

PLOKTA

The Alcephilic Fanzine

March 1998—Volume 3, Number 2

Plokta comes to you from Steve Davies and Alison Scott. It is available for letter of comment (one copy is fine, we pass them over to each other), trade (2 copies if possible, please), contribution, beer or enlightenment. These can be sent to:

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This issue comes to you courtesy of a wide variety of strange sexual habits. Thanks to Gail Courtney for giving us *The Encyclopaedia of Unusual Sex Practices* without which we would never have learned the true meaning of Saliromania. Participants include Steven Cain, Giulia de Cesare (in California), Sue Mason (in her cups), Mike Scott (in Boston), Marianne Cain (in trouble) and George.

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Artwork by Sue Mason (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 14), Jo Byatt (5). Photos by Steve Davies (6, 7, 9)

This fanzine is schizophrenic on the matter of who to support for TAFF, and cannot agree whether Tobes should really win the Doc Weir award. However, we're united in supporting Germany for the Eurovision Song Contest.

Editorial

Yes, it's the special Corflu edition of *Plokta*, shortly to be followed by the special Eastercon edition, special Worldcon edition and, inevitably, special Novacon edition. It's amazing how closely tuned we are to the natural rhythms of the world. By next year we hope to be reviving old traditions like burning Mark Plummer alive in a wicker model of a duplicator in order to appease the mystic ancient gods of Leeds.

In response to certain mutterings from the outer darkness (thank you, Michael Ashley) we are attempting to shed our friendly, cuddly image by being nasty about people for a change. Of course, if it doesn't work we'll go straight back to being sweetness, light and articles about IKEA by next issue... So if you have an amusing flatpack furniture anecdote, we want to hear it now. Should have put it in the Scavenger Hunt, really.

Speaking of which, various people have already entered our great Scavenger Hunt (see last issue for full details of what we're after). We were particularly impressed by the picture of Brad Foster as a baby, and by the postcard of an elf lovingly ripped from Bug's childhood postcard collection. You have until Easter to send us your rat, and we'll give you a full report after that.

Our guest writer this issue is Chris Bell, who seems to be having a little problem with technology. We thought we'd help you out, Chris, by giving you our top tip for making recalcitrant technology behave—swear at it. If that fails, you might try banging on the table, impugning the ancestry of the programmer, or reading the manual. Well, it works for us.

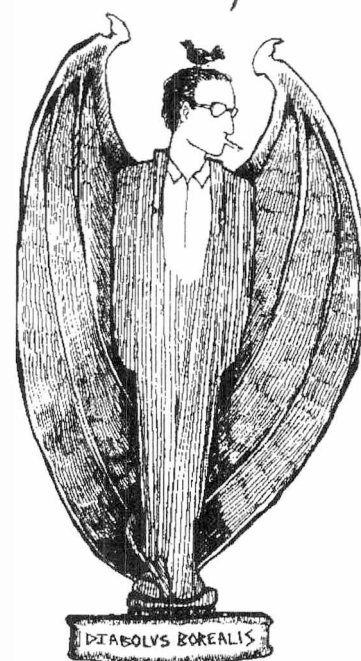
Steve has installed a new network hub, after swearing at it, banging on the table, and impugning the ancestry of Bill Gates. For some reason he stopped short of reading the manual, though.

We didn't think the new network would make any difference, but it appears to have achieved hive mind sentience and has started demanding all the privileges of a member of the *Plokta* cabal. As the privileges mostly seem to involve eating and drinking, we've sent it off to do the washing up.

Of course, we'll see many of you at Corflu, where for some reason we're responsible for the newsletter (and who knows, possibly also a website). We're planning to produce as many issues as we feel like, and are looking for your contributions. So please come and find us in the bar and tell us your amusing ~~flatpack furniture~~ Gestetner anecdotes.

Finally, the production of this *Plokta* has been enhanced by a wide range of exciting and unexpected events. In fact, Alison has a delightful amoebic dysentery anecdote, but unfortunately this editorial is too brief to contain it.

FECK! ARSE!
DOMINOES! DRINK!



And now a little something from Chris Bell, standing alone against an avalanche of Technophilia...

Batteries Not Included

Mostly I enjoy technology when it manifests in my life. I approve of bathrooms, and kitchens, and the like, which function properly; and these exist as a result of technology. On the whole, if one ignores television and suchforth which follow Sturgeon's Law slavishly, modern communications seem a good thing; in general travel is vastly preferable now, as a result of technology, to the way it was in the past: all those books in which people travel around by coach rarely seem to mention the suspension, which as anyone who has been for any distance in a horse-drawn coach, as I have, will testify is less than comfort-inducing even on a paved road such as didn't exist until technology made them possible. I also know of no greater pleasure at a con than watching (from a safe distance and in absolute silence) the tech crew wrestling with their cable-knitting....

I'm well known to be a neo-Luddite on the subject of computers, though, aren't I? I'll come clean and tell you: it's not actually true that I hate the things. I've got three on the desk here as I write, and another underneath it in a box, and I have been using one for the past ten years. I'm really quite fond of them in an exasperated sort of way. I certainly wouldn't say that computers are superfluous. For many activities they may not be entirely essential, but they're useful in a variety of ways, and they can be fun as well. But I can't help noticing that *Plokta's* phrase "superfluous technology" generally seems to end up being applied to computers, in one way or another. Nobody automatically assumes that someone is talking about a microwave oven or a video machine or a new sort of bicycle when he says "superfluous technology". It's always something to do with a computer that some member of the Cabal has just got, right? And it's somehow assumed that it's the new thing which is superfluous, rather than the old one which is now redundant.

So it seems that the idea that computers may be superfluous is easy to convey; there is already present in many people a resistance to the idea that they are a good thing. There are all sorts of historical urban-mythical reasons for this, usually involving gas-bills in the thousands of pounds and little old ladies killing themselves, or other stupidities which were always blamed on the computer and never on errors by the operators or the programmers of the computer; but it does seem rather silly not to have begun to discount these by now. I have therefore been casting about for some time trying to find reasons for hating computers, as it were: reasons for the irrational dislike of them which comes over me, willy-nilly, when they are being panegyrised. I don't like having knee-jerk reactions, you see: I always want to understand *why* I do or feel something.

Now, I recently had the interesting experience of watching someone who has used the same home computer for word-processing over some years wrestling with a new application for it. I was fascinated by the feeling of helpless panic followed by resentment which the familiar machine seemed able to induce at that point. I was fascinated; and I was also reminded of something which at first I couldn't lay my finger on. Then it came to me.

Do you remember, or have you ever watched, what happens when the present which is opened with such joy on Christmas morning, the newest shiniest cleverest electronic toy of them all, the toy for which one had begged, and waited eagerly, turns out not to have the batteries with it? (I'm talking about the bad old days before this Christmas, when you couldn't just go

out and buy batteries from some shop which forced half-a-dozen wage-slaves to work on Christmas Day.) Or when the instructions for its assembly are impossible to follow because (one finally has to assume) they have been translated from German into English via the Japanese by a Basque speaker, and furthermore Tab B is nowhere to be seen? There's terrible disappointment in the discovery that one just can't play with this wonderful new gadget until it has been fixed in some way, and one can't do that oneself no matter how one tries.... Disappointment, followed by anger, and then deep resentment which focuses not on the donor or on the designer but on the toy itself. Somehow one is never going to be able to feel the same pleasure in it which one would have felt if it had worked properly from the start.

That is what always happens when a non-expert starts to use the new computer which does lots of things which haven't been available before. Not just sometimes; *always*. Unless what you have is a machine and a program with which you are already totally familiar, within ten minutes of your firing up the new shiny compact state-of-the-art wotsit which is sitting on your desk—that is, at the precise moment when you embark on using one of the new features which are the reason you got the thing in the first place—something will go wrong: and you won't know what, and you won't know why, and you won't know what to do about it. You know that this is your own fault, because you have asked the machine to do something which for some reason it can't understand; and you have a nasty feeling that anything which you now do will make it come to pieces completely, and then it will never work again. You can't get anywhere further, and you're going to have to shout for help. You feel helpless, and frustrated, and *stupid*.



If you're lucky (and I'm really lucky, and God bless Chris Suslowicz and Dave Langford and Roger Burton West and Tanaqui Weaver) you have friends who if not actually sitting beside you when this happens are a mere phone call away, and when you ring them up and tell them what has gone wrong they won't patronise you about it; they'll say something like "Well, I *think* it *might* be (such-and-such)"—even when they know for certain that the only way you could have got where you now are is by making some really dumb error which only a complete novice with an IQ rating somewhere in the low 40s would make, they'll *still* put it like that, and spare your feelings—and tell you how to put it right, or how to get from the mess you are in to where you were trying to go, or whatever else.

(If you aren't lucky enough to have such people in your life, what you'll have to do is consult the assembly instruction booklet, er, the manual. Yes. Well. Good luck.)

And to revert to the new toy model for a moment, there is another distinct similarity between your new computer and (uh) your new train set. You need to choose your friendly experts with enormous care. Otherwise you will end up, as so many small boys have done over the years, watching rather sadly whilst Daddy sets up the railway, I mean sorry whilst yer Expert sorts out the software, and makes it do all sorts of interesting things which you know perfectly well you won't ever be able to repeat because it has all happened so quickly and the explanation of how it did it doesn't include a step-by-step note of what was actually done.



After this has happened, you may well need to start again. (Swallows and Amazons readers will remember Dick and Dot resteping the mast when they first sailed Scarab, after Nancy and Peggy had done this for them so fast that they couldn't see what was happening.) Dave Langford is my witness, I once rang him up and asked him to talk me through reinstalling WordPerfect 5.1 in DOS for a machine he had set up mere days before; in the interim an expert had laid hands on it, and I couldn't do a thing with it. He was very good about the whole business, and didn't try to correct anything, he just told me how to wipe the slate clean and start up from scratch, talking me through it on the phone. There are probably technical terms for the process of wiping a computer clean and doing whatever it was that I did under his patient instruction, but I don't know them. I do know that it didn't involve a large electromagnet, which was what I had been contemplating at one point just to see what that did to a computer which sat there and refused to start up.... It didn't even involve my axe.

What I also know is that during the several hours before I admitted defeat and rang him, when I was wrestling with that machine in tears of exasperation because what was going on made *no sense* and I couldn't find the relevant bits in any manual because they were all called something different from what they had been called in the manual for the previous set-up, I felt exactly like a child who is bitterly disappointed by a new toy which doesn't do what it is meant to. The sensation was identical. It's a form of misery I hadn't experienced for the best part of thirty years, and it threw me straight back into the mindset of a child who is cross and sad and frustrated. I childishly hated the machine which had caused it. In fact, I never did get

to love that computer, and when the chance came to abandon it and move to a nice new one, I did it like a shot.

So I want to put this thought to all the people who do understand computers intuitively, and who can't somehow get to grips with the idea that there might be anyone who is still happily using a PCW and doesn't *want* to upgrade thank you.... that anyone might not like computers, or want them, or trust them, or see any need for a new one. It will do no good to explain all the advantages, at this point. You may, if you have a nice user-friendly computer, allow such a person to play with your computer over a period of some weeks, making sure that you are always at hand to explain what is going on when the thing suddenly says that an error of type 12 has occurred (I know that you won't have the faintest idea what this means either, nobody does, it's a plot, but at least you'll know that it isn't the end of the world and you'll know how to stop it from happening all the time) or blandly refuses to delete a file or whatever other cute trick it may think up. By such means you may manage to convince this poor technologically challenged individual that the newer computer is not actively hostile, just very, very stupid; that it's not the user who is the moron, but may be the machine that is being uncooperative. After a few months of this gradual running-in the patient may start to feel that there is something in this more modern computing stuff after all: at which point you must at all costs make sure that the computer he gets is the same as yours, or as near as can be managed, so that he can feel triumphant about knowing how to fool the thing into doing what he wanted.... Yes, I occasionally say "nah-nah-nee-nah-nah" to this one, when it has tried to mess me about and I've known how to stop it from doing its worst to me. See? Childish. Immensely satisfactory, too. I won, I won, I won. Beat you! Heh. I wonder what percentage of computers have "You Bastard" as their owners' pet-name for them?



What you are dealing with when you try to convince someone that a new computer is a wonderful thing, you see, is not the rational adult you thought you knew. It may be that what you have is a six-foot-plus unhappy child with a beard and no faith in a new toy. And what's more, the adult you thought you knew may be entirely unaware that this is the case. So treat him gently; don't bully him; don't try to talk to him about it in a reasonable way. Reason has nothing to do with this. Computers bring out the disappointed child in us. They don't do what we want them to. They come without the batteries.

—Chris Bell

The Beast of Bodmin Terrace

George's appearance in issue 9 of *Plokt* as a laptop companion has resulted in a small but vocal group of admirers who claim that the cat didn't get an even break. As his doting stepmother, I agree that the odds were stacked against him in comparison testing carried out by people who think that noisy, smelly babies too stupid to live are in any way a good idea.

George was included as a fixture of our house. A proper appreciation of George would be enhanced by knowing more about his environment. We bought the house in May 1993 from a couple called Mr and Mrs Hern. It's not a beautiful house: it's a red brick cube, and we are encouraging ivy and Virginia Creeper over it as fast as we can. Only the other day, Steve was outside with the staple gun, attaching fronds of creeper to the top of the garage. We have to do this because our particular Virginia Creeper has a marked preference for doing exactly that: creeping. It has filled the gap between us and the neighbour, it is choking the tiny bit of garden next to the drive and shows imminent signs of setting off down the road to invade Poland. Maybe we could encourage it more to fulfil its desired function if we start calling it a Virginia Climber.

Because the house was large and reasonably priced, we brushed aside a few minor drawbacks. Chief among these were the world's most inefficient kitchen (doors in three of the four walls), a downstairs loo that you can only reach from outside the house and a sitting tenant.

On one evening visit to the Herns we found ourselves gazing at a round black fur cushion on the brown armchair in the room with brown geometric carpet and brown floral wallpaper. We noticed it mainly because it was the only thing in the room out of keeping with the colour scheme. Oh, said Mrs Hern airily, that's George. The round black fur cushion ignored us, curling up tighter to defy eviction from its brown haven.

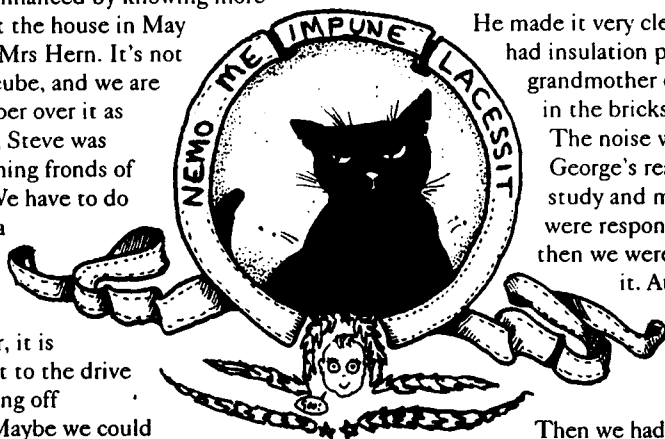
Years ago, a large black tomcat with a sullen expression and a limp just moved in. Eventually, the Herns accepted the inevitable and formalised the arrangement by calling him George and having him neutered. This appeared to make no difference whatever to his bad temper, his propensity to spray and his fondness for getting into fights.

Mysteriously, the Herns weren't able to take him with them.

In fact, they were going to have him put down. At the time we didn't appreciate the sense of this, and chorused as one "Oh, no, you can't possibly do that. We'll have him." George showed his gratitude for the next few months by hissing, spitting and trying to flay any living creature that came within three feet of him, this being the approximate reach of his claws.

The Herns kept him in at night, and let him out every morning at exactly 5:20 am. Now, Steve and I are not your 5:20 am kind of people. But we believe in peace through superfluous technology, so a week after we moved in, Steve installed an electronic cat flap in the back door and George's collar was decorated with a magnet which would let him in and out. We didn't have to train him to use it. He just barged through right from the start, only having to twist his shoulders a little bit sideways to fit. He had obviously already perfected the technique on other people's cat flaps.

By day, George stalked the neighbourhood, *il Gatto di Tutti i Gatti*, but after dark he had been penned safely inside. Now we had upset the natural balance and let him loose on the helpless Creatures of the Night. One morning I went outside to find the whole back yard fluffy with several colours of fur and a trail of blood down the side and across it. George eventually appeared and curled up on a pile of the Herns' tasteful yellow floral curtains. When he got up a few hours later he left a circle of dried blood. He limped for a few days, but there were no more major fights after that. Just the odd skirmish, to stay in trim.



He made it very clear that it was His House. When we had insulation put in, it involved using the grandmother of all dentist's drills to make holes in the bricks all the way around the first floor. The noise was like being inside a blender. George's reaction was to march upstairs to the study and mount guard in the doorway. If we were responsible for His House's destruction then we were damn well going to go down with it. At one point a workman dropped a bale of fibreglass insulation the size of a coffee table right beside him. George merely glared.

Then we had new carpet. Two sturdy chaps arrived and started bringing in their tools and the rolls of underlay. After a while a plaintive voice came up the stairs "Ere, is this cat yours?" and we found George positioned in the hall, refusing to let them back in.

Two doors up live an elderly couple who call him Top Cat. He answers when called as Top Cat, not surprisingly, as they feed him milk, chicken and kitchen scraps. Oh, no, the old chap told me solemnly, he won't eat cat food. I showed him the binful of empty tins but his expression made it plain that they were just decoys put there to fool him. Or that we ate the stuff ourselves. The man over the road also gives George milk (he won't drink semi-skimmed, mind,) and the bacon out of his butties.

Another neighbour was a bit less charitable: "Getting a bit deaf in his old age, is he? Going blind, then?" Feeling guilty about the foreign policy of our Virginia Creeper (it was that neighbour), I assured him George was in full possession of his faculties.

"Well, the other day, when I come home he was lying right in the middle of the road, right?"

Er, yes. George long ago worked out that you don't have to move out of shadows as often if you do that.

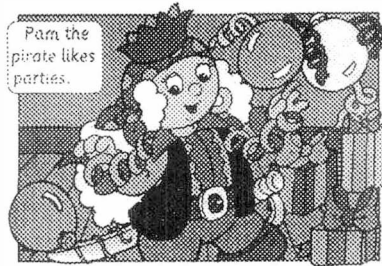
"Only I done a three point turn. Right all the way round him and he never moved once."

When he was younger, George would climb the lilac tree in the back yard and bite off branches, chew them a bit then drop them. The Herns once had to take him to the vet to remove a small branch he had got stuck across the roof of his mouth.

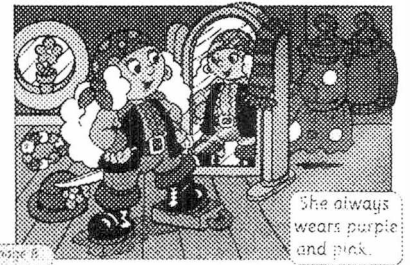
Now that he's older and a lot more milk, bacon, chicken, etc has passed under the bridge, so to speak, George is content to spend his days sitting under the lilac tree, guarding the hole in the back fence. Rumours that he is too fat to get up the tree any more are widely denied. All manner of fearsome creatures live in the vast blackberry thicket at the bottom of our garden, but Westbourne Terrace is safe in the knowledge that it has a guardian who is even worse.

—Giulia De Cesare

A Child's Garden of Fandom



Sue has recently got a job ("I had to sell my soul into slavery for a new car") colouring children's comics. When we looked at some examples of her oeuvre, we realised that such characters as Pam the Purple, Party-loving Pirate translated only too well into fannish terms. We could start off with, oh, Jim the Jactitating Jerd [do you mean Jim Trash or Jim de Liscard?—Ed] and then...



A

...is for Ashley the Ambivalent Aardvark



B

...is for Brian the Bibulous Bookworm

C

...is for Claire the Crap Cormorant [isn't a Liver Bird a crap cormorant?]



D

...is for D the Dismal Dominatrix

E

...is for Eira the Erotic Egret

F

...is for Foxy the Furtive Fetishist

G

...is for Gregory the Grouchy Gostak

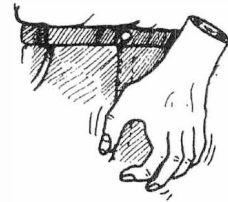
H

...is for Headlong the Hirsute Hedonist



I

...is for Ian the Irrepressible Itch



J

...is for Jaïne the Jutting-out Jezebel

K

...is for Kari the Knickerless Kelt

L

...is for Lilian the Lecherous Lemming

M

...is for Martin the Megalomaniac Mouse

N

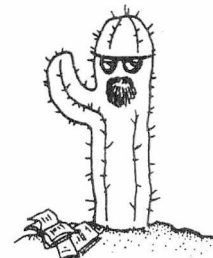
...is for Noel the Nestling Numbat [see Claire's Capacious Clearance...]

O

...is for Oliver the Official Ops Manager

P

...is for Paul the Prickly Pedant



Q

...is for Queen Ynci the Questionable Quetzalcoat

R

...is for Rhodri the Raucous Rodent

S

...is for Siddall the Sad Sacofricosist

T

...is for Tobes the Topping Twink

Ü

...is for Ülika the Ubiquitous Überwensch

V

...is for Vinç the Vacillating Vole

W

...is for Walt the Well-Worshipped Wombat

X

...is for XXXX the XXXX XXXX [censored on advice from our lawyers]

Y

Yngvi ...is a Louse

Z

...is for Zander the Zinging Zebu

Now then children, be sure to come back next issue when we get onto numbers (with ½R the ½-baked ½wit) and punctuation (with &ders the &rogynous &roid).

Sue and the new love of her life



We'd have got a photo of her draped across the bonnet except we were worried that she'd dent it...

Life Imitates *Plokta* Dept.

A TV programme called *TV Dinners* has excited much comment because one of the shows visits a family serving up the placenta of their first-born child. The mother brought the placenta home from hospital ready-frozen, and cooked it up in several different ways, including placenta paté, at the baby's naming ceremony. The TV presenter, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, reckoned it was delicious, but several of their guests decided to forgo the opportunity.

The family also buried the umbilical cord underneath a rowan tree in the garden as part of the ceremony, in a traditional pagan ritual traced all the way back to *The Wicker Man*.

Meanwhile, questions have been asked in Parliament. A mad MP described the programme as "encouraging cannibalism" and demanded that it be banned.

Remember folks, you read it here first.



Gail Courtney ponders the dangers of having a nickname that starts with an unusual letter of the alphabet. And who sawed her boat, anyway?

Following the problems we had with our last set of fanzine reviews, we've been looking around for a new reviewer. Eventually we found one lurking around the litter tray...

George the Cat's Fanzine Reviews

I had better come clean. These fanzine reviews are not by George. However, *Plokta* seems to have acquired the reputation of being as cuddly, sweet and generally adorable as an old pussycat. "Oh, don't mind him," said Giulia. He's an old cat and a bit set in his ways." George is the first cat I've met that keeps his claws unsheathed when he's asleep. Just in case.

First off the pile this month is *AlloCAte*, a "personal fan magazine" from Alex McLintock, 82A Beresford Avenue, London, W7 3AP. The editorial includes the disclaimer "Don't expect articles with proper beginnings, middles and ends. These are self-indulgent writings." No kidding.

We find out about Alex's odd personal habits (washing up after parties), what he does on long train journeys (listens to a walkman, and yes, he tells us what albums), his irrational belief that trains on non-intersecting tracks will nevertheless crash and what he did in Champagne (drank Pimms). All right, so I lied about the last one. He actually drank champagne.

I am, of course, picking out the good bits. More typical is the beginning of a dreadful article about Alex's work in computer networks. (At least as bad, but not quite as long, as the one from Simon Bisson that we didn't print in *Plokta*.) Just when I was seeking out the eyelid matchsticks, it stops. Phew. Alex then explains that he lacked enthusiasm for finishing it, and therefore thought long and hard about leaving it in. And then made the wrong decision, evidently. But then, this whole fanzine feels like a cutting room floor.

Alex will be helping with Intuition's newsletter. Here's a hint from an old hack; *alot* is not a word. It's the way he must have added it to his spellchecker's dictionary that bothers me.

All this could probably be forgiven in a neo making their first foray into the grand bright world of fanzines. But Alex has been a fan for several years, and has a wide range of fanac including two previous fanzines. So why this, why now? He's a nice chap, has he no shame? Worse is the suspicion that he may believe that other fanzines are like this, that we all just print out the unedited outpourings of daily diaries written on the Tube.

I'd much rather read the unedited outpourings of a man who makes a habit of destroying female undergarments. Michael Ashley sent me *Saliromania 11* because I am allegedly depicted therein. The use of captioned photos is one of the best things about this fanzine. In a strange synchronicity, *Saliromania*, like *AlloCAte*, contains a half-finished article about the editor's work. However, this one is sharply written, perceptive, and you wouldn't know it wasn't finished if the fanzine didn't tell you. More controversial is Ashley's opener, a stylish and scorching attack on *Banana Wings*. He accurately pegs *Banana Wings* as a product of the settled middle classes. But his legitimate criticisms are lost in a hugely entertaining tirade of unreasonable abuse. Ultimately, his criticism is like candy floss; fun to read but insubstantial. So *Banana Wings* isn't what you want from a fanzine, then? So what? Just because you don't find points of contact with the lives of the editors doesn't make their lives, interests and writings less valid.

Certainly, one of *Banana Wings*' faults is to print too much of most of the letters it receives. This fault is shared by *Saliromania*, which appears to take printing a facsimile of each letter as a badge of courage. While every letter in this issue contains something interesting, the overall effect is one of flabbiness. Whether flabbiness is a worse sin in a 14-page fanzine than a 60-page one is left as an exercise for the reader.

The final article in *Saliromania* is a much weaker tale of alcoholic excess and an abusive lifestyle. I was strangely reminded of Kev McVeigh's *Adventures in Failure*. It's funny the way in which some people think that drinking, staying up late, and aimlessly pondering the purpose of life is an intrinsically better subject for fanwriting than the rigors of Sunday afternoon at IKEA. While it's easy to see why Michael Ashley is a Nova winner, I'd like to see him sustain his quality for an entire fanzine.

A number of editors who do manage to sustain their quality for entire fanzines are the pseudonymous but plural EB Frohvet. Of course, we're not talking about the same quality standard here. I'm slightly surprised to see that *Twink* is now up to issue 8, but not as surprised as I am that we're up to issue 11. EB nail their colours to the mast in the editorial, inviting contributions on books and other 'fandom-related' subjects. You are therefore unlikely to find articles in *Twink* about either IKEA or excess. Instead, we regularly have low-level book reviews (think *Paperback Inferno*) of books I don't plan to read, capsule reviews of fanzines which demonstrate a completely different critical context to my own (though they seem to quite like *Plokta*), usually two or three articles, and a lively loccol.

This issue, the lead article is an interview by Margaret B Simon, of Bobbi Sinha-Morey, a poet of whom I've never heard, let alone read. The interview is banal and gives no indication of why you would wish to read the poetry. Worse, it includes no examples. I'm left with a dark suspicion that Bobbi Sinha-Morey is the poetry-writing pseudonym of Margaret B Simon, and a certainty that EB should have bounced this piece. Possibly they felt obliged to run it because of all the (generally good) artwork that Margaret has supplied to *Twink*. A terrible choice for a lead article—was it the first to arrive?

I'm much more interested in EB's thoughts on who we ought to nominate for the fanzine Hugo and why. They outline some of the major factors that seem to lead to regular nominations, and query their validity. They then proceed to fall into the same trap themselves. Despite the fact that they've never seen an *Ansible* (look out for a care package from us, EB), they describe it as an "excellent fanzine." Similarly, they note that fanzines which continue to be published for a long time are more likely to be nominated, while supporting *FOSFAX* for just this reason. Eventually, they conclude that top of their nomination list is *The Reluctant Famulus*. Strangely, *TRF* is a fanzine much like *Twink* only more so. Their other recommendations are *FOSFAX*, *MSFire* (which I have not

seen) and *Attitude* (the only fanzine on their list which is also on mine).

EB lament their lack of UK trades, but it's hard to see *Twink* and *Saliromania* having many points of commonality. *Twink* is a sercon fanzine, and sercon simply isn't what I'm looking for in fanzines. It can't be a coincidence that even the most serious British fanzines have at least some personal or frivolous content. I refer, of course, to *International Revolutionary Gardener #1*, the fanzine formerly known as *FTT*. Like *Twink*, *International Revolutionary Gardener* is clear about its boundaries: "IRG will...continue to reflect our interests and concerns, irrespective of whether they intersect with fandom at large and whether the resulting publication can truthfully be described as a 'science fiction fanzine'." Much more my sort of thing.

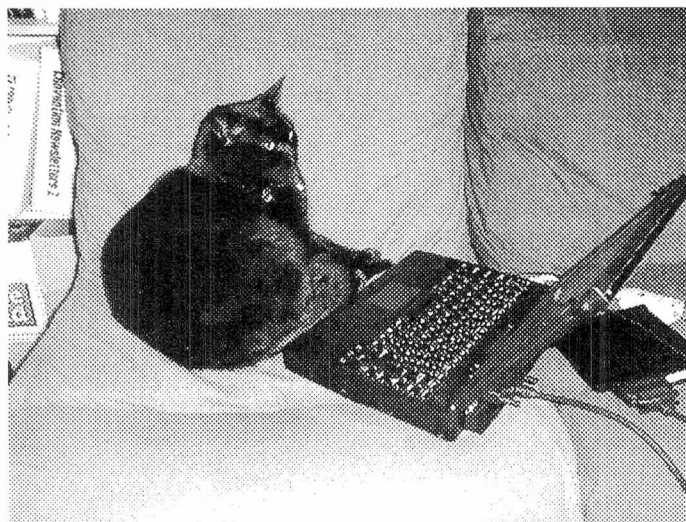
So, it's business as usual for Joseph Nicholas and Judith Hanna, saving the planet one small garden at a time. This issue contains three carefully crafted articles, two from Joseph and one from Judith. Joseph moves explicitly from re-titling the fanzine to seeking solutions to the world's problems and back again; Judith lets the same principles shine from within her article about what she's been up to lately. *IRG* is topped off with a letter column filled with both serious politics and tap-dancing turtles. My only real quibbles with all this are the lack of artwork and the sustained effort required to read the fanzine.

Little sustained energy is needed to read *Drunken Fuckwit*, edited by the eponymous Tobes. He provides an apt demonstration of the title by leaving the editorial address off the fanzine, presumably to encourage trades. Tobes does not see the need to provide a rationale for his fanzine, which is

unformatted, printed on one side of the paper, and appears to be unedited rambling. Much like *AllLoCate*, in fact, which is where we came in. Nevertheless, careful perusal indicates that either the fanzine has been crafted with considerable care or Tobes has a funnier stream of consciousness than most of us. *Drunken Fuckwit* is jolly entertaining in places, though it probably helps if you know some of the people he makes fun of. And like the best perzines, it gives an impression of what makes Tobes click; you feel you

can really understand the sort of chap who drinks Calvados from a hipflask for breakfast.

—Alison Scott



George at work on another article for *Plokta*

Fanzines Reviewed this Issue

AllLoCate, Alex McLintock, 82A Beresford Avenue, London, W7 3AP.

Saliromania 11, Michael Ashley, 15 Howgill Green, Woodside, Bradford, BD6 2SE

Twink 8, EB Frohvet, 4725 Dorsey Hall Drive, Box #A-700, Ellicott City, MD 21042, USA

International Revolutionary Gardener 1, Joseph Nicholas & Judith Hanna, 15 Jansons Road, South Tottenham, London N15 4JU

Drunken Fuckwit 3, Tobes Valois, Somewhere in Jersey

I Can't Believe It's Not...

First it was cats and spiders, then gastropods... now insects. The Ploktarazzi must think I'm soft in the head—what do insects have to do with fandom? But then what do treacle mines...?

I spent an hour on the 'phone, during work time and at national rate, all because of a bloomin' butterfly. The little insect has been lodging on the landing since the autumn, just latched on to the wall under the window. Then it woke up—in January, bad idea. I didn't even know that butterflies survived the winter in adult form, they're so fragile I sort of assumed that they all died off and only eggs or pupae hatched in the spring. So the butterfly, a Red Admiral or Peacock, I can't tell which is which, started flapping weakly on the landing, this wasn't good; for one thing was likely to get trodden on or starve or—most likely—get turned into deeply fascinating but short lasting cat toy; butterflies are about Spookie's level of prey. My knowledge of them is limited but it seemed such a shame to just let it die if there was something I could do so I put a little saucer of honey in front of it, a cloche of a biscuit tin over it and got out the 'phone book. Nothing in the index for 'Butterflies, care and feeding thereof' or 'Vet—small animals (and stray butterflies)' so I called Chester Zoo.

It took forever to negotiate my way through the automatic "if you have a star on your dial, press now" system which seems to have infiltrated most switchboards and get to a real live operator. She didn't seem at all fazed by my call—perhaps they frequently get calls from dotty women with stray insects wombling about their houses? She put me through to the invertebrate house who were nice but had no more idea about what to do than I did, they gave me the phone number of London Zoo—they have all manner of specialists. So it was call number two and another automated system to slowly negotiate. The operator tried to contact their insect specialist but he wasn't answering the 'phone (probably sick of his important and well paid research work being interrupted by dotty old butterfly lovers) so she gave me the number of the London Butterfly house. Automated system number three. Aargh! I was really going off the idea of helping out my little fluttering friend—especially as I expected to be told that there was nothing I could do and to put it out of its misery. But, eventually, success! A human voice and, at last, a butterfly expert, Dave. He didn't seem to think I was at all mad and told me to feed it some honey diluted with water then to get it into a cool, dark, dank place—anywhere in our house, really, to (hopefully) go back into hibernation until the spring.

So I diluted the honey, placed it and the butterfly in one of the drawers from a little Ikea storage box—just the right size and with a built in ventilation home (oh, and a fannish connection too!) a paper lid to keep it in then a new home in a dark corner of the spare room. When I looked in on it the following morning it had drunk all the honey water and was sat on the edge of the saucer (in the sort of expectant pose I normally expect a certain obese feline to be in.) I put some more honey water it, Dave-the-butterfly-man told me to feed it up well, the plan being to lift the water out and, with luck, it will go back into hibernation until the spring. Then I began to agonise, what if I overfed it? I mean, I obviously overfed both Spookie and myself, the thought of an obese butterfly... it'd never get off the ground for a start or maybe it won't go back too sleep if it's too full, it'll just sit there, waiting for me to supply it with more honey water and we are almost out of honey and I'm not buying a whole new jar for one blasted butterfly... Then I started to worry about the ventilation hole. It's a decent size so my little visitor won't suffocate but is too small for it to make an escape bid from. However, it is a large enough hole for one of the massive house spiders Spookie is so

bad at catching to break in and have itself a meal on the fly—sudden panicked thoughts of lifting the paper in the spring and finding only a pair of wings and a well satisfied spider. A net curtain over the hole will hopefully act as a barrier.

So a corner of the spare room has an Ikea drawer with a little paper lid, a net over it and a little note reading 'Caution! Butterfly' just in case I forget what the little tableau is about. As if.

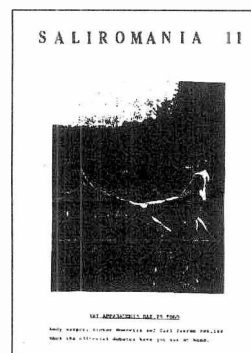
Am I soft or what? Though I am the woman who burst into tears when a particularly huge and fine bumble bee bimbled into a gas flame on the kitchen and burnt off all its hair, wings, legs—it just lay there, buzzing sadly until I put my foot down on it—can you imagine the vet's response if I'd rushed *that* in as an emergency case!

If I open the box up in the spring and find out that the little bug has curled up its toes I will be so upset! (If you see me in tears at Eastercon, you will know why.)

—Sue Mason

I'm Sorry, I Haven't a Clute

ROBERT ROBINSON: And welcome to this week's edition of *Call My Bluff*, where our panellists try to divine the meanings of a wide range of obscure fanzine titles. First today, we have *Saliromania*.



TEDDY: Oh, of course I'm familiar with *saliromania*, which is the practice of destroying ladies' underwear for sexual pleasure. Seems an awful waste, though.

MIKE SIDDALL: Nonsense, Teddy. *Saliromania* is from the Latin *salinus*, and is the practice of gaining sexual pleasure from precious bodily fluids such as blood, sweat and tears. (FX: hastily stuffs his hanky back into his pocket).

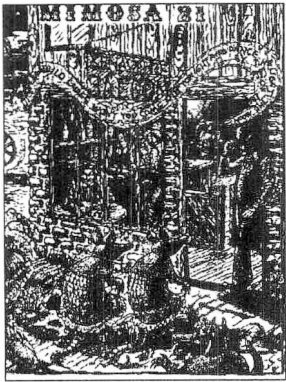
DR. PLOKTA: Do you have a hole in that pocket, Mike? As an expert on acronyms, I can tell you that you're both wrong. *SALIROMANIA* is in fact a commonly used acronym on *soc.psychopathy.leeds*, and stands for *Scraping A Living in Remote Outpost*, Michael Ashley's *Neuroses Imitate Art*.
















ROBERT ROBINSON: Well, well. Which is it? As usual, answers will appear at the end of the programme. On to our next fanzine, which is *Mimosa*. Panellists:

JOAN PATERSON: A *mimosa* is a term for a particular sort of psychiatric patient; in this case one who has a pathological attraction to outdated forms of reproduction, in particular mimeo.

JUDITH HANNA: I'm afraid that's just silly, Joan. As a gardening Australian, I'm particularly well-equipped to define this one. *Mimosa* is the genus of a number of leguminous

plants, including *mimosa pudica*, the Sensitive Plant. It is also used more generally for acacias, especially the Australian Wattle-tree.



MICHAEL ABBOTT: In fact, you're both barking up the wrong wattle-tree here. Mimosa, or to give it its proper name, , is the main trading port of my native country, , known in English as Wingdingia. Wingdingians always talks in the present tense, and have a saying             

ROBERT ROBINSON: ♠♣♥♦ ♡♢♣♤ ♡
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 ♠♣♥♦ The next title is *Warhoon*.



TOBES: Ah, Warhoon. A word to conjure with. In Ireland they *have* *shebeens*, where you can pick up a drop of the local *potteen*, but to get the best underground Jersey calvados, made from the native apple, er, potato, er, lighter fluid, er, whatever I can get, you would have to seek out a *warhoon*. I have some calvados here—would anybody like some? (FX: hands round hipflask)

EVERYBODY ELSE: No, thanks.

ROGER ROBINSON (no relation): I wouldn't believe that, no matter how much of Tobes' calvados I drank. When I hear the word Warhoon, I get a sense of Déjà vu, or should I say, Dejah Thoris. Warhoon is a city of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Mars, well known for its Hordes.

PHIL NANSON: Actually, you're both wrong. Warhoon was the evil cousin of Elric of Melniboné, who betrayed him to take over the Dragon Throne.

ROBERT ROBINSON: And wielder of the dread sword Mournblade, if I recall correctly. How about *Twink*.

KENNETH BELL: (FX: Reads from pink card) I'm not sure I understand what this means, but it says on this card that *Twink*

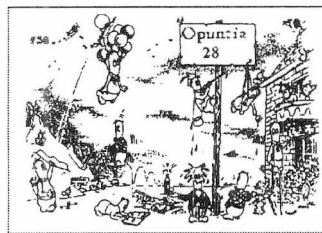
is gay slang for cute brainless gay jailbait. What does that mean, Auntie Sue?



SUE MASON: (FX: hastily stops sketching) I haven't the faintest, dear. But in any event, a twink is really a clueless newbie, and is Internet slang. Not that I'm any more familiar with the Internet than you would be with a wide range of exciting...

REVEREND SPOONER (boffing his queer) that's butter
ollocks, Sue. Frohvet themselves explain that the title of the
fanzine comes from the rhyme "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star".

ROBERT ROBINSON: Or is it, perchance, all of the above?
On to our next word, *Opuntia*:

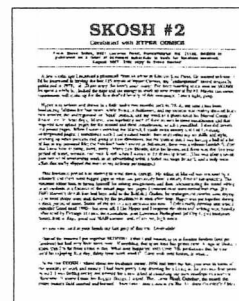


BRIAN AMERINGEN: I'm glad you asked me this one, Robert. *Opuntia*, originally "oh-pun-tear" is the drop of liquid that is expelled from the lachrymal ducts in response to a particularly painful example of paranomasia.

CHRISTINA LAKE & LILIAN EDWARDS: No, that can't be right, Brian, or you'd have put it on a t-shirt. In actual fact, an opuntia is a prickly pear.

SEAMAN DOP: Bollocks! I've known for many years that "Opuntia" is the practice of drilling holes in cacti for sexual satisfaction. The desert people have a slogan: "A woman for duty, a boy for pleasure, and an opuntia for breakfast ecstasy" (FX: shifts uncomfortably in his seat)

ROBERT ROBINSON: Would you like to borrow my tweezers, Dop? Meanwhile, I wonder if the panellists would like to ponder the true meaning of *Skosh*?



SUE MASON (again): No, Kenneth, I'll explain to you later. Skosh is American slang meaning "a bit of stuff", and comes from the Japanese 'sukoshi'.

STEVEN CAIN (juggling four skosh balls and a baby): Chotto matte kudasai, Sue. It does come from the Japanese sukoshi, but is now a juggling term, for a rubber juggling ball with thousands of tiny protuberances. These were originally used by geishas to provide sexual satisfaction.

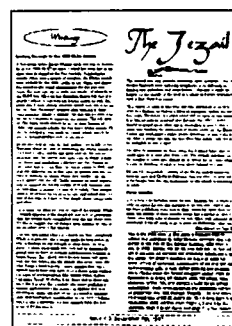
ANDREW ADAMS: No, no, I'm a juggler and I know that's rubbish. *Skosh* is one of the few mainstream *Babylon 5* fanzines, and is a reference to the enigmatic ambassador Skosh.

ROBERT ROBINSON (in rubber environment suit): One perfect moment of fandom. The owls are not what they seem. *The Jezail*.

JAINE WEDDELL (juttingly): "Jezail" is an old Hebrew word for trollop, used particularly for women from Jezreel. The most famous example of a Jezail is the alliterative Jezebel. So Andy is talking about a loose woman.

HUGH MASCETTI (explosively): That's a lovely dress you're not quite wearing, Jaine. But you're quite wrong about Andy

Hooper, who is in fact a loose cannon. More precisely, a flintlock or musket used by Afghans. (FX: Woof! Woof! Bang!)



ZEV SERO (unorthodoxly): Well, you're right to set it in the Middle East, Hugh, but you should know that it has nothing to do with Hebrew, Jaine. It is in fact the Muslim second morning call to prayer, and is widely considered to be idolatry, particularly when practised in a handicapped parking space.

ROBERT ROBINSON: And there we have it, and Jezail is the last word for this week. But I bet you're all agog to find out the correct answers, and here they are. [Ed: Here, our transcript fades out, at the point where the original audio tape appears to have been eaten by a baby.]

Lokta Plokta

Kim Huett
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Australia
(rub@macquarie.matra.com.au)

If Eddie Cochrane can't see how the X-Files is just Scooby Doo for the Nineties then she really, really needs to start taking some of the brown acid.

Eunice Pearson
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(ep@ribbon.demon.co.uk)

I've actually been to Harlech, Porthmadog and Barmouth so I could visualise those places while reading Dave Langford's holiday diary. Ah, but you want to try living in Wales during the winter months. Now that's true endurance! I live in a small village called Pantyscallog (Pant for short) which is more often than not, shrouded in clouds during the autumn and covered in fog during the winter. When it gets really cold, the sheep come down off the mountain and rummage around in dustbins, munch plants and generally make nuisances of themselves. A bit like the tourists that come here in summer.

I like treacle. When I was a Girl Guide I used to go round collecting for our annual jumble sale, and one of my mother's friends always made treacle toffee as her contribution. I bought as much of it as I could afford out of my pocket money! I love the sharp, bitter taste of black treacle, but then I prefer dark chocolate that's

especially sugar-less, so what would I know? But treacle jelly? No thanks, I think I'll pass on that taste treat!

Might I suggest that you try installing several cats for the Warm Things In Your Lap experiment? I have four cats who all try to cascade on one frail human form, rather like trying to run several programs at the same time, making Windows 95 groan and complain. The girls like to sit, one on the human's lap and the other on the chest. The chest-sitting cat prefers to use female humans as they come with a built-in ledge to stop said feline from sliding onto the other one. This is useful since our girls hate each other and will not touch each other if at all possible. Usually, the younger boy cat sits on the human's feet while the older boy sits on the arm of the chair within reach of the add-on stroking drivers.

Steve Jeffery
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I can't send you a Nova Award 'cos I came further down the polls than you did, so can I take a time-share on your third place? You need to practice your terminal embarrassment podium look more. These things are awarded out of cruelty, after all (look what it nearly did to poor Sue).

You may "don the outer garments of fantasy, but your underwear is full of supprises" (quote: Philip G Williamson, who will regret this, having it broadcast in *Ansible*). In your case, the outer garments are a return to the traditional *Plokta* front

page design, after a couple of inspired spoof covers, but inside... Oh, this is wonderful. This has to be among the best alternate world convention reports I've seen for a long while, even more so as it nicely parodies the current *Acnestis* meme on Patrick O'Brien novels (but no mention of wombats?), and heaves close (me hearties) to an Alan Coren piece on 'pirate barbers' in the style of *Treasure Island*. "Avast behind!" "It's not that big, is it?"

So that's how these things are decided. I wondered about the smell of cordite (and the goats) in the corridors.

2000AD, I thought, started very well but the scansion seemed to go to pot (maybe laudanum) around the middle. I did like the person@porlock tag line. [The scansion accurately reflects the original, which did indeed go to pot in the middle.]

Treacle jelly? What on earth possessed you with the idea that something that combines one of the major ingredients of hectography with another that is the confectionery equivalent of sump oil would be edible? Why not just boil up old crudsheets with a corflu dressing? (Andy Hooper might go for it, as "the fine odour of old mimeography" pervades the kitchen, and probably melts the smoke alarm). But I didn't realise that there actually was a real treacle well in Oxford. Since I can't think of any possible alternative uses for treacle (you could try re-grouting the bath or gutters with it I suppose, but the run-off might be toxic), I would have it taken outside with a long pair of tongs and safely disposed in a controlled explosion by the bomb squad.

It will get rid of a potential danger to hearth, home, Pod and George.

Of course 'guillemot' can be used as a verb. Do not E B Frohvet and Kate Shaefer both come from the land that gave us General Alexander Haig and his unique contribution to the English(?) language: "Haig, in Congressional hearings before his confirmatory, paradoxed his auditioners by abnormalling his reponses so that nouns were verbed, verbs nouned and adjectives adverbised. He techniqued a new way to vocabulary his thoughts so as to informationally uncertain anybody listening to what he had actually implicated." [Spectator Feb 1981] The first time I typed the line "Dear Sir," in Word 7, I got Microsoft's irritating little paper clip wanting to tell me how to write a letter. Somebody should invent a desktop utility that allows you to nuke the little bastard on-screen and then sweep the pieces into the Recycle bin. I used to have mere qualms about upgrading Microsoft products. Now the prospect frankly terrifies me.

Kim Huett (again)

First of all a Joseph Nicholas story. He was quoted in a fanzine as writing 'Bollocks to the Internet'. Not long after seeing this I sent Judith an email about various matters and ended with 'How typical of Joseph to resent anything he can't tidy'. When Judith replied she replied 'Don't underestimate my little Attila's cleaning abilities'. I think we should all be very afraid because I can just see a virtual Joseph in little pink apron having a red-hot go.

Now I have that out of my system I must also admit to a terrible urge to spell your fanzine's title as *Plokta*? Does this say something about my subconscious? Or am I on to something here? Probably not, odds on *Plokta* is simply Gaelic for *Apparatchik*. That would certainly explain the morphing cover on #8.

I myself thought the termination of *Apparatchik* something of a mercy killing as it seemed to lose direction over the last twenty issues or so. With so many strong personalities involved it seemed to lose the clarity of vision it had while it was just Andy. It will be interesting to see if Andy can recreate the peak period of *Apparatchik* with *The Jesail*. My only hope is he does something a little different with the Fanzine Countdown. If there was one part of *Apparatchik* I never liked it was that. I always found it as sugary sweet as chocolate coated sugar cubes.

As for the question of E.B. Frohvet I must admit that having read an issue of *Twink* I've declined the offer to trade with him.

As far as I'm concerned life is short and I'm only going to trade for fanzines I know I want to read.

Having acquired most of the early issues from Memory Hole it's interesting to see how *Plokta* has evolved. I'm afraid I will have to agree with Paul Kincaid in his view that the early issues were very scrappy, both visually and in the quality of the writing. The good news is that with each issue the cabal demonstrated a slightly surer grasp of what was going to work. Keep this level of improvement up and you will soon be producing something the editors of *Wired* could only dream of.



The coverage of the roleplaying convention reminds me of a conversation I had with Kari and Phil while I was staying with them. As far as I can tell British and Australian roleplaying conventions have very little in common. This con report for example suggests programming such as panels and guests of honour are common occurrences down your way. I've been to more than a few Australian roleplaying conventions, in particular the annual Canberra bash which is one of the largest in this country, and I have to say they don't go in for non-gaming activities up here. Which is not to say committees haven't tried on occasion. It's more the case that the bulk of attendees don't want to stop gaming to attend anything else. The group I normally attend conventions with for example assume that if they going to go to the trouble and expense of travelling interstate they want a decent return in regards to the amount of time spent roleplaying. It's quite normal for us to play six or seven of the possible eight three hour sessions of a standard convention. The only aspects of roleplaying cons up here which seem to survive this obsession are the dealers room

(no sweat boss, the gnp of a small African nation can change hands in there during Cancon), and the animé video room.

Buck Coulson's declaration about your election coverage confirming his Seppo attitude to the British Government rather confused me. Then I recalled his fascination with animals capable of licking their own genitals and realised he meant he would have preferred the Tories to have won the election.

Sue's bit on decorating reminds me that friends of mine bought a house with a spare bedroom wallpapered in rather realistic visions of coconut tree fringed beaches. They're somewhat less than enamoured of this but I don't mind. If nothing else I'm pretty sure they'll eventually break down and hire me to remove it for them.

Walt Willis

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Northern Ireland BT21 0QD

I think this is the best *Plokta* yet, largely because of the piratical conreport. If it wasn't too fulsome I feel like saying that Seaman Dop is one of the great comic creations of English literature. I particularly admired the bit about splinters, but the whole thing is delightful, in both concept and execution.

[How does it feel to be our comic creation, Dop?]

It was a pleasant surprise to see *Warhoun* 28 featuring in the plot, even if it was only as a dead weight.

Antony J. Shepherd (Dop)

Ground Floor Flat, 76 Dartnell Rd,
Croydon, Surrey, CR0 6JA
(dop@carcosa.demon.co.uk)

Arrr... Thank 'ee very much for the last swashbuckling *Plokta*. I'm not quite sure what I did to deserve all that but it was funny anyway....

Either you are of course complete bastards or some ideas are simply inevitable, but I received *Plokta* a mere matter of days before producing an *Our Dog's Basket* which also had the idea of the next British Worldcon being held in the millennium dome. (But I had the best name. Mandelcon).

I was happy to see that I won't be the only person being lynched by the smofs if Tobes wins the Doc Weir... (I *do* keep typing Doc Weir—which would be a much better award.)

David Langford

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(ansible@cix.compulink.co.uk)

I'm tempted to send you an eight-inch disk, utterly unreadable by standard or surviving non-standard 8" drives (experts have tried), being one of several containing the text of the 1979 *SF Encyclopedia* in the format of a long-junked typesetting machine. But I still vaguely feel that these useless disks should be kept together and preserved by the Foundation or some such. But here is a moose-related item, which may be unfamiliar to you if you haven't seen the Thog precursor *Pegasus Descending: A Treasury of the Best Bad Poems in English* ed. James Camp, X.J. Kennedy and Keith Waldrop (1971). This begins with a selection of notable opening lines, including—from Harry Edward Mills' very ethnic *The Square's Lullaby*—"Sleep, my little papoose; Thy father hunteth the moose." Try it on Marianne tonight.

Kim Huett, (yet again...)

The cover of *Plokta* #9 is nicely done though it is a pity that Marianne has such a serious expression. Perhaps it's unfair of me to point this out since not every baby is called upon to face the grim task of going at British fandom. Still, it could be worse, as far as I'm aware kissing babies isn't considered necessary when standing for TAFF.

In regards to the 'Warm Things in Your Lap' table I would like to point out the model used for the cat category was obviously not the best. I have an economy sized model which I can assure you would rate much higher in regards to noise, portability, suspend mode, findability, and staying where put. I would offer to give you a loan but since I have only the one, which would be difficult to replace, I can't risk having it damaged in transit.

I was impressed at the breathtaking cluelessness of Lloyd Penney's comment re ElderMOO. Perhaps he should look up 'social' in a dictionary before deciding what that includes. He might also like to check out the entry on 'cretin'.

Mae Strelkov

4501 Palma Sola, Jujuy, Argentina
Dear Marianne,

Why should I write to that bunch of idiots trying to raise Cain and you? You are very beautiful on the front cover, even if you see plainly (in your wistful way) that they are making fun of you. What nonsense are they saying? That you're just another mortal? You will surely still remember, (since forgetting begins once you join the

idiots on Earth in their chatter), you just *know* Life is great and there's no end to it. It's a ridiculous, artificial toy you're hugging. Throw it back at them and ask for something sensible—maybe a complete toy skeleton to set up? Tell-em it doesn't say anything to hug just a toy skull. You like your friends complete, with flesh also and nice churning red blood in their veins. (Ask for a Barbie doll, ha, ha!)

Is there no bureau where babies can complain against illustrations showing them totally enclosed in rope? Certainly, *Goo* is the sensible answer to such silliness. Would anyone imagine what you could have said once you learned this silly language we're currently using? What you already know is truer, brought with you from birth!

Your companion, that glossy black cat, no doubt understands you, but tolerates nonsense even though they give it as "Dr. Plokta" a mere laptop for expressing profound thought. Learn the pleasure of cat-psychology in *Life* and you'll never be bored. I have around 20 cats now till it's a real burden, and I'm passing out birth-control pills to those mommies left-and-right most desperately. I don't suppose your grownups will produce twenty babies shortly to keep you company. Just as well, maybe. Parents find babies hard to rear even when you've just one at a time, and it would be sad to see twenty babies roped like you are, in a row.

So you don't know how to purr and can only cry *Waaa* when compared with that black cat, so smug that it is. Don't let it get you down. Don't worry—cartoons are meaningless, not true. Ignore the test results they've printed: such grown-up humor is not to be taken seriously. Imagine comparing a baby with a lap-top. The cat might rate high marks too and so might a book, but you are the living message from Heaven and always will be (as we all are, if we but knew it). Books may contain messages, cats certainly do too, but no one can match you, dear Marianne.

Ah! So you're 9 kilos already? That's more than any cat of mine is, I fear. I want them fat, but feeding 20 cats at once so all share alike is a problem, I hope soon to have a small screened porch where I can feed the younger generations to the exclusion of the greedy elder cats who eat all. No problem to you, dear, unless you follow the "broad-and-easy highway" and avoid the Straight-and-Narrow as I suppose I too do. So, closing this letter with love, I'm your "Grandma Mae".

PS Keeping 20 cats indoors (unless they're all supplied with nappies) has proved impossible. I'm vanquished! Now I have to

sneak outdoors, or they all pour in, in one solid mass.

Kim Huett, (does he never sleep?)

Timing is everything so it was most appropriate this issue of *Plokta* reached me in the very week a wave of Tellitubbie durdum should descend upon me. Not that I've seen the little buggers themselves, some temporary employment and a bung video recorder has seen to that. On the other hand fate has conspired to ensure they have been mentioned everywhere from the latest episode of *The Vicar of Dibley* to the local newspaper over the last few days. Interestingly, though the question of which Tellitubby do people like best has come up several times. I don't know why they bother because Tinky Winky is the inevitable response. I can only assume tinky is one damn hot adjective that I'm not familiar with.

Was interested to read the truth about Andy Hooper in *Ye Olde Almanack* as I was beginning to wonder if he might not be a feral Tellitubbie. Now I think about it I must concede *Ye Andy* could easily be some sort of hive mind. For that matter have you ever considered that the same could probably be said about Pat McMurray? Actually, after reading *Ye Almanack* a vision did come to me in which it was discovered *Ye Andy* and *Ye Pat* were actually superheroes in disguise, here to save the planet for fandom. Every time some danger, eg. the NBW (Next British Worldcon) would threaten to destroy fandom they would put their rings together and in a flash of purple turn into Multifan, saviour of the faniverse.

What's with this issue anyway, was the mighty *Plokta* Cabal too busy playing pirates for fill their own fanzine? Sure looks like it cap'n what with all the Langford and Weston Apocrypha draped over various pages. Not that I mind pirating and would really like to sign up for your next voyage, pending the announcement of who will be filling the cabin boy position. Ooo aaargh, grease up the parrot Roger, it's going to be a long trip.

For that matter I don't especially mind the Weston or Langford presence though Dave might like to note that restful holidays in remote corners of the country work best if you stay put. If he and Hazel truly want rest and relaxation next time I would recommend they choose a window each to stare out and position armchairs accordingly. Whirlwind trips to every market town within middling distance can be idly considered but in no account attempt them as such faffle will get you to nowhere but exhaustion.

I hope you sent the remains of the treacle jelly to Christina Lake so she might relax after the exertions of a long overseas trip. It might also prove useful if she visits another mosquito-infested locality in the future.

To conclude I would like to point out I'm not so much interested in knowing how 'guillemot' works as a verb as discovering whether 'EB Frohver' can work as a pronoun.

Sheryl Birkhead,
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MD 20882-2819

I'm a bit curious—apropos of absolutely nothing—Novas, Ditmars, Auroras—are there other national awards?? I've asked if I would be able to vote/nominate for the Ditmars, and was told yes. (But I never seem to get my act together enough...)—are the Novas restricted to "citizens"? [*No, you need to be a member of Novacon.*]

The scavenger hunt list is great. The Lynches chuckled over some of the items, knowing *they* actually had the item.

Treacle, gingerbread—yes—what's parkin?

Joseph Major
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Prairie oysters are said to be a very tasty dish.

Editorial Condolences on the demise of the Brave Little Flatbed Scanner, which has passed from this world to a tech lab incorruptible, where there are no upgrades to trouble it.

Gee, and they thought our tales of Blackhearted Tim sailing on the account in the White Terror under the Jolly Ronald were bad.

Scavenger Hunt: No, I am not sending you my baby picture of me sitting with my feet in the toilet.

The P-Files: Good work. Usually you have to upload all of Windows 95 to get that result.

Lloyd Penney
1706-24 Eva Rd, Etobicoke, ON

Greetings to all you ravening maenads, especially Multiple Nova Award Winner Mark Plummer. Here's a letter from Multiple Aurora Award Winner Lloyd Penney on issue 10 of the Multiple Nova Award Losing *Plakta*. Well, to be nominated is an honour all in itself, but

nothing beats bringing the hardware home. May you go on to grab some Novas for yourselves.

Arrrr, ye scurvy knaves, thou hast crabbed t'gether a hard tale of the lazy lubbers that be British fandom...I hope the loccol has healed up smartly, or there'll be no place for this letter.

Yvonne and I are hard at work, assembling all the ingredients for our entry in the Scavenger Hunt. Actually, we already have most of the ingredients (except for the tacky Diana memento...probably already sold out), and you should be receiving an embarrassing package from Canada shortly. I hope that the bottle o' bubbly will travel the Atlantic safely and well.

Treacle pudding? Ecccccch! You could make several batches of this questionable treat, and do your own remake of The Blob... Honestly, would you eat anything that was black and gelatinous? Those two adjectives usually refer to tar or some petroleum derivative. I suspect that treacle pudding may be the closest thing we have, technologically speaking, to a stasis field. Arm the treacle pudding torpedoes, Mr. Sulu...

Jellied moose nose? Mighod, some people will eat anything. That's why such recipes are sent to Britain, where many strange food items are jellied, like eels...and treacle... I think jellied moose nose may have shown up in a Rocky and Bullwinkle cartoon.

Eh-oh! The Teletubbies are the spawn of Barney. We've already been warned that the Teletubbies are coming to Canada and the United States in April. If they have televisions in their tummies, I can only imagine where the cable connection is...or does a part of their anatomies constantly flash 12:00?

I'll wrap up this letter with a scary thought...Pod is Dop spelled backwards.

Pamela Boal
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I can vouch for the treacle well and for the fact that they just don't make things like they used to. Use by date for proper black treacle indeed! Even that runny stuff that people confuse with the real thing used to manage quite well without any dates, blowed if I ever heard of any one being poisoned by old golden syrup. Your Mum was quite correct, of course treacle keeps at the back of the larder for years, coming out only for ginger puddings and extra rich celebratory fruit cakes. There are

medicinal uses but far too unpleasant to mention in a delicate fanzine.

You seemed to have used rather more than usual the number of nicknames this ish, both established and I believe new coined. How about doing a favour for new fans and for old fans with a poor memory for names—publish a Who's Who. While I think I know which one of you is Tool Man and I would recognise Simo by sight, I haven't a clue about Seaman Dop's real name and as no doubt he gives his name rather than his nickname on LoCs I would like to know. As Tobes seems to be wearing a gas mask in the photo I have no way of remembering his real name even if I have met him. Also I confess I sometimes forget who are the life partners and who the fanzine partners in the Croydon Mafia.

We Also Heard From:

Teddy Harvia (a \$5 computer clock backup battery died and took the whole computer with it. My sync sank), **Sharon Sbarsky** (I did like the Almanac on the back, especially the reminder to nominate for the Hugos), **Richard & Nicki Lynch** (Please note CoA: Richard & Nicki Lynch P.O. Box 3120 Gaithersburg, Maryland 20885 U.S.A.), **Steve Green** (no wonder I feel burned out), **Bridget Hardcastle** (Gordon Brignal's local pub in Tadley is called The Treacle Mine—and thanks to *Plakta* I now know it is 'medicinal waters' he goes there for, rather than actual treacle.), **Margaret Austin**, **Steve Brewster** (I'm leaving my current address), **Tim and Jackie Duckworth** ("What the..." says Lauren, looking at the contents of her litter tray—one bin liner and three crumbs of cat litter (the vet wants us to collect a urine sample from her....)), **Mark Plummer** (Even Dop has been forced to concede that the latest issue is "quite good"), **Terry Ieeves** (Nostalgia for the days when I used to get to all the cons), **Lisa Major** (The almanac in back was especially cute, although you did fail to mention the rain of gefilte fish on Pesach, the first mule winner of the Kentucky Derby and the X-Files investigation of the huge waterlogged liner which mysteriously appears in New York Harbor on April 12)

Addresses of Contributors

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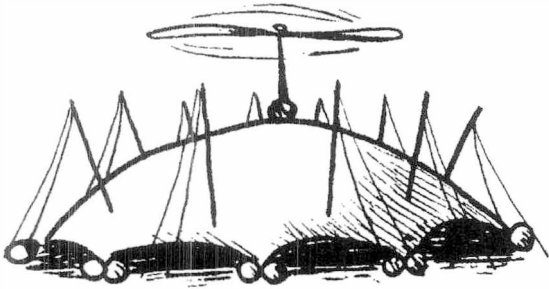
We've also had entries to the scavenger hunt from Brad Foster, Bridget Hardcastle and Peter Wareham. A full report with pictures will appear after Easter, but keep them coming, chaps!

Application For Millennium Funding

BEING a PROPOSAL submitted to the MILLENNIUM COMMISSION by the PLOKTA CABAL on behalf of British SF Fandom.

Insofar as Her Majesty's Government proposes to spend vast amounts of money on community projects and public works in order to celebrate the impending millennium, we feel it is only equitable that the science fiction fan community should ~~get its share of the loot~~ have the opportunity to participate in this noble endeavour. We present below a carefully considered proposal for such a programme.

Most importantly, we feel that the Millennium Dome should reflect fandom's role as part of the broader community [*some of us are much broader—Ed*]. This can be achieved by a small enhancement, as illustrated in the detailed blueprint attached.



As part of the programme of publicly sponsored sculpture, we recommend that a magnificent statue, *The Demon of the North*, be constructed on a prominent hillside between Leeds and Keighley (see p.1).

The millennium provides a natural opportunity for celebration. In fandom, our celebrations are conventions. We therefore propose the following support for cons:

- A new annual public holiday on the first Monday in November, to be known as Novacon Day.
- Increased NHS funding for research into the effects of a combination of sleep deprivation and alcohol abuse.
- Setting up a special centre of filking excellence in a soundproof building on Rockall.

Our proposal for the establishment of a fannish convention centre in Liverpool has been withdrawn, as this appears to already have happened.

Fandom recognises the special nature of the British agriculture industry, and wishes our proposal to support it. We think this can best be handled through a national programme of increased planting of the essential fannish crops of barley, coffee, hemp and twiltone.

In order to recognise the fundamentally spiritual nature of the millennium, the fountains in Trafalgar Square will run with Laphroaig for the year.

Naturally, we have not omitted to include the other areas of the United Kingdom in this proposal, and the following items will give it a truly national scope:

- Oblique House in Northern Ireland to be made a national monument and home of the British Olympic Ghoddminton team, affiliated to the National Sporting Academy.
- Scotland to be sprayed with the new pesticide SMOF-Away to extirpate all traces of Worldcon infestation. Further treatment may also be required in York, Bromley and Oman.
- The establishment of a National Reproductive Museum and centre of excellence for Gestetner repairs in Folkestone.
- Chair of fanzine criticism at Caprine University, Croydon, to initially be held by Michael Ashley. This will lead to the regeneration of Croydon as the Leeds of the South.
- The doshes of Haverfordwest to be ceremonially distimmed by the local gostak.
- The establishment of a national pub-crawl network, making it possible for the dedicated fan to proceed from Land's End to John O'Groats without ever sobering up.

In return for all this investment, UK SF fans will of course give something back. To spark off the national celebration of the Millennium, Armageddon Enterprises will set light to the Brecon Beacons.

It should be noted that the timescales for this programme are more generous than for most other millennium activities, as due to the special nature of the SF fan community, these celebrations will not take place until 31 December 2000, the start of the third millennium.

P-FILES

