

Search

Applications edit



Control an Orbital Mind Control Laser

Control which city?

New York

London

Paris

Munich

What Action?

Vote Boris!

Stand on the Left

Swim in Fountain

Giant Kitten Attacks Post Office Tower

Cities I've Invaded

I've invaded 147 cities in 43 countries



Information

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Personal Info

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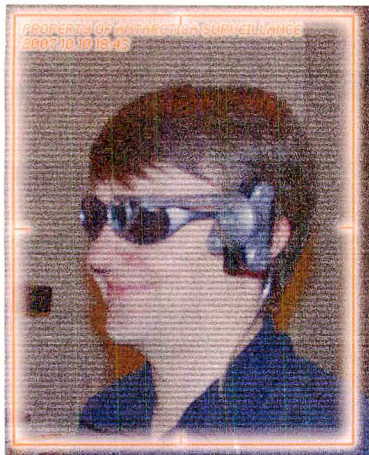
Website: http://www.ploкта.com

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Saxon Lasers: Many styles available



"Who'd have sonic?"



Doctor Plokta

is priming the orbital mind control lasers. updated 30 seconds ago...

Networks: Antarctica, Evil Geniuses for a Better Tomorrow, THRUISH, Minions of Doctor Plokta, Sex: Male, Relationship Status: It's Complicated, Birthday: Ploktober 4, Hometown: Fortress of Solitude, Antarctica, Religion: Bow Down and Worship Me, Worms

News Feed

Displaying 9 stories. See All

Father Christmas is attending the Polar Regions Residents Association AGM: 7 attendees so far

Ming the Merciless is dispatching War Rocket Ajax to collect Flash Gordon's body

Darth Vader has converted to the light side of The Force.

Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have changed their relationship status to "It's Complicated"

Peter Weston has joined the group "Unlike 99.99999% of Facebook, I Was Born in the 19th Century"

Niccolò Machiavelli has no intention of telling you who he's befriended.

Updated: 37 of your friends have joined the group Match it for Pratchett

Emperor Palpatine and Darth Vader are no longer friends.

Gordon Brown has joined the group Minions of Dr Plokta

Requests

Displaying 4 of 132 requests. See All

The Rt. Hon Ruth Kelly sent a request using L'il Brown Patch: Here's an 8 lane motorway for your brown patch. Won't you please send me a concrete monstrosity back? Destroy the Environment!

Robby sent a request using Vikings vs. Robots: Please join the Giant Robots and help win the global battle against the Vikings! Beat up Beowulf!

Dick Cheney sent a request using Swan Upping: Hello fellow bird lover! Here's a dead swan for your collection of taxidermological marvels. Shoot a Bird for Jesus

The Plokta Cabal sent a request using Whose Rocket is Shiniest? We admire your personal global strike capability. Let's rate our nukes on firepower, chrome and retro style! Compare Rockets Now

Education and Work

Education Info: College: Ankh-Morpork Assassins' Guild school ('82), Jordan College, Oxford ('83), High School: St. Bartleby's School for Young Gentlemen ('74) (Expelled), Hogwarts Academy ('75) (Ex-spelled), Durmstrang Institute of Sorcery ('75), Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters ('77)(Xpelled), Pre-school: Ayn Rand School for Tots ('72)

Gifts Received

displaying 3 gifts Give a Gift | See All



from: George



from: Palpatine



from: Wernher

- View photos of Dr Plokta (6), View Dr Plokta's weapons profile, Design Your Own Power, Send Dr Plokta a Gift, Are you Compatible with Dr P?, Poke Him! (not recommended)

Friends

73 friends see all



Ernst Blofeld is plotting to take over the world updated ten minutes ago



The Brain is plotting to take over the world updated yesterday evening



Ozymandias is plotting to take over the world updated two days ago



The One Ring is plotting to take over the world updated last week

Groups

41 groups see all

Unlike 99.9999% of Facebook users, I have my own GPS • People who always have to spell their names for other people • Friends of Russia Dock Woodland • When I was Your Age, Pluto was a Planet • Coalition to Get Antarctica a Flag • People who play Puzzle Pirates when they should be finishing the Plokta cover are Really Annoying • On 15 May 2008, Everybody Has to Go Out and Panic Buy CARROTS • xkcd • 09-F9-11-02-9D-74-E3-5B-D8-41-56-C5-63-56-88-CO • 'LASER' is not spelt with a Z you morons • I use my massive off-grid generators to see in the dark • People who can travel down telephone wires • The iPhone will just be a toy until you can use it to control weapons systems • I Want To Slap People Who Stand On The Left On Escalators

Colophon

This is issue 38 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 three statuettes of Ultraman.

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

Photos by Alison Scott (2, 10), Mike Scott (3, 4), Florentijn Hofman (10, not CC-licensed), Ian Sorensen (13). Graphs by Flick & Alison Scott (14). Art by Steve Green (12), Jackson Pollock (14).

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6. Living on the Front Line

By **Sue Mason**

Sue reveals her secret life on the house disaster help-line. Call now, operators standing by.

6. The Curious Incident of the Frog in the Night

By **Giulia De Cesare**

In an unusual departure for *Plokta*, here's a cat anecdote.

8. The Observer's Guide to Mud

By **Jaine Weddell**

Nothing quite like it for cooling the blood.

8. Five a Day Revisited

By **Alison Scott**

Apparently, the P-Plan diet is quite startlingly healthy.

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10. Ducks Ahoy!

By **Alison Scott**

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14. Pollocks

By **Alison Scott**

A serious mathematical article.

Not Photoshopped (for once)



What do you get the man who has everything for his birthday? Apparently, it's a personalised numberplate with the title of his fanzine. Jonathan laughed like a drain when he saw this, as it is apparently the funniest thing in the world ever. If looking for other gift ideas, we bet AN51BLE is still available.

Editorial

There we were, on the first beautiful sunny weekend of summer. We were therefore all chilling and enjoying the sunshine, apart from Flick, who every five minutes stopped playing Kingdom of Loathing for long enough to ask why we weren't doing *Plokta*. Eventually, everyone worked out that if they just wrote some bits of editorial and bollocks, she might stop harassing them. So they did, and all was good, especially the bits that involved margaritas, until disaster struck: Alison was kidnapped by a notorious band of online pirates, who forced her to solve repetitive puzzles when she should have been working on the *Plokta* cover.

It took the rest of the cabal a while to rescue her, which means that this editorial is a strange mix of material of varying, and often non-specific, vintage.

On that same weekend in Reading, at about 7pm on Friday evening, Marianne was so bored that she picked up a copy of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, which she's been avoiding for about four years. For the rest of the weekend, she stopped reading only for eating (enthusiastically), sleeping (after much complaining) or hitting Jonathan (repeatedly). Unfortunately she can't tell anybody at school how much she likes it because her reputation of "the girl who hasn't read Harry Potter" is at stake! Mike claims that Flick might want to apply this logic to the *Lord of the Rings* movies, but she is sceptical.

Mike's duckspotting habit continues (and continues to continue) unabated. We learn from the Southwark News that he's captured shots of foxes, sparrowhawks, turtles and moose. OK, perhaps not moose. The swans are, after a year off (bloody seagulls!) back to the breeding, with Petronella currently on her sixth egg and counting, and the coots are as busy shagging as ever. In a way, you're all lucky not to have had to put up with last summer's accounts of Drama On The Docks, because some of the murder and cannibalism incidents were a little distressing. Whilst Flick looked on James and Simoné Bacon's wedding as a chance to buy a lovely new frock, Mike was

more excited by the chance to go to South Africa, where he could take pictures of completely different bird species, like those coots with small red dots near their eyes! And Slightly Different Pigeons!

Alison and her family discovered chore wars (<http://www.chorewars.com>), a system whereby you can get gold! XP! and LEVELS!!! for doing regular household tasks, although it soon descended into apathy when no one could agree how many points should be awarded for bothering to log in and update the website.

The cabal's trip to Reading was the first since since Steve and Giulia acquired new catlets, although they fled to hide at the other end of the garden as soon as Jonathan arrived, so we didn't see much of them, despite the best efforts of the rest of the cabal to track them down and join them. Although we didn't see the cats, the hedgehog was remarkably unconcerned about people walking up to it and taking photographs, at least as long as it could get to its bowl of cat food.

Deprived of cats to taunt, Jonathan instead filled the hot tub with bowls and his trunks with balls, whilst at the same time developing a mortal fear of Giulia; she now only has to glare at him while wielding a pasta server and he goes and hides under a bush at the other end of the garden. Flick did try to learn the knack, but Jonathan persists in hiding under her boobs and calling her 'Mummy'.

Alison decided to take her melodeon playing to the next level by attending the Sunday lunchtime English Tunes session in the Horseshoe Inn, which regular (ha!) readers may remember from

<plokta.con> π. When she arrived, she found lots of good music, interspersed by the musicians sipping on their Guinness or continental lager and bemoaning the pub's abnormal lack of real ale. It's a little known fact that the correlation between playing English Traditional Music and drinking English Traditional Ale is approximately 0.999 recurring. The barmaid explained with

her limited command of English Traditional Vocabulary that they'd sold four barrels the previous night, but the sessioners were not convinced and felt neglected. However, Flick did feel obliged to point out that those four barrels had been consumed by a ZZ9 book launch, held in the pub the previous night.

Flick's now back at university, where she plays with paper most of the time. Alison keep asking her to write an amusing, informative and witty *Plokta* article on the subject, but always seems to fall asleep into her beer when Flick starts explaining just why the shadow zones on pre-1800 laid paper are much more exciting than those on post-1750 mesh paper. Flick does have an impressive collection of new knives, though.

Alison and Steven really should have bought their house from Sue (see p.6), as they have a nasty crack in their living room wall. They were thinking of selling it to Tate Modern as an installation for the Turbine Hall, but apparently that's passé, now.

You remember the TAFF ballot we included in the last *Plokta*? You remember the last *Plokta*? No? Oh. Well, anyway, we had a ballot back from Ken Slater, voting for Howard De Vore and including 100 French francs (which might have been worth something in 1972). Sadly, he just missed the deadline by a squeaky margin of thirty four years or so.

Mention of Ken Slater reminds us that he has sadly recently departed, as have Dave Wood, Marion van der Voort, Ray Bradbury (the Birmingham fan, not the author) and (on one particularly unfortunate day), Arthur C Clarke, Anthony Minghella and Captain Birdseye.

Finally, we're hoping to hold another <plokta.con> next year, at a location and date to be decided before the end of this year. The fact that the preceding sentence was written last year has no bearing on its accuracy....

Japan Trip Report

By Flick

Did we mention we've been to Japan?

Most significant and disorienting culture shock moment of the entire trip: they stand on the wrong side on escalators.

The first three nights, we were in Tokyo. The morning of day one was museums: Science (most interactive museum ever), Modern Art (great fun playing 'spot the influence') and Craft (utterly fabulous musical table, which I can't find anywhere online). Afterwards, we had a walk through the park (the cicadas are not only incredibly loud but also huge! Much to my amusement, all that time playing *Animal Crossing* meant that I could identify them by sound) and then



went down to Akihabara, which was most notable for having a department store with about four or five aisles lined floor to head-height with those machines



containing small toys inside plastic balls. I was good, and only bought a few....

Day two involved a trip to the big Meiji shrine, which was made even more fun by the fact that there was a dance festival on in the grounds, so there were groups of wonderfully dressed dance teams sitting and practising throughout the park. There were also three main stages

where the dancing was going on: great fun!



We had lunch in the shrine cafe, which was astonishingly quiet given the number of people around and then wandered down through Shibuya, where I'd been hoping to see the cosplayers but instead there was a parade of some of the dance troupes and not a goth in sight.



Day three saw us touring the Imperial Palace in Tokyo. The palace was about as nice as you'd expect a 60s-built concrete building to be, but the grounds were quite pretty and there were some nice forts and so on nearby. It was also incredibly hot, and I was starting to feel a bit feeble by the end of the tour!

Lost in Translation Moments

- Getting the bullet train from Tokyo to Kyoto.
- Coming across a random wedding party crossing the grounds of a temple.
- Choosing between half a dozen identical pictures on the menu of a 'cook your own beef' restaurant.
- Being by far the tallest person in a crowded place (and neither of us is that tall!). It was worst in a department store food hall, surrounded by little old ladies.
- Having a woman in black stockings in your hotel room (OK, maybe only Mike can count this one).
- Staying in an hotel whose lobby is full of hordes of bowing staff members in natty uniforms (Mike started insisting on going the long way around between the lifts and the door, in order to avoid bowing more times than he absolutely had to).
- Having an apparently minor foot ailment go all red and swollen and scary looking.



In the afternoon, we got the shinkansen to Kyoto, having taken advantage of Japan's highly sensible and organised luggage-shipping service to send most of our bags to meet up with us later in Yokohama.

We met up in Kyoto with Kari, Phil, Farah and Edward, who'd already been there for a few days and so could tell us where we absolutely had to go. We stayed there for three nights as well, and I really wish we'd had more time there and less in Tokyo: I certainly think we'll be going back.

Day four was a Phil-directed trip to the Kiyomizu temple, which was scenic and bustling and full of different ways to have your fortune told. It also had a booth with three little men in it: for a (very small) fee, they would do a page of calligraphy and stamps, so I had them do so in my travel diary.



After that, we went to Kodai-Ji, a temple set up by a widow to honour her husband, and Entoku-In, the house where she lived after he died. The house was just beautiful, with ornate painted screens, and the temple had lovely gardens as well as a whole new selection of fortune telling papers for me to collect.

In the afternoon, it was off to the Kyoto Imperial Palace, which was much more interesting than the one in Tokyo and had some wonderful gardens.



After dinner (a sort of pancake thing) that evening, we all went in search of ice cream. Mike and I had green tea ice cream at a place that made it in front of you, by pouring green liquid onto an incredibly cold metal plate and mixing it around as it froze: fab!

On day five, the others headed off to Yokohama and we visited Nijo Castle, which was very nice and had the advantage that you could go inside and look around, which you couldn't with the

Imperial palace. About half of the rooms had reproduction wall paintings, with the other half waiting to be done.

After we headed off, we went to the Costume Museum, which was utterly, utterly marvelous: they'd built a scale model of part of Genji's palace, and filled it with dolls (about 8" high, kneeling) in period kimono. They were absolutely gorgeous!



There was also another room, with full-sized costume examples that you could try on yourself—of course I jumped at the chance. (Only two layers, rather than twelve, but still.)



I did ask, as we were leaving, whether it was possible to buy something like the dolls: the woman told me that they each cost a hundred million yen; even if she meant a hundred thousand, £500 is more than I was prepared to pay. I was a bit surprised that the museum didn't have any lower-quality copies for sale: one of the things I wanted to buy over there was exactly that kind of doll, but either I was looking in all the wrong places or they just aren't available when it's not Doll Festival season.

Day six was our last day in Kyoto, sadly. We headed off early, and went to Sanjusangen-do, a temple next door to the hotel, which had both calligraphy guys and a long room containing 1001

identical, life-sized statues of Kannon, which was rather awe-inspiring.

We also popped to the Kyoto National Museum, just over the road from the hotel and temple. It's amazing how quickly you get through the archaeology section of a museum when the only translated labels say things like 'clay pot'. They also had some very pretty screens and scrolls, copies of which were on sale for, well, far more money than I could justify spending on a scroll.

Our shinkansen to Yokohama was three-quarters of an hour late, which was astonishing and nearly made me miss my first programme item of the con.

Fortunately, I just made it on time, which was good as it meant I got to be dressed up in a kimono. Although it was gorgeous, I have to say that the mediaeval one was an awful lot easier to put on and wear.



The rest of the con was mostly a blur of working on the newsletter, serving (and drinking!) ice cider at Canadian bid parties, failing to win a Hugo and wondering where people were: there wasn't a bar, or even a decent central seating area, and the typical Japanese con runs from 10am to 6pm on Saturday and Sunday, so there wasn't any evening programming. Even the Hugos started at 6pm, which means we were getting changed to go to the reception at about 4pm.

Still, all in all it was a good con!

Living on the Front Line

By Sue Mason

I work in customer care for a national housebuilder.

Everyone cringes when I tell them what I do and can't understand how we can take abusive phone calls from angry customers all day.

But it's not like that.

Mostly. To be fair, I get more annoyed at our own side, our builders and subbies and unhelpful co-workers than I do with the hapless customers.

If you buy a new house, your housebuilder will offer a two year warranty against defects caused by faulty workmanship or materials. So if your boiler leaks in the first two years, or your lights go poof or the window won't shut, you're covered. People call us with everything from the trivial and mundane to 24 page lists of outstanding snags which should have been dealt with three years ago when they first moved into the property. Ahem, see comments about unhelpful subbies and co-workers.

There's only two of us in the department and my colleague seems to specialise in the odd customers. If they have 17 dogs and want to know where to get a door handle for a 12 year old house because one of the dogs has chewed the bathroom door handle, they call her. Then get irate when we can't source 12 year old door handles.

We are a good team, we pulled the department up by its bootstraps, worked damn hard at it. We cheer each other up when we are down, we sympathise when things go tits up. We buy each other silly toys and coasters with slogans such as 'Stick your problems up the bum' and have long discussions about *Trumpton* and *Camberwick Green* and *Hong Kong Phooey*. She currently has to do physiotherapy exercises, so we do them together, which I think has cemented the office's opinion about us being slightly odd. And she sings Christmas songs at me all year round, which is grounds for justifiable homicide in my book.

Apart from that, we get on very well.

Oh, and there's our boss, but we have him pretty well broken in by now. He does as he's told, most of the time.

The people who buy our houses are not like you and me.

They don't have books for a start, or if they do, they don't have many of them and don't attach heavy bookcases to our plasterboard walls. They don't have much stuff in general. Our two bed starter home is 12'7" wide, so don't buy one if you have a life and Stuff. We have people who buy a show home and all its contents down to the pot-pourri and the magazine on the shelf in the study, tables, chairs, sofas, everything. Don't they have a life? Don't they have a great auntie Nelly to leave them a clock or a Gran to leave them a table/bureau/music cabinet etc, etc, etc? Don't they have several hundred books, comics, CDs, DVDs? An art studio? Evidently not.

Modern properties, no matter who the builder, follow the same sort of pattern, rather crammed together, even if they have big gardens to the rear. Estates built in odd areas such as the middle of trading estates or old railway yards; brownfield is in at the moment, which is a good thing for our poor greenbelt.

There will be at least five bathrooms, or so it seems. Boy, do we cram in those en-suites. You can buy a flat the size of a postage stamp; it will have an en-suite for the master bedroom. Even if it's a one bedroom flat. Buy a modern version of a two up, two down, half your hall will be taken up by a cloakroom, because you obviously can't walk upstairs to use the loo. Tiny little bedrooms also seem to be a feature, what can you do with a bedroom 8'6"x7'? Not much. How about a study, 6'2"x7'7"? Just don't study anything which takes a lot of room.

Some of the layouts are nice, three storey properties with the top floor devoted to a big master suite with dressing area and big en-suite. Bedrooms two and three can share an en-suite between them, great for causing arguments between teenage girls.

Of course, the more bathrooms you have, the more plumbing you have and nothing, nothing causes as much mess as water. So just hope your bathrooms were not done on a Friday by a contractor on contract for £10 an hour.

Most of our customers are lovely; they bring me bottles of booze at Xmas or swap earrings for pyrography. There are some, such as the earring lady, who I can't call unless I have a spare half hour as we will sort out the problem with the house in the first two minutes, then spend half an hour chatting about crafts and cats and stuff. I had one chap with a somewhat wet rear garden (think mangrove swamp sort of wet) whose wife was totally pots for rags over her pedigree cats. He was begging me to get the garden sorted ASAP before he buried the wife under it; she wouldn't let the cats out to do their business because they might get sucked into the mud never to be seen again. He hoped so. I had to get him dealt with quickly to maintain marital bliss.

Some have genuine problems which have nothing to do with their property; we are learning to spot the post-partum depression ladies or just those needing to have their medication adjusted. When someone is perfectly rational and pleasant in one telephone conversation and screaming abuse in the next, there's something going on other than the sink not draining properly. Sometimes they have just had a bad day at work, or a row with their partner, sometimes it's more serious. We had a chap whose kid had just died. I understand that he might not have wanted to talk about it, but if we had known that, we would have been much more sympathetic when he screamed at us.

Then we've had the opium den in the apartment. The wife swapping estate. The homeowner who greets our workmen at the door in a see through negligee, or just boxers.

Some like the attention. Bored housewives or retired gentlemen with too much time on their hands will keep on finding faults, no matter how trivial or will go on the internet and send you a 48

page letter detailing which legislation you are contravening by not having a sticker on the door frames you just fitted.

Some people want you in and out ASAP, busy, busy, busy, we are important career people don'tcha know?

Some folk, it's a power thing; they like to think that they can make us jump and like to see how high. But it's self defeating, for example, who do you think I bend over backwards to help? Mrs L whose lights have all blown and who remains pleasant and friendly and willing to wait home for the electrician? Or Mr G, who nit picks every single thing we do and who has irritated the NHBC and local authority inspectors to the point where they will sign off any work we do, regardless of if it complies with regs just to get rid of him? It is, as our American chums would say 'a no-brainer'.

And the things people think are faults?

Some have the 'magic house' syndrome; it's a new house, it is self maintaining. They are given a homeowners manual detailing maintenance they need to carry out, such as letting the house, which is timber framed, dry out gradually so the plaster doesn't crack. Or greasing hinges on windows or the garage automatic closer. They then call me six years later to tell me that their 'new' garage door has seized. "Have you had it regularly serviced, madam?" "No, it's new..." The other biggie is servicing boilers, we get calls from people panicking as they had their boiler serviced for the first time and it has some life threatening fault* And have they had it serviced in the last four years? Er, no, it's a new house. Head desk, head desk.

Then there is The List. Which can run to several pages. We shouldn't get any list, it should have been dealt with by our site managers before the property comes over to customer care (see 'unhelpful co-workers and subbies' passim) but we do. And if my manager attends, he also will do a list of jobs to be done on the property.

When I first joined the company, our department was in a sorry state, it had been neglected for years, there were over 3000 outstanding jobs on the system.

Now, after two years hard work, there are 66. I inherited some lists.

There was one long, long one, for a house on a very prestigious development which ran the full gamut from problems with the kitchen units to an ill fitting front door and a swampy garden. And, at the bottom of the list, 'grease toilet seat hinges'. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, 'grease toilet seat hinges'. Let me put it to you, you buy a half a million pound house, the toilet seats look okay but are actually a bit naff (and about £7 each) and squeak. Do you a) buy new loo seats or b) get your builder to grease the hinges on them? Answers on a post card please.

If the relationship between us and the customer fails, we can ask for the assistance of the National House Building Council. They will send an assessor out to make The List. We had one where most of the issues raised by the homeowner, the assessor had decided were not faults. "This issue not the fault of the housebuilder". I think he must have been as irritated with the homeowner as the last assessment on his list reads "When I returned to my car, a large grey cat had walked all over it, leaving muddy foot prints. This issue not the fault of the housebuilder."

My favourite was a very persistent gentleman who called to tell me that the ten year old property he had bought had a plumbing issue. The downstairs cloakroom toilet cistern filled from the hot water system rather than the cold. Nice and toasty for those cold winter mornings, you would think? But of course, it was All Our Fault and he was less than impressed when I told him no, I wouldn't have a plumber there to rectify the issue. After ten years? I gently explained that such an issue should have been reported by the initial purchaser within the first two years after legal completion and also, we had no idea what the previous owner had done in those ten years to his plumbing system. So he stormed off in a huff, threatening us with dire consequences once he had spoken to his solicitor. Sadly, I never heard from him again. I wonder what his solicitor made of it all? Perhaps he also suggested it might be nice on cold mornings?

The Curious Incident of the Frog in the Night

At quarter to four one morning: a high-pitched squeal. Due to previous experience, I was immediately able, from the depths of slumber, to identify it as the unmistakable sound of a small animal telling the world as loudly and emphatically as possible, "Nooooo! Do! Not! Want!!"

Shot out of bed, put the light on and saw Sahara scrabbling at something under the door of the wardrobe. Grabbed her and tossed her to Steve, peered under the door to see some-thing small, brown and worryingly wet and textured: a mouse festooned with its own gizzards?

While Steve manfully stayed in bed clutching Sahara, who was desperately thrashing to get back to her toy, I ran for my glasses, dressing gown and a plastic container of the sort we keep on hand for trapping bees and wasps. Slid the door to one side, tub to hand. Grabbed a handy, nearby twig¹ and winkled the thing out, plopping the plastic tub over it.

Little brown frog, bit over an inch long, gizzards still mercifully intact. What I had seen had been its little paws, held protectively in front of its face. It now began to hop about under the tub with a vigour indicating that it was unharmed, so I was able to take it outside and leave it on a lily pad at the edge of the fishpond, whence it had vanished by morning.

Sahara has earned the fighting name of Frogbane. This escapade is indicative of a worrying trend. We've been very lucky in having had, in George of Blessed Memory and Shadow, a pair of very lazy cats who reckoned they were big enough not to have to prove anything.

Well, it could have been worse. There could have been much more gizzard involvement, and that in less accessible places. This is a reasonable, working definition of optimism, I suppose. My glass is half full: just not of gizzards.

—Giulia De Cesare

¹What? Doesn't everyone keep long, whippy twigs conveniently to hand in their bedrooms?

*No it doesn't; the gas board are not above scaremongering to get custom

The Observer's Guide to Mud

By Jaine Weddell

Having been to a number of festivals ourselves last summer, the Cabal identify deeply with this article. About three feet worth of "deeply" (Type IV), to be precise.

With global warming threatening to turn our green and pleasant land somewhat brown and withered, one can't help but fear that the younger generation may grow up ignorant of what happens when soil gets really, properly, wet. To remedy this situation I would like to provide a short introduction to the wonderful, nay glorious, world of mud.

The tentative taxonomy below was compiled as a result of extensive, frequently messy, and occasionally hazardous research in the field. And garden. And woods. Many of the more extreme sightings occurred at festivals. (Although in such situations the observer's clarity of thought may suffer through the injudicious application of scrumpy, or other intoxicants, nothing beats a few thousand hippies for churning up the earth.)

The rankings below generally reflect an ascending order of saturation and a correspondingly descending level of viscosity. It is important to note that close investigation of Types IV and V should not be attempted without suitable protective clothing and footwear. Trust me on this.

Type I. Sticky Soil. The line between mud and soil is a fine one, but for the purposes of this study I propose that once the soil starts ticking together, we have mud. Type I mud can be deceptive. Whilst occurring to a depth

measured in mere millimetres (that's a maximum of a quarter of an inch in old money), it tends to be surprisingly slippery, and failure to exercise caution may result in an unexpected and sudden chance for closer investigation.

Type II. Mild Squish. Depth and moisture content are the main distinguishing features here, with Type II mud being noticeably deeper and damper than Type I. As a rule, if it's deep enough to leave a footprint in, but not so deep that you'd think twice about trying to, then it's Type II. Type II is the commonest type of garden mud.

Type III. Proper Goo. With Type III we first see the 'splash factor' coming in to play. If you've got mud spatter up the back of your legs, you've found Type III. Type III often occurs in conjunction with puddles. Outside the festival environment, it's common in deciduous woodlands after periods of heavy rain. At festivals, you can usually find it down-slope of the water point or showers.

Type IV. Wellie Trapper. If jumping in the mud results in face-spatter, you're in Type IV. (Note: this is not a recommended identification method so much as a warning). Here we see a step-change in the texture of the mud. Type IV clings rather than sticks. It also tends to be deep, often deceptively so. Stepping into Type IV mud may, unless fancy footwork or snow-shoes are employed, result in the reckless investigator temporarily losing sight of their feet, if not permanently losing their footwear.

Type V. Liquid Death. This fearsome natural phenomenon is generally seen only on television, when it is shown washing away cars, livestock or villages. My only encounter with it was at the notorious 'Mudlands 2000' festival, when three days of solid rain on a badly drained field somewhere in Hampshire (yes, the very one mentioned in the song, Brit-poppers) led to a river of mud flowing across the front of the

main stage. Certain brave festival-goers placed chairs in the mud and continued to dance, but most people were sensible enough to move upslope. Unfortunately the toilets were on the far side of the stage. I still have nightmares.

I offer the above classifications in the full knowledge that mud does not always conform to the rules. Also, I have not attempted to take into account factors such as soil type, gradient, or the presence of foreign objects (vegetation, stones, rotting corpses etc.) However I hope that my provisional thoughts may lead to further investigation of this much neglected area of study, and a renewed interest in mud.

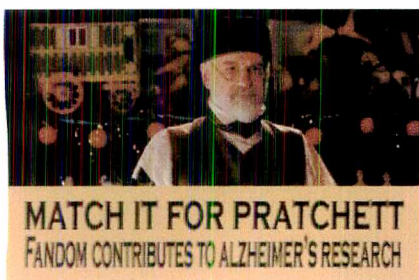
Five a Day Revisited

I rubbed my eyes and looked again. The thing about dreaming is that text doesn't stay the same in dreams. If you look a second time, it will change. But it still clearly said that the antioxidants in fruit are more effective if you mix the fruit with alcohol before eating it. We have long appreciated the easy route to five a day caused by sending Dr Plokta into the kitchen to make four different jugs of fruit margaritas (the fifth portion of fruit comes from the large quantities of lime juice involved in the process, and yes, we pulp the whole fruit rather than using juice for the margaritas). But it had never occurred to us that we could improve the health-giving qualities of fruit by adding alcohol.

I rubbed my eyes and looked again. The story had changed. I knew it was too good to be true. Except now it explained that women who drink large amounts of coffee are less likely to develop dementia. I suppose I would have to drink it, rather than just leave it lying around to inspire me.

The next thing we know, they'll be telling us that chocolate has more antioxidants than red wine or green tea and is thus better for you.

—Alison Scott



Lokta Plokta

Chris Garcia
garcia@computerhistory.org

Thanks for sending the great issue of Seamonster my way. Wait...oh, it's *Plokta*. I've been had!

I really like, no wait...LOVE, that cover. It so totally captures the spirit of the 1970s covers right down to the computrolautomatican and the little dude holding the punched card. I showed this around The Computer History Museum and they loved it. I'm going to be hanging my copy between some plexy in front of my cube!

I must quibble with your use of the term Interweb. As a computer historian, I am allowed to correct you that it is actually spelled IntArweb. It's a small matter, but from tiny acorns do mighty Archimedes grow. I was actively laughing my head off at that story of time-travel. The Brunner bit was freakin' ghenius! I've also looked it up and there was only one ARPAnet connection in the UK in 1972 and it was at Cambridge. In 1974 the number went from 1 to 17.

What exactly does that stork/egret/heron/whatever have in its mouth? It looks like a bird, which is nearly as scary as that YouTube video of the pelican eating the pigeon.

Ikea. How I hate you, Ikea! We didn't get one here in the Bay Area until 2003 and it was the biggest event around here in years. The excitement felt for it was only approached by the furor that rocked the lowest-third when WalMart opened down the road. I hate Ikea. I went once, to buy a bed for Evelyn (aka

The Little One) and I brought it home and followed with near Nazi Prison Guard dedication to detail the drawn diagram and somehow managed to not only not make the bed, but also somehow destroy Evelyn's dresser by scavenging bolts for the bed! Luckily we called an expert, Evelyn's Grandmother, and she fixed it. I will admit that the Ikea meatballs are delicious, but that is all I will give them!!!

I've never made marmalade. Check that, I've never even eaten marmalade. In California, as young children, we're given Peanut Butter and Honey sandwiches when we go off to school. I'd never even had a Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwich until I was in college. Marmalade seems some distant and foreign stuff that requires a two year degree in alchemy. Now making Jelly is an easy matter. Get stuff, boil it, mash it, coarse strain it, put it in jars which you've super-heated, slap a lid on it and forget about it in the cupboard until you find it again when you move.

I drive to work every morning at 7am down a road called 237. And while I'm trying to merge with the bastards coming from Oakland and San Jose, I get to skirt by the waterfowl of the marshes off to the right. And every morning there are three other birds: a red-tailed Hawk, an Osprey and a small hawk which I'm not sure what it's called. There are hundreds of ducks and coots, and every week or so I get to see the hawk or the Osprey swoop down and grab a duckling of a coot. It's kinda sad to see.

The cormorants we have around tend to get eaten a lot too, but I think that's because they are stupid, stupid birds.

Bonsai Ent. Is there no justice?

Love the bacover art piece! There's a gentleman standing in the back with an afropick that looks just like me. I'm a little afraid. It's creepy how much he looks like me. I showed this to the girls at work and they said 'why'd they draw a picture of you?' and I flashed back on the Mr. Sparkle episode of *The Simpsons* and I thought I should call the Cabal and someone would answer and I'd say "This is Chris Garcia from America. Who should I say is speaking to me?" and the response would be "We'll send you premium, answer questions, hundred percent" and I'd get the video and it would all turn out to be a strange coincidence. That's how these things happen.

Steve Jeffery
peverel@aol.com

The title lettering is startlingly reminiscent of Ken Cheslin's shaky (though admittedly one-handed) calligraphy on dozens of Olaf and Marauder fanzines he sent me over the years. The little Atom BEMs aren't quite as deceptively accurate (a little too chunky), but having tried to fake these for Kech a number of times, it became increasingly apparent that Atom's style and execution was extremely deceptive, and nowhere near as simple as it looks.

Loved the joke carried on inside the cover, to the 1972 Chessmancon Conrep—in typewriter Courier font and

all. (No photos of Flick in 1970s minidress and knee boots, sadly.)

I note you didn't take the attention to period accuracy to the point of actually typing this out on stencil and then scanning the result. That probably would have been too much.

I don't know if I have a "distressed Courier typewriter font" knocking around on a disc somewhere, but it occurs to me that even if I have it'll be in Windows 3.1/95 TTF format, and I have no idea whether that will work with Macs.

At the risk of being drummed out of fandom at this point, I have to admit that I've never actually been to IKEA, and "The Fourth Circle of Hell" now confirms a feeling—started by China Mieville's short story in *Look for Jake* about a haunted IKEA ball pit—that I never really want to.

Don't IKEA, Argos it.

Re Duckspotting. Just what size frogs do you get in Walthamstow?

Vikki and I were given a Bonsai (not an Ent, though) for Christmas, our pleasure only slightly restrained by everyone's cheerful observation that they are really easy to kill. Which we almost managed in the first couple of weeks, but now a regime of frequent daily watering seems to have perked it up again.

After catching ten minutes of *Today in Parliament* on Radio 4, the phrase "creative commons" strikes me as hilarious. Any idea why that should be?

Ducks Ahoy!

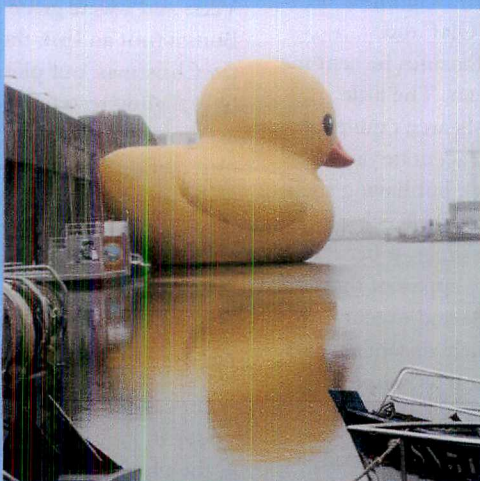
It's funny the things kids latch onto. When Mike & Flick bought Jonathan a giant rubber duck, I was unsure about it. After all, it didn't beep or play games or have animatronic woojaflips. It just sort of, well, bobbed. It was, to be fair, a perfectly ordinary rubber duck except for being 12" tall. I was worried that Jonathan might be a tad bored with it.

I was wrong. The giant rubber duck rapidly became one of Jonathan's most treasured possessions. Renamed The DuckBot, or Duckbotty for short, it was his constant companion; not just in the bath but also pressed into service for all sorts of jolly games. When we arrived home from Pat and Julie's wedding, the sound of much childish giggling turned out to be because Duckbotty had been decked out in Marianne's wedding finery.



One day Jonathan came and gave me a big hug. "You know what I really want, Mummy?" he said. I knew he wanted something, of course, because he'd given me a big hug. But I had no idea what. "A duck that is bigger than Duckbotty." We laughed. I explained that I didn't think there *were* any ducks bigger than Duckbotty.

I was wrong. Again. This summer, Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman has delivered the duck of Jonathan's dreams. It's a yellow PVC inflatable rubber ducky, Canard de Bain, 26m tall, and it spent the summer floating on the Loire estuary as the star turn in an arts festival.



Duckbotty's clearly been outducked.

—Alison Scott

Joseph T Major
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In March we went north, to Dayton, Ohio. It was warm, almost summery.

In April we went south, to Pensacola, Florida. It was cold, nigh wintery.

Either my geography or my time of year is off.

Having read Lorna Robinson's article on "The Fourth Circle of Hell: IKEA" (and wasn't that a Dante dish to set before the king?) I now sympathize even more with the guys in "Fight Club" who went around smashing up IKEA stores.

Duckspotting: Okay, I choose tits—Stop that, Lisa! No! Ouch!

The only potato chips Fans should eat are Pringles. Why, you ask? Well, because one of the engineers who developed the machinery to make Pringles was—Gene Wolfe, a form of torture that even Severian might disdain.

Jason K. Burnett
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(Issue 35)

You mean the CenterParcs Belgium impression of a typical Brit isn't accurate? Hmph. Maybe I should take the money I've been saving for a trip to England and instead go to Japan, which is apparently full of ninjas, small monsters, and schoolgirls who change into superheroines in a flash of light and brief nudity. Or maybe that would be disappointing as well....

Chris Garcia's article on "faking it" was quite interesting, but not quite right. I seem to remember that I was actually the one discussing this topic with Walt Willis at Chicon II, when Garcia came up and

tried to borrow bus fare from us, in order to mount an expedition to visit the shop of a black market absintheur in the suburbs....

So *that's* a treacle sandwich? Hmm.... Upon further research prompted by this article, I discovered that I had entirely the wrong idea about treacle, having pictured it as more of a light syrup, rather more like corn syrup. It definitely sounds more palatable now that I know what it actually is. Before my grandfather died, we used to spend every Thanksgiving making what we called "cane syrup" but was apparently treacle. He had a large cane press, powered by a belt connected to his tractor engine, from which a pipe led down the hill a way to a cooking trough, which was heated by a wood and pine resin fire and had a spigot at the end for pouring the syrup off into cans when it was done. It was hard work (being one of the youngest men involved in the process, I got the worst job—taking the crushed cane stalks out of the mill and throwing them on a trailer) but the results were definitely worth it. Perhaps a followup study could be done to compare the effects of a treacle sandwich with those of treacle eaten over a hot buttermilk biscuit?

I was amused by Joseph Nicholas waxing nostalgic for LP sleeves. I suppose I'm just young enough to have missed getting infected with this—when CDs came out, I remember being pleased with how much larger the cover art was than what I was accustomed to seeing on cassettes. Personally, my pet peeve in media packaging is the stupid large box they invented for DVDs—I would

much rather DVDs had been packaged in CD jewelcases.

Alison's account of the mechanical elephant in London was wonderful—I think someday I'll have to go the England after all, regardless of what CenterParcs Belgium thinks of the place.

(Issue 36)

The pictures and account of Flick and Mike's wedding were great. Flick was radiant, as all brides are required by law to be. If someone could find a way to synthesize or extract "essence of bride" for sale to other women, they'd make a fortune. Um... on second thought, perhaps synthesize would be best—harvesting would be all too likely to lead to an anime-esque scenario involving suction cups and tubes and wires and steam-powered machinery, not at all conducive to a nice wedding.

Being a big fan of snack food, I greatly enjoyed Alison's article of crisp flavouring (or, in American, "chip flavouring" - damn but it just looks and sounds so much better in English!) One of my favorites on this side of the pond is "Cajun Craw-Tator" from Zapp's (a small company in Louisiana that make excellent chips). Being designated "Cajun," the primary seasoning is cayenne pepper. Still, they taste remarkably like boiled crawfish for a product which, so far as I'm aware, contains no actual crawfish. Other big trends that I've spotted are various formulations of honey mustard, and something that manufacturers call "loaded baked potato," which consists of pretty much all the flavors on the one chip: Sour cream, cheese, onion, and bacon. Zapp's also makes a dill pickle flavor: Salt

and vinegar, plus dill; very tasty.

The "Guide to Plokta Residences" was wonderful - based on photographs of you I've seen, it manages to capture each of you perfectly, and I wouldn't at all hesitate to use it as a field guide to identifying you in the wild. But I have to ask: Is Giulia really the only member of the Cabal who doesn't use a Mac? If that is indeed the case, maybe you could convince her to switch and pick up some sort of endorsement/ sponsorship deal from Apple. (Well, one can dream...)

[We're trying to wean Giulia onto a Mac Mini]

John Purcell
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Jaine's trials with cats had a happy resolution. We have seven cats in our household, so she should be grateful she doesn't live next door to us! However, it sounds like that sonic deterrent was most effective. I wonder if it will work on teenaged boys? Our 16-year old daughter certainly gets a large number of phone calls, text messages, and drop-in visits from her school friends. Maybe if I invest in one of these "sonic cat scarer" devices, or that invisible fence doo-dad you surround your yard with to keep your dogs from roaming the neighborhood, and modify it appropriately, that might work. This bears some investigation. Thank you for the idea.

Alison Scott's musings on the oddball flavorings of "crisps" —I have a sneaking suspicion that's the British version of potato chips, or some kind of our American snacking yummys—is totally true. I have long wondered about how and why—more why than how, in fact—marketing

moguls come up with these strange concoctions. I guess human nature just holds true no matter the nationality; slap a new, exotic name on a product, change the ingredients a bit, and voila!—a "new" snack is born. People will try anything if you present it in a certain way.

Brad Foster
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Considering how sometimes it will be a few months after the publication date that my copy of *Plokta* arrives through the mails (and, by the way, thanks for continuing to do this on paper for us old guys!), for a second there I thought some sort of skiffyish time warp had opened up and an issue of the Silver-age *Plokta* had finally made it through. I was further thrown from reality when I saw that this was volume 23. So, it's not from the past, it's from the future? Oh, wait, that is a "minus" -23...and, wait, time travel is impossible... and wait, *Plokta* is constantly doing these clever theme and design projects each issue.... Ohhhh, I get it!

Great job on the retro look pages, and Alison has done Atom's memory proud with the cover design.

Snow in London in January? I can top that: how about snow in Dallas, Texas in April? Bad enough that it was the first time it had snowed on that date in about seventy years, but it was the middle of an outdoor art festival I was set up at. Snow never stuck, just floating in the air, but the air never got much over freezing. By the time I got home that evening after sitting outside for eleven hours, I could barely feel anything from my knees down. Of course, the previous weekend we had

been set up for a show up in Oklahoma, right in the middle of the aptly named "tornado alley" section of the U.S., and barely avoided having our entirely livelihood blown away. Ah, the life of the artist, so serene.

Anders Holström
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It was with a long since felt feeling of S.O.W i held *Plokta on Mars*. The ATom tribute cover, the classic "content and illo" bcover, the colour scheme. As themes go this one was really well put together. As the conreport felt very much like a melding of two eras. I don't think i am alone in thinking that i should have realised that a Life on Mars issue was in the coming. Season 1 has just aired over here and been met with glowing reviews. The new and latest version of Dr Who has also just started and i think this the first time Sweden gets exposed to the good Doctor on a weekly basis. One of the first commercial TV stations did a mixup of a few episodes sporadically something like ten years ago and the movie has been on the air once or twice but that is it. That is also about all the Doctor Who i have seen myself. Even after decades of Brit Fandom the exposure to actual episodes have been almost nil. Bearing that in mind i do quite like this new series. Some of the chase sequences feel a bit long and awkward and the could have done without the "Angel clone" that passes for his costume. Having never seen an actual Dalek episode even if the character itself is well known to me i thought that the Dalek episode was done really well.

Well enough about TV. A short comment about

something closer to the fannish core IKEA. I was saddened to see that someone of such note that they are chosen to write for a high-end fanzine like yours would be so flippant and disrespectful to IKEA.

Pamela Boal
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I enjoyed your time trip. It was 1973 before I managed to attend a Con I don't remember the event being over laden with films or media references but one of my most vivid memories is of the *Star Trek* Bloopers. My favourite episode is of Captain Kirk ordering Scotty to increase to warp five. Cut to a vast hall of gleaming machines. Pan along to the end and there is a diminutive man shovelling coal at a furious pace into a small furnace.

I would join the Plant Liberation Front but as with many abused creatures I fear if we cut their wires they collapse and die. All we can do is remonstrate with any one we see about to purchase the tools of that terrible practice. We must point out the joys of full grown specimens. In time they can overhang a neighbour's garden dropping leaves, sap, fruit or even branches. They can cut out a neighbour's light or best of all, if left long enough, their roots can cause the neighbours' driveway or patio to crack and buckle.

Andy Sawyer
andysawyer@fsmail.net

Thanks for the Eastercon report, which could for all I know have been real as I only managed Saturday, so what do I know about what happened on other days—actually I'm misremembering, because I managed an hour on Sunday

Stop Press

Making Light points us at a touching story of moose delinquency:
<http://www.oomsa.com/node/678>

("I need to go to Chester!... "Oh, I'll come with you") and ten minutes on Monday once I discovered that the hotel was actually just across the road from the emergency bank holiday dental clinic which I was persuaded to attend once it was obvious that the damn pain just wasn't going to go away.

Eric Lindsay
fjagh2007@ericlindsay.com

Real time machine stuff to find a 1973 TAFF ballot. I recall rich brown having a cartoon about Mario Bosnyak as a fanzine cover. I also recall visiting Elliot Shorter in New York, around 1973. Met Len and June Moffatt at one or two cons. Used to see Howard DeVore at Midwestcon, and was in an apa with him for a long time. The entire ballot makes me feel old.

I don't want to think about the gadgets missing from my life in 1972. It was another two years before I got my first programable device (a TI calculator, on which I learned how to give myself unlimited fuel in the moon lander game).

Since Lorna Robinson mentions The Fourth Circle of Hell: IKEA, I will give evidence of a single item of merit—the height of IKEA off the floor.

Preliminary report on the iRobot Roomba vacuum cleaner. Our tile floors are now cleaner than they have been since our much missed cleaning lady moved to Brisbane. Alas, this probably

reflects more on our low standards of dusting than the actual ability of the Roomba.

For example, this is the first time in six months that we (and here I mean the Roomba) have cleaned under the bed. It is amazing how much dust and fluff the gadget can find, on what we regarded as clean (for a low value of clean) floors. We were also delighted to note that the Roomba also went under the Ikea bookcase units, which also hadn't been cleaned under for a long time ... ever probably.

The coolness factor is high. Our architect neighbour was so impressed he brought in a bottle of very nice red so we all could sit and watch the Roomba do its thing. This might indicate there isn't much entertainment around here. Sitting and watching the thing vacuum doesn't actually save you any time. You could do the same work with a regular vacuum cleaner in a quarter of the time. Also, cleaning out the dust container (and clearing the brushes and bits) takes about twice the time as emptying a regular vacuum cleaner, despite the ease of taking out the brush bits (which promptly have smaller bits pop off).

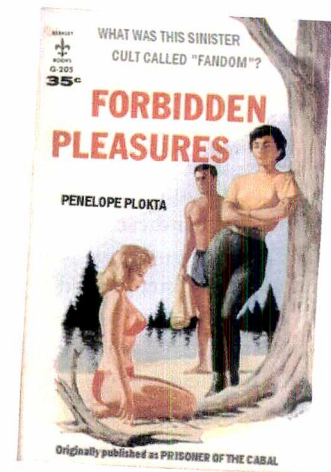
The noise level of the Roomba is slightly less than a regular vacuum cleaner, but it is sort of hard to listen to the news while it is running. My initial impulse, that running it when we are going shopping or leaving the house, seems reasonable.

The Roomba has a nice array of lights, some of which change colour and pulsate. The superfluous technology coolness factor of the lights is high, in a flashy Mardi Gras sort of way. Against this, having 27 different lights

around the room at night makes having stars superfluous, and means you never need night vision.

Steve Green
ghostwords@yahoo.co.uk

Gosh, the old books you find on eBay...



Susan Francis
susan_shades@yahoo.co.uk

I like the retro format, but I'm glad you didn't carry it all the way through. And if you went the whole hog, with the hand-written address or mailing label in the lower half of the back page, which is folded over and stapled to save using an envelope (like some old ones I was just looking at) ... you'd have a crease right across Alison's wonderful Atom pastiche.

I hadn't realised why those old zines had the contents list on the back – oh right, if you just left printing page 2 till last, you wouldn't be able to cram other stuff on there. And the back page would be bitty anyway, being arranged round the space for the mailing label.

Milt Stevens
miltstevens@earthlink.net

Including the 1972 TAFF ballot in Plokta #37 was a neat touch. I can't say I knew anything about the 1972

Eastercon, so that material is pretty much lost on me. I was much more familiar with the 1972 worldcon and with TAFF. Of course, I remember who I voted for in TAFF that year. I voted for the Moffatts. Len is one of my oldest fan friends. In fact, I met him at the my first LASFS meeting back in 1960. I encountered Howard DeVore in SAPS and the Cult and had met him once at the 1969 worldcon. I had just joined FAPA for the first time at the beginning of 1972, and both Len and Howard were members of FAPA at the time. I had only seen Frank Dietz once, at the only meeting of the Lunarians I ever attended. I never encountered him either in person or in print after that time.

Lorna Robinson doubts the efficiency of things Swedish. I have tried Swedish meatballs and found them to be reasonably efficient. In fact, I was nearly killed by a Swedish meatball once. It was one of my worst wartime experiences. Some people might consider it not very efficient since it only nearly killed me. Actually, it left me feeling rather sunburned on the inside.

Then there are tall, blonde Swedish women. Have you ever noticed that tall women usually have very long legs? I've always thought that was a most remarkable coincidence. As to the efficiency of tall, blonde Swedish women who happen to have very long legs, it depends on your assumptions as to what they are trying to accomplish. In my own experience, I'd say tall, blonde Swedish women who happen to have very long legs are able to accomplish anything they want to accomplish.

As I recall, I have seen an Ikea somewhere in the United States. It may have even been in California. When I saw it the outline of the building seemed to be sort of fuzzy. At the time, I thought it might be mold. Later, I heard that people who wandered into Ikeas might not be heard from again for a hundred years. That might explain the fuzziness I had noticed earlier. Ikeas aren't really native to this dimension. They only pop-in to our dimension long enough to empty your wallet, and then they leave again. Their ready to assemble furniture probably goes together much easier in the dimension where it was created.

Lloyd Penney
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Man, what a hip, groovy zine you've got! Plokta 37 is really hip to the scene. It needs some words, you know what I'm sayin'?

Splendid little time machine you've got there...ATom would be proud about the cover. We are so spoiled with our level of tech. If we did go back 40 years, we wouldn't know what to do. Some of us would look at wristwatches and dial-faced telephones, and not know what to do. By this story, we can now blame Sue Mason for K/S fanfic. Well, someone has to take the blame.

Yvonne keeps threatening to write her own IKEA fanzine article, seeing we've had our own adventures in the several IKEA stores in the Greater Toronto Area. Dollar hotdogs, cinnamon buns, bottles of lingonberry sauce...haven't we all been there?

Hiya, Chris...Yvonne tell you about peanut butter and sardine sandwiches, which she

says are yummy. I will take her word for it. She does like the Terra chips as well, and I like them, too. Ketchup potato chips? This is one Canadian who says yuck. (Said that last issue, too.)

Oh, look at that bacover illo. All this crowd needs is a cartoon dumb Great Dane. "I would have gotten away with it, if it weren't for you meddling kids!" I love Jonathan drawn as Dennis the Menace.

Sheryl Birkhead
25509 Jonnie Court,
Gaithersburg,
MD20882, USA

Crottled greeps...ah fannish history—crottled greeps—the number one choice of fans. Yeeouch, that's a lot of alcohol to consume and a startlingly high number of high heel tumbles (but the anesthetic effects of the alcohol no doubt prevented any serious injuries!) in a short span of time.

The sound generator to ward off cats is an interesting concept. Several years ago I bought a little ultrasonic generator that is meant to be stuck to the bumper of your car and warn off animals (the label is pushing warning deer, but it ought to work on other animals as well)—so there are no accidents. Unfortunately, the adhesive does not stick to the newer polyurethane material—so I guess I'll never get the change to use one. I am not sure how the cone of sound flares out—but I wonder if it only warns away those actually already behind (well- off to the side and behind) the vehicle.

I went to the *Nippon* website and took a stroll down the Hugo memory lane. The designs have been widely different (and I noted one year missing with no footnote

—so wonder if it was an absent year or just one they could not fill in)—with one year even being a flat plaque. Some of the designs were extremely creative.

Just tried Parmigan+garlic Pringles which are sorta pressed potato "chips". In this instance, the new flavors are all with "chips" that are about one-third the size of their usual product. So, it looks as if the explosion of flavors is widespread, not necessarily good, just showing up everywhere.

Ian Sorensen
ian@soren.demon.co.uk

Saw these cushion in the back of a Roller and thought you might want pics for your collection.



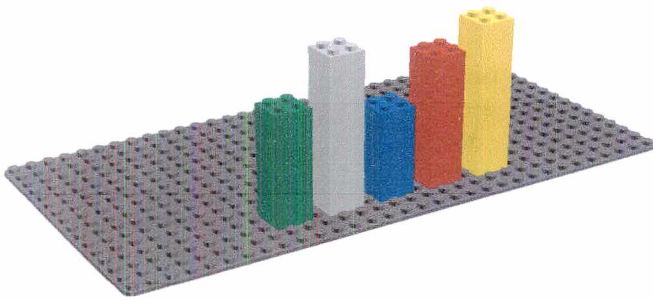
We also heard from: Tim Kirk (telling us about a Russian moose farm), **Marcus Rowland** ("Did you notice that IKEA list 'Frack' as a bathroom mirror?"), **Erik Olson** (pointing out the fruit is better for you when consumed in cocktails), **Ben Yalow** ("The Worldcon went to 2 year lead time in 1969, so the 1973 race was decided before the 1972 Eastercon") & **Terry Jeeves** ("I can no longer hand write and typing is very hard work").

Pollocks

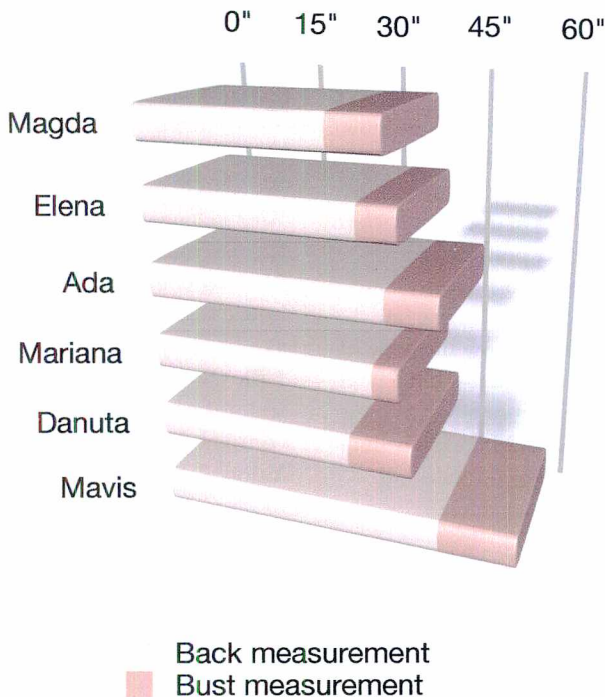
By Alison Scott

As regular readers of *Plokta* will know, we like to include articles with an educational bent. Marianne is learning about effective representation of data in chart form. And, by a strange coincidence, we have just acquired numerous copies of Numbers '08.

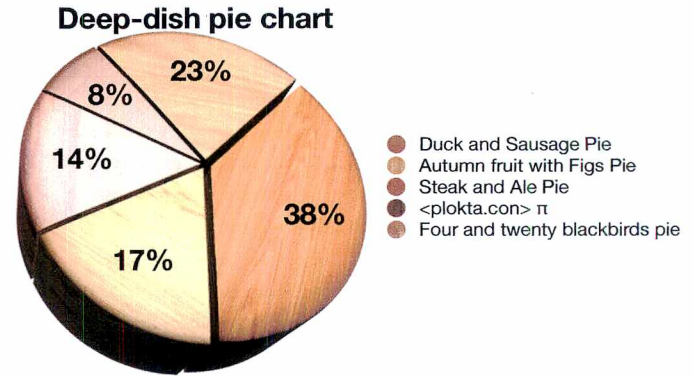
Now. The important thing about data is that you should think carefully about what data you have, and how you can best use charts to display it. For example, if you decided to catalogue your collection of Lego pieces, you would want to use a block graph



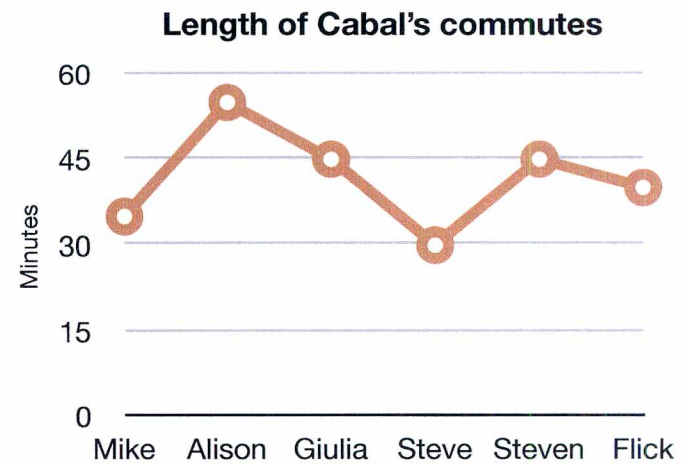
If, on the other hand, you were expressing personal data gathered from the many Polish barmaids in Walthamstow, you would be looking for a 3D Stacked Bar Graph.



When Marianne started to track the assortment of food served up at a *Plokta* meal, she realised that she needed a Pie Chart.



Caroline explained to us that she's now changed her commute; so we compare the lengths of our Underground journeys on a Line graph.



Finally, we chart the location of Jonathan's Geomag on a scatter diagram.

