikki had opened the envelope and left it there for me) my first reaction was to ignore it as another promotional junk flyer and open the other envelope, which contained

Nic Farey's This Here, and start reading that. It wasn't till Vikki asked if I wasn't going to look at my other fanzine that I gave it a another look and noticed the *Plokta*. Though that not a proper barcode, I suspect. (You need a copy of NiceLabel, which can generate all manner of these. I hadn't realised just how many different types of barcodes there are.) In fact it looks like some sort of squished font or anamorphic projection, but I can't make it out.

Pamela Boal pamelaboal (at) westfieldway.fsnet.co.uk

Thanks for a cover to cover wide smile. I suspect that if I could read it held at the right angle the bar code on the front cover is composed of words. Please tell me if I am correct and what the words are.

Yvonne Rousseau rousseau (at) senet.co.au

When *Plokta* thirty-nine-and-a-half arrived in Adelaide today (thank you!), I particularly enjoyed Mike Abbott's thoughts on Diana Wynne Jones. Among the many delights of her work, I treasure a wonderfully absurd moment in *The Ogre Downstairs* (1974) after Douglas McIntyre accidentally sows dragon's teeth in a British shopping centre's parking lot. Like his brother and his step-siblings, Donald has had a modern Classics-free education. The Latin label, 'Dens Drac', means nothing to these children, and they have never heard of the original sower of dragon's teeth: Cadmus, brother of Europa.

Perhaps it is significant that Cadmus is sometimes credited with introducing the alphabet to ancient Greece. Diana Wynne Jones uses the Greek alphabet to record the remarks of the armed men (a ferocious motorcycle gang) who spring up from Douglas's sowing. However, when the Greek is transliterated into English letters, the gang's utterances tend to sound like, "These kids tried to thump me, fellows!" and "Well, let's take both of them apart a bit" and "Full o' spirit, aren't they?"

Thus, it's wonderfully absurd that when Johnny asks his stepbrother Douglas what language the gang is speaking, Douglas is as mystified as he is, and can only guess: "It might be Greek". The children are obliged to judge the meaning by the tone ("Neither of these suggestions sounded pleasant"). In fact, the children need only to listen in order to understand—whereas readers must take some trouble to decipher what's being said, and thus (as their reward) to appreciate how outrageously their legs are being pulled.

Milt Stevens miltstevens (at) earthlink.net

Plokta 39½ is dedicated to the credit crunch and other economic woes. Even as I write, I'm doing my bit to help the global economy. I'm having my driveway replaced. It became apparent that the driveway needed replacement when a gopher burrowed up in the middle of it. Either I was dealing with a gopher on steroids or the driveway was entirely eroded. I had known for some time that the gophers had been working on

rodent rapid transit in the back yard. I had been tolerating the situation, because I didn't go out in the back yard that often, and it's always easier to keep your wallet in your pocket. Times had changed, and I had to take out a contract on the gophers.

Even if we all replaced our driveways, it isn't likely to be a permanent solution to the global economic problems. What can we do about the problem? I thought of the computer adage that a feature is a glitch you can't get rid of. That might be our solution. We convince people that they like having a bad economy. Credit crunch sounds bad, but crunchy credit sounds much better. Crunchy candy bars and crunchy chicken are both popular. Why should crunchy credit be any different? If they gave you more credit, you'd probably do something stupid with it anyway. It's all for your own good.

WAHF:

Bill Burns ("I like the anamorphic barcode"), **Henry "Knarley" Welch** ("Never having been the house-spouse I cannot comment on the various suggestions for tough economic times"), **Alasdair Hepburn** ("From the recycling-old-locs dept"), **Lloyd Penney** ("Is treacle a sugar product or a petroleum product?"), **Mary Kay Kare** ("I should be happy to introduce [Flick] to my gins of choice") & **Joseph T Major** ("Alison expects to inherit an ancient tin of black treacle from her mother." Is this anything like inheriting the strain of yeast?)