

iPlokta

Strong Language

Children At Large

ANGST



Volume 9 Number 1 Issue 31
Scandal Generator

Lilian ✓ Sue ✓
Flick ✓ Alison ✓
Giulia ✓ Moose ✓

BOLLOCKS



Mac OS X

Admitted

Normal

STAPLES



Window XP

Denied

Reverse

OS

SHAGGING

POLARITY

COLUMNS



WORTHINESS

MOOSE



HASSLE

CALORIES

ALCOHOL

DO NOT
PRESS

Superfluous Technology



Alison Scott 2004

This is issue 31 of *Plokta*, edited by Steve Davies, Alison Scott and Mike Scott. It is available for letter of comment (one copy to Alison's address is fine, we pass them over to each other), trade (copies to each of our addresses if possible, please), contribution, editorial whim, or for an Airport Extreme base station.

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The *Plokta* News Network is at
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The cabal also includes Giulia De Cesare, Sue Mason, Steven, Marianne and Jonathan Cain.

Art by Alison Scott (cover), Sue Mason (2, 3, 5, 6, 14), Unknown but sent in by Dale Speirs (12), Henry Maynard Infants' School (13)

Photo by Alison Scott (13)

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Sue Mason

Giulia de Cesare, as for Steve Davies

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Editorial

WE HAVE suffered from a slight mailing delay. The previous issue, which was given out at Novacon, is still (at the beginning of February) waiting to be posted. Sorry: Alison is crap. Anyway, the big news is that we are doing another <plokta.con>. If you actually got the previous issue, you'll have had a flyer with it—but you may get/have got it only just before, simultaneously with, or even after this issue.

March update: While Alison's back was turned, Sue removed the piles of *Plokta* that were lying around the living room and posted them. So you should have had issue 30 before this one, after all. That's assuming you ever get this one, of course.

<plokta.con> Release 3.0 will be held in the Chequers Hotel, Newbury, from 1-3 May 2004. We'll be running a light and relaxed programme from late morning Saturday to early evening Monday.

Our Guest of Honour is **Charles Stross**, part-time Evil Overlord (Planetary) and author of *The Atrocity Archive* (serialised in *Spectrum SF*), *Singularity Sky* and the short story collection *Toast and Other Rusted Futures*, as well as several forthcoming novels. He was nominated for the Hugo award for Best Novellette in 2002 (for "Lobsters") and in 2003 (for "Halo"). After a mere sixteen years as a professional SF writer he has become an overnight success, and is one of the UK's hottest authors. You can find his website, and samples of his work, at <http://www.antipope.org/Charlie/index.html>.

Rooms are £37 per person for single, double or twin, but there are very few singles. Once we run out (and we will), you'll be able to buy a room next door at the Bacon Arms (a twin or double) for £55. The Chequers is also short of twins—again, once we run out

there are twins next door at the Bacon Arms at £55, or down the road at the Queens for £65. To book a room in the Chequers at the con rate, email meetings.thechequers@corushotels.com. No deposit is required, but they may want a credit card number to confirm the booking.

Membership is £25, but will go up to £30 from April 12th. Send cheques payable to "Plokta" to Mike Scott, 39 Fitzroy Court, Croydon, CR0 2AX, or pay by PayPal to mike@plokta.com. Please tell us: Name, badge name (if different), postal address, email address (if you want to get email updates) and LiveJournal ID (if you want it on your badge as well as your name).

In a change on previously discussed, but not published, plans, Sunday night is Pirate night at <plokta.con>. So bring along a swash to buckle and brush up on your pirate-lingo. Remember, pirates always speaks in the present tense. Aaarr!

In other news, our Mac quotient was temporarily depleted by a burglary at Plokta Towers. Alison and Steven lost the PowerBook and the iBook, as well as many of their most precious possessions. (Best quote from the loss adjuster: "Most people only have *one* digital camera.") But the insurance provided shiny new laptops with Bluetooth, Airport Extreme and a glow-in-the-dark keyboard, and state of the art stereo cameras, so Alison is happy again. Unfortunately, the burglar omitted to steal the children.

And finally, in the pursuit of enhanced bendiness, Alison has taken up yoga. At the end of the session, she always feels chilled out and flexible. By the time she gets home via the tube, she's back to her normal pointy-haired self.



BOLLOCKS

Cabal Chair Resigns

The Edwards Report into the veracity of the most recent issues of *Plokta* was highly critical, stating that many articles were substantially incorrect, and others appeared to be wholly fabricated. In a statement, the Cabal said, "No shit, Sherlock". However, Alison Scott has now resigned as Chairthing of the Governors of the *Plokta* Cabal.

Years of Rice and Salt

Did you know that 2004 is the International Year of Rice? Last year was the International Year of Fresh Water, and before that was the International Year of Mountains.

April 2004, which is next month as I write, is Irritable Bowel Syndrome Month. It's also Alcohol Awareness Month (we'd like to assure the organisers that the *Plokta* Cabal are already very aware of alcohol), Cancer Control Month, Occupational Therapy Month, STD Awareness Month (but we thought *everyone* had got the hang of Subscriber Trunk Dialling by now), Women's Eye Health and Safety Month, National Facial Protection Month, Sexual Assault Awareness Month ...the list goes on and on. There is clearly a serious shortage of months, causing many good causes to have to share. Another argument for calendar reform.

April is also Tackle Your Clutter Month. Alison, meanwhile, is waiting for Tackle Your Clutter Decade.

And we're really looking forward to May, which is Eat Dessert First Month.

The Passion of the Plokta

BOLLOCKS**Gadget of the Month**

Gadget of the Month was going to be GarageBand, Apple's new program allowing any idiot to mix their own music tracks on their Mac. However, in a reversal of the normal sequence of events, we appear to have been scooped by the mass media—GarageBand was *Time* magazine's gadget of the month in January.

Nevertheless, we've been playing with the software pretty obsessively, using it to make up for a lack of proper musical instruments, talent, or accompanists. Steven's been making compositions from loops, the children have been shaking their groove things, and Alison's been recording herself and offsetting it to produce canons.

**Fame at Last**

The award-winning BBC series *The Office* is, being adapted for the US, and liberties are being taken. One change is the name of the monstrous office manager, David Brent—for reasons best known to the American TV networks, he's being renamed to Michael Scott. We wonder if they could find a suitably well-known comedy actor to portray him...?



*The Dr Plokta Action
Figure in action*

The Importance of a Good Foundation Garment

AS YOU may know, I'm very keen on corsets.

I know that lots of people either don't like them or think that they're restrictive and unnecessary, but I like them, and I think that they suit me.

I can't really imagine what the world would be like without them - much less easy on the eye, I suspect.

But, at the moment, I have a corset dilemma.

You see, I've always had a few corsets. The numbers have varied over the years, but it's a long while since I only had one.

On the other hand, I do usually have a favourite, a best-corset-in-the-world-ever.

At the moment, I don't. It's distressing, for me. As I said, I know that people get by quite happily without them, or would consider the others that I have enough, or even more than enough. But I like to have a bestest corset.

I did, until fairly recently. It was gorgeous, and fitted me brilliantly and—if I do say so myself—I looked damn good in it. But it wasn't really meant for my lifestyle, I fear, and it's got a bit tatty around the edges. I don't really think that I can wear it out any more. I still have it, and I still love it to bits, but I accept that I need a new one. Someone suggested that I change the trim on it, see if I can't rejuvenate it a bit, but I think it's too far gone for that.

There's also one which I loosely refer to as my clubbing corset. It's a bit goth, and it's great for going out and dancing all night long. I don't really think it's suitable for a posh do, though. In fact, I know that it isn't. But I like it for clubbing—I won't retire it unless I find a new best corset, and maybe not even then.

As well as that, I've recently discovered that I can, once again, fit into a couple of old satin number that I've had for years. See, there are advantages to going skinny.... I used to wear these two corsets all the time, having had them pretty well forever, but I hadn't worn them in about five years until a couple of months ago, so I was really pleased that they fit me again. But they're getting a bit tatty now, if I'm honest, and—whilst they're fine for occasional clubbing—they're never going to do as best corsets.

There are a couple of others but... well, they're even less in the running than those ones are.

So I reached the conclusion that I really did need to buy a new corset.

I went shopping. I looked all over the place, but eventually I found the ideal corset in a place I go all the time—FairyGothMother, in Camden. I should have looked there in the first place, but I assumed I'd seen everything that they had.

It was amazing.

I loved it to bits. The colour and the style, even though I hadn't had anything like that in ages, were just what I go for—it reminded me in some ways of my old satin number. And it was just brilliant. I tried it on, and I thought it was fab.

I dragged Alison up to Camden and tried it on again—she thought it was fab, too, and said I should buy it.

When I asked at the counter, though, I got a nasty shock. It turns out that someone had already ordered and paid for it, but hadn't been in to collect it. Even though it had been a while, they weren't allowed to sell it on in case she came back for it.

Was most sulky about this. Most, most sulky. I did think about asking them to call me if she didn't turn up to claim it but... well, it's not likely to happen, is it?

After that, I had a bit of a strop. I impulse bought two corsets, one intended for casual and one intended for best, on the web.

I liked the casual one, but I don't think that the best one is really me—the fit isn't quite right, and I'm not over keen on the style. I think I'll have to get rid of it. In fact, I couldn't really see a time when I'd wear the casual one, especially as I lost weight, so I gave it away to someone else.

But this still means that I need a bestest corset. Much as I love my other corsets, I don't think that I'll be happy until I can find a new bestest one; I'm just that kinda girl. I need a corset that I can wear to a ball, or a wedding, or a goth club, or a con. That kind of corset doesn't come along very often.

A couple of months ago, I saw a couple that I quite liked. One of them I wasn't really sure on the price of, and then one of my friends decided to get an almost identical one, so I decided that it wouldn't be for me—it's not right to have the same bestest corset as a good friend, and, anyway, I think it suits her far more than it would ever suit me.

The other one... well, I spotted a picture of it on a website that I don't normally bother to look at, and I thought it would be ideal—certainly it looked great on screen. But the price was something that I wasn't prepared to pay, so I decided to leave it. After a while, I realised that I was still going back to the website and looking at it all the time, so I decided to say sod it and order one.

That was a couple of months ago, now: progress in obtaining it hasn't been as fast as I would have liked. I have been hearing encouraging noises recently, though, with last-minute confirmations requested for a couple of small sizing details and the like. There have been some rumours flying around about disagreements at the supplier, but those seem to be reaching some sort of resolution, now.

I must confess that, while I was waiting, and particularly while I was waiting with no information about an expected delivery date, I got a bit annoyed about it all. I don't think it's appropriate for a manufacturer to leave customers in the dark like that. And I did start to look around for alternatives. Yes, I would have lost the (substantial) deposit that I already paid but, as I say, I was rather annoyed; part of me only kept chasing the manufacturer for information out of bloody mindedness. So I decided, again on a bit of

an impulse, to go out and get a different one instead. I wasn't looking for a bestest corset, just something to give me some more interesting wardrobe possibilities.

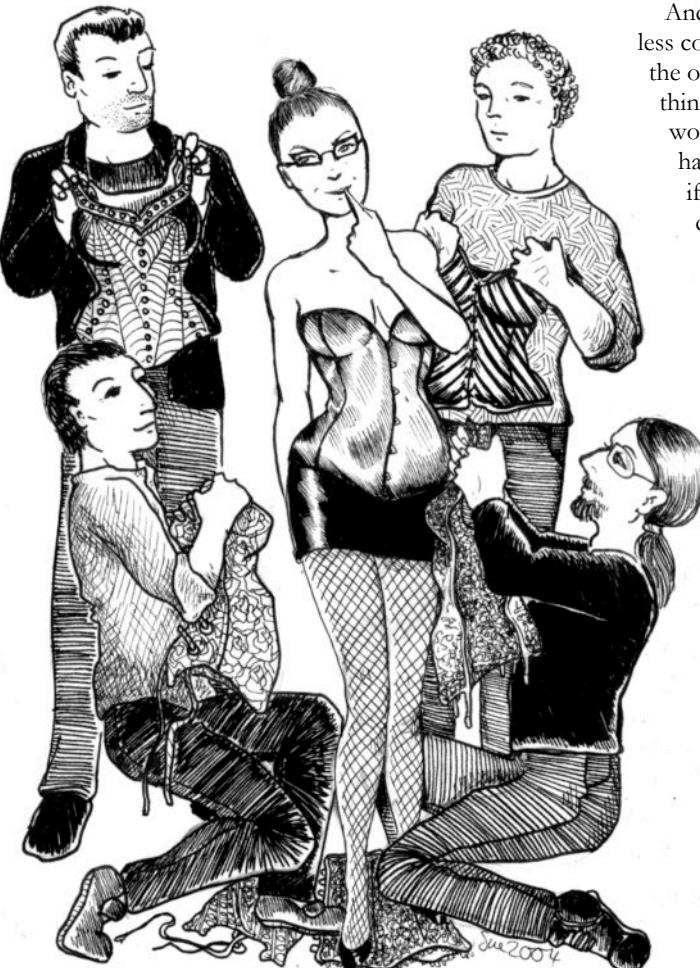
As I wasn't looking for something for best, and I'd lost a bit of weight, I thought that maybe I could finally get something I'd been vaguely wondering about for a while: a corset that was more focused on waist reduction than I'd gone for before. It's not something I'd really had the confidence for in the past, but I figured that there was no harm in trying. I popped up to Camden and almost immediately found something I liked. Nothing dressy—just plain black cotton, with a very faint pinstripe—but the fit was surprisingly good, and I decided that I would try it for a while.

I really don't think that it is a bestest corset, but I think that it could be fairly versatile. I can think of an outfit I could put it with for, say, the work Christmas Party, and a couple that'd be good for clubbing. It's eminently suitable for a con, so I think that I should get some good use out of it. I'm not sure how long I'll be able to wear it—it's really rather small, so if I put too much weight back on then it won't fit—but it'll be fun while I do. As Douglas put it, somewhat surprised by my choice, it squeezes me in the right places.

And, now that I have it, I'm less convinced than ever about the one I have on order: I don't think it'd be as good for, say, a work do. I suppose that I'll have to wait until it turns up, if it ever does, before I can decide on that. I'd be loath to just stick it in the back of a cupboard and never wear it, after all it's cost me, so I think that I will at least give it a serious try before I give up on it.

So don't be too surprised if you see me with any one of a number of corsets, around and about. Most of them will be familiar to you, but the new one is a slight departure from my usual style. Particularly if you were expecting the one I have on order.

—Flick



BOLLOCKS

Emergency Backup Gadget of the Month

LiveJournal user and corset-lover Mr_Tom directs us to the Bovine Rectal Palpation Simulator. As the website explains, bovine rectal palpation is a difficult procedure for vets to learn and requires considerable practice. This used to take place on farms, but now there are increasingly many students and reduced access to cows. Plus, of course, it's hard for a teacher to work out exactly what it is that the student is palpating. An alternative approach was clearly needed: the BRPS allows people to palpate the synthetic innards of a compliant fibreglass cow.

Apparently version 2.0 will fully replicate the experience of lying in a puddle of ice water and having half a ton of cowshit land on your head.



Can you feel anything when I do this?

Coming soon: the Possibly Ripe Melons Palpation Simulator, and the Alyson Hannigan [remainder of joke deleted on grounds of taste].

"Do you think that simulator runs on a Gateway?"

Second Class

The cabal were all greatly amused to discover that Alison has recently acquired an executive coach. "Is that one of the ones with carpet on the floor and downstairs toilets?" enquired Dr P? "You know, the sort with little DVDs in the backs of the seats?" Readers of *Plokta* passim will not be surprised to discover that it is, rather, a bossy American woman who specialises in coaching the irrepressible.

Heath Robinson and I

NOT VERY big in Tasmania, Heath Robinson, which is a shame because if you look at some of the jury-rigged contraptions that helped the early settlers to survive, he could have been their patron saint. But it does explain why I never heard of him until I came to live in England.

I've always had a bit of a tendency towards unlikely ways around trivial problems: obsessive readers of *Plokta* may recall my curtain hung up with bent teaspoons, and very well it worked, too, as well as being a lot easier than organising proper curtain rings. I believe that if necessity is the mother of invention, laziness is surely its deadbeat dad.

There are lots of examples of this approach around the house. When it became necessary to acquire a collar and lead for Shadow, our new-old cat, so we could let him out of the house without worrying that he'd bolt for Norwich, I could not convince the man in the pet shop that their biggest cat collar would be too small. "Don't worry, luv," he said confidently. "You don't want the dog collar. You take that one and if it don't fit bring it back and we'll see what else we can do."

So of course it was way too small and I would not be going back to that part of town for a couple of days, and meantime it was lovely and sunny and I wanted to take Shadow outside. So I found some cotton fabric, tore it into strips and tied it into a knotted facsimile of the dog harness I had seen in the pet shop. It let

me take our bemused feline out and served as proof, tooth holes and cat fur and all, to take back to convince the man in the pet shop that I really did need his medium-dog-sized harness.

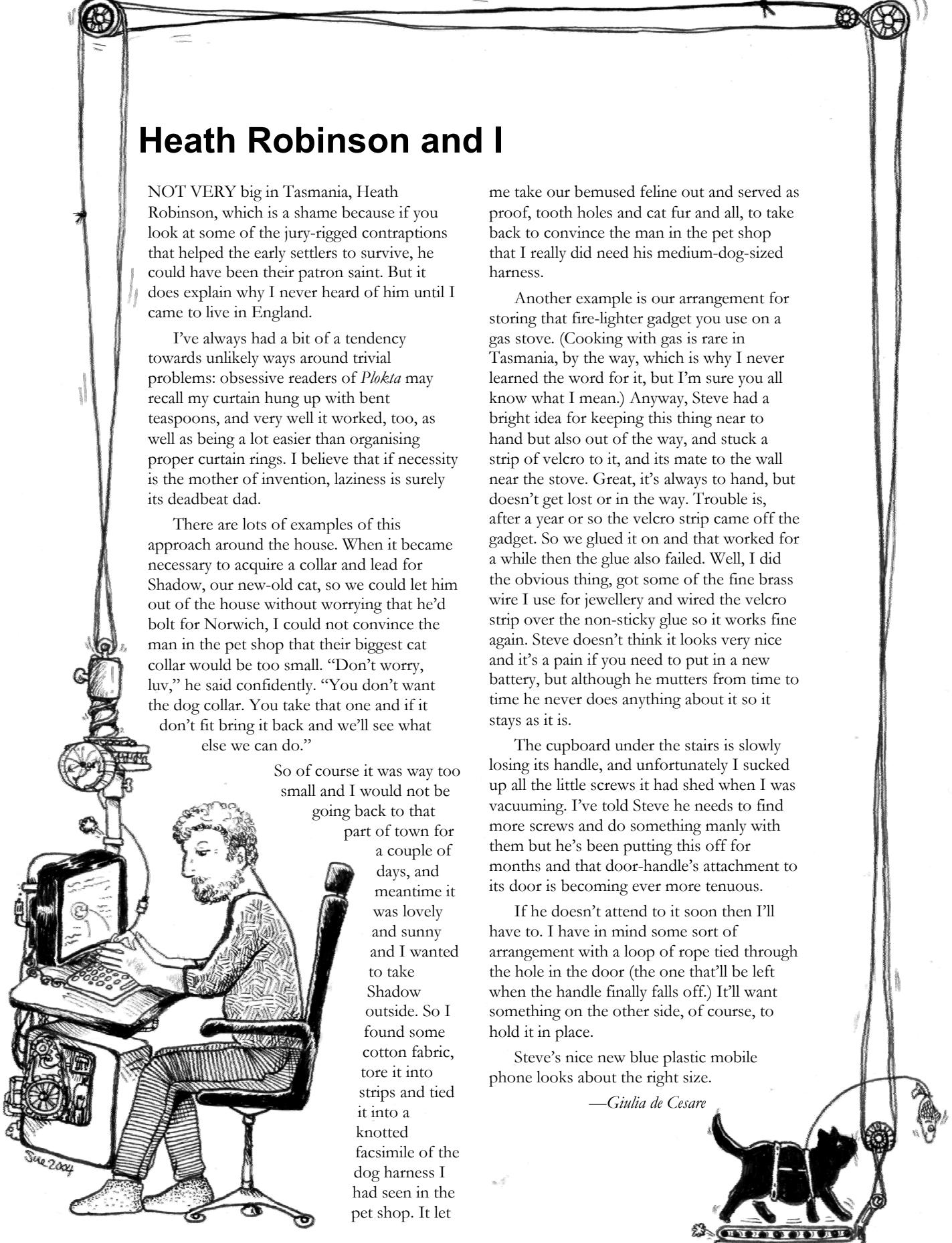
Another example is our arrangement for storing that fire-lighter gadget you use on a gas stove. (Cooking with gas is rare in Tasmania, by the way, which is why I never learned the word for it, but I'm sure you all know what I mean.) Anyway, Steve had a bright idea for keeping this thing near to hand but also out of the way, and stuck a strip of velcro to it, and its mate to the wall near the stove. Great, it's always to hand, but doesn't get lost or in the way. Trouble is, after a year or so the velcro strip came off the gadget. So we glued it on and that worked for a while then the glue also failed. Well, I did the obvious thing, got some of the fine brass wire I use for jewellery and wired the velcro strip over the non-sticky glue so it works fine again. Steve doesn't think it looks very nice and it's a pain if you need to put in a new battery, but although he mutters from time to time he never does anything about it so it stays as it is.

The cupboard under the stairs is slowly losing its handle, and unfortunately I sucked up all the little screws it had shed when I was vacuuming. I've told Steve he needs to find more screws and do something manly with them but he's been putting this off for months and that door-handle's attachment to its door is becoming ever more tenuous.

If he doesn't attend to it soon then I'll have to. I have in mind some sort of arrangement with a loop of rope tied through the hole in the door (the one that'll be left when the handle finally falls off.) It'll want something on the other side, of course, to hold it in place.

Steve's nice new blue plastic mobile phone looks about the right size.

—Giulia de Cesare



Give Me Liberty or Give Me the Book Club

ABOUT this time of year, someone usually has a sort of Xmas lunch for my Shouting Book Club. This year, since I've been rather pre occupied in various ways, I decided it was probably my turn to repay some hospitality.

No probs: Andy had gone to Kent, my family had gone to Tenerife, all my Xmas pressies were bought, and I had Saturday entirely free; a whole day to slob around, hoover the carpet, make a huge vat of curried parsnip and coconut soup (utterly marvellous—recipe on request!) and since I had bought 2 for 1 mushrooms, tomatoes and salad packets at the same time as I bought the parsnips, easy-peasy to also make wild mushroom risotto à la Delia with green and tomato salads on the side, buy a quiche and some other nibbles from M & S, plus the traditional Iain Mellis cheese & some heavenly rye and caraway bread. No worries. We would have a Bohemian, relaxed lunch and I would spend Sunday evening snoozing in front of the telly and working out how much work I could get through in the last two days before going away.

It didn't turn out quite like that.

Ian Sorensen had been recruited to secure me an interesting & cheap mixed case of wine, since his main hobby is hanging out in the reduced wine section of supermarkets wearing a grubby mac. "Get me 4 bottles of fizz", I said airily, "plus some red and white. I don't expect we'll get on to that, but it'll come in handy sometime I expect."

We drank it all.

Charles and Paul brought two bottles of champagne. Mandy and Graham brought two as well, plus stollen, lebkuchen and cake. Adele brought pink Lindauer fizz. (I don't know what Janice and Wilson brought as they couldn't be heard over everyone else shouting, and headed out as fast as possible.)

We drank it all.

I thought I'd got too much food. I had made smoked salmon crudités on the rye bread, for fun, plus a creamed cheese mix, plus M & S sausage rolls for kitsch nostalgia value. That was before the soup, risotto, quiches, salads, cheese, chocolate Yule log, mince pies and cake.

We ate it all.

Cate, aka new flatmate, wandered bemusedly into the kitchen in her

pyjamas with a migraine like expression in her eyes. "I thought you were working at the uni?" I said. "That last minute finishing-PhD-before-Xmas thing?" "Oh no," she muttered, holding her head. "Darren [ex-boyf from Manchester] and I went clubbing till 5am. Then he, er um, had to check out of his hotel at 10am so we, er, came back here. He's still asleep."

Oh yeah. That other one, it's got bells on. Jingley bells.

I warned her the flat was full of rather noisy people. Her gaze told me that I had no need to state the entirely bleeding obvious.

In the background, Adele was screaming that **no-one kept her, she was a self sufficient woman, sex was for young people only, Johnny Depp, Johnny Depp and more Johnny Depp, and did we all remember she had straight waist-long hair when she was 18?**

Paul [Charles's new boyfriend] muttered that he had only met us three times, and so far each time someone had stormed out in a calamitous huff. We reassured him this was absolutely fine and how we expressed the solidity of our friendship.

"See, last time when Jeremy shouted at Odell about paying fees for private schools," I said, "And she came back in and screamed **I've never been called a fucking cunt in my life!** And now they're absolutely OK with each other. Well, more accurately they haven't been in the same room together since, so..."

"**Yes, fucking cunt!**" agreed a slightly drunk Mandy. "She'd never been called that before!" "**Fucking cunt!**" chimed in a teeny bit bibulous Adele. "We should reclaim that word really. Why isn't there a nice word, like willy, for women's bits? **Cunt! Fucking cunt!**"

I think there may have been someone in Largs who didn't hear us.

The Christmas tree, which had always been a tiny bit reminiscent of the Leaning Tower of Pisa in fir (fur?), fell over in slow motion. It hit Mandy square on the head. She didn't stop talking. Miraculously, my beautiful new Italian champagne glasses did not shatter.

Charles wandered into the kitchen and came back eating cold risotto.

"The worst thing I ever did," said mild mannered Graham, "was two-time



Mandy when I was 21. But you knew about that, didn't you?"

Mandy looks as thunderous as you can when so drunk the edges of your face are shimmering like heat haze.

The Christmas tree fell over again, in even slower motion. This time, it hit Adele on the head. She didn't stop shouting. Miraculously, my beautiful new Italian champagne glasses did not shatter.

"The worst thing I ever did," I say brightly, "was forward a slushy email the useless Irish guy of the time had sent me, to his new lover when he had sort of neglected to tell me about her, and I knew he was at that moment visiting her in Seattle. And no, I was absolutely totally pleased with myself."

Everyone ignores me. In the corner, Mandy and Graham are having a heated discussion the contents of which I can only guess at.

Charles wanders into the kitchen and comes back eating a frozen leg of lamb.

"I wouldn't have gone out with her even if I was single!" bellows Adele. "**I wouldn't have gone out with her even if I was single! I wouldn't have gone out with her even if I was single!**" Her horizontal hold has clearly failed for good this time.

It is 11pm. People arrived at 2. I suggest it may be time to draw proceedings to a close. Graham glares at me. "Don't you like us? Aren't we your friends?"

The Book Club. Love 'em or leave 'em. Friendship testing by, with or from destruction. Rates on request.

—Lilian Edwards

Lokta Plokta

Smrichardson@aol.com

Did you know you have been google whacked??

Put in a search for womble and fishslice and it's only you that comes up!!!

Henry L Welch
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I did not, however, find the issue either Linux, MS Windows, or Mac OS X compatible as it was too large to insert into the CD drive drawer and I no longer have any machine with a functional floppy drive. I did, however, consider punching a hole in one corner and attaching the issue to my USB disk key, but thought better of it.

Paul Worrall
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Have a good Christmas, may I suggest that you don't cook your turkey in a chocolate roasting tin!

Dave Clements
davecl@mac.com

I fear your information regarding the Mall of America is not correct. The largest indoor shopping centre in the world is in fact West Edmonton Mall, in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. To quote from the respective websites:

'West Edmonton Mall is... the world's largest entertainment and shopping centre' while the Mall of America is 'the largest entertainment and retail complex in the US'. Since some people seem to think the US is the world, its an understandable mistake as but, as an Edmonton resident observed, every time the Mall of America gets close WEM

just builds something else. They now have an indoor roller coaster, a water park, a ridiculous number of cinemas, performing dolphins and a fire breathing dragon. And, being in Canada, they probably have more moose as well.

Kate Yule
kyule@spiritone.com

Hello all. We've just had our house detailed in readiness for a visit from The Mother-in-Law, and thus the carpet has miraculously changed color, everything in the kitchen keeps sending off audible little "glints" of sparklingness, I can't find my knitting instructions anywhere and the *Plokta* from August 2001 has bobbed to the surface.

I cannot think of any circumstances under which someone would utter the lino on p. 8, "I've got to get used to having a nipple." Perhaps it's best that way.

Max
max@hawkida.com

There's an artist called Jack Johnson that gets a lot of air play on More Music 104, the American radio station I listen to. Jack Johnson makes nice background music, fairly mellow. The lyrics are a bit odd, though. The first song of his that I noticed was "Horizon Has Been

Defeated" which opens with:

*The horizon has been defeated
by the pirates of the new age
alien casinos*

and later throws in lines like:

hallelujah zig zag nothing

whatever that means. I never pay all that much attention to lyrics anyway, they kind of leak into my subconscious for the most part and it's not

uncommon for me to find out I've been mishearing them for months. The next song that came along, "Bubble Toes", a cursory Google tells me, really does contain the lyrics:

*It's as simple as something that nobody knows that
Her eyes are as big as her bubbly toes*

*On the feet of the queen of the hearts of the cards
And her feet are infested with tar balls*

However the bit that I always hear as:

*Loc to Dr Plokta,
Loc to the Dr, Dr
Loc, loc, loc to Plokta
Loc to the Dr, Dr*

is actually, according to the web:

La da da da da.

I'm not convinced. There aren't even enough syllables. MP3 attached—judge for yourselves. [Regrettably, our technology is not yet sufficiently superfluous to allow us to include audio in the fanzine.]

Eric Lindsay
fiawol@ericlindsay.com

It is better to be untidy than to be tidy. If you are untidy, then although almost everything in the known universe is somewhere in your room, you can't put your hand on it. Because you believe you will be able to find it, you waste vast quantities of time seeking the elusive item. This is not good. On the other hand, if you are tidy, you have already thrown out almost everything. When you seek something, you come to the realisation that you threw it out last time you cleaned, and that this is all your own fault! This is much worse.

Lloyd Penney
penneys@netcom.ca

Thank you all for issue 29 of *Plokta*, now with more fibre for your regularity. Just gotta watch those staples, or your colon will become a semi-colon. A loc is impending...

The cover...my, what luvly children! Those toothy grimaces, those faces of pure evil...have you ever seen such happy devilspawn in your life? Then again, maybe they just look like Dad. Do these two know they're drawn like this? [No, they're just bad that way—Ed]

Those damned Daleks crop up everywhere. At a local Dr. Who event some years ago, we were running the hospitality area in a church basement, and in the kitchen, I opened a cupboard to find dozens of glass salt and pepper shakers. I displayed them to everyone as the contents of a Dalek nursery.

Lloyd Penney (again)
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Many thanks for issue 30 of *Plokta*! I think this is the first issue I've received since 26. The carnivorous Post Office must be fed regularly, I guess.

I have already been to Robert Sawyer's home a couple of times to view his golden Holy Relic on display for all to see. I am referring to his Hugo, of course...

Milt Stevens
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The description of Alison's den sounds entirely typical. In the trufannish residence, fanzines form sedimentary layers on all flat surfaces. This isn't limited to the English speaking world. Years ago, when I was visiting Takumi Shibano in Tokyo he pointed

out some features of the typical Japanese home such as the Shinto Shrine. He noted that it wasn't very reverent to allow fanzines to begin accumulating on the top of the Shinto Shrine. So he removed them.

In older fannish dwellings, the layering process can become quite spectacular. Sometimes, you can find places where stacks of fanzines have partially collapsed revealing a cross-section of fannish history all the way back to the hektozoic era. Unfortunately, local fire departments keep declaring these older fannish dwellings as fire hazards and depriving us of a valuable source of historical research.

I personally have had many interesting times conducting archaeological digs around my own house. I always find it exciting to come across some totally rare and obscure bit of science fiction in my own livingroom. On one occasion, I found a copy of a science fiction magazine I had never even heard of myself (April-May 1939 *Dynamic Stories*). On another occasion, I remembered I had a working television set on the floor in the den. Locating the floor in the den proved to be the major problem.

David Thayer
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If Teddy Harvia sends you not as much as a flimsy postcard in response to your wonderful fanzine, blame me. I am his Evil Twin™. He has had the latest issue of *Plokta* on his desk awaiting time and inspiration to draw/write you a postcard of comment. Alas, I have draining him of his creative energy to devote to writing an SF novel. I am also working overtime at the office and taking college courses online.

We both enjoy the color and humour (sic) of your fanzine,

but a lifetime of wanting to be a famous SF writer has finally caught up with me. I realize that my novel will not write itself. I must take the time, even if it deprives Teddy of time to cartoon. I am 30,000 words into a 120,000 story. If I fail as a writer, you can expect cartooning to reclaim priority.

Joseph T Major
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Lokta Plokta: Indeed, so much has Mike Glyer improved under the Milt Stevens Fannish Fitness Program that I would not even dare to lift him.

E B Frohvet

Yes, thanks, I do read *Plokta*, on those occasions when it reaches me. This was evident from the fact that I regularly reviewed it. I also wrote from time to time, until I reached the apparent conclusion that I was incapable of writing the sorts of comments in which you were interested.

Jackie Duckhawk
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I had a Beach Experience last summer. One in which I got to meet a tall, muscly, bronzed, handsome, monosyllabic lifeguard with the obligatory strange white stripe down his nose, a bucket and a kettle.

Unfortunately, he wasn't interested in me, only in Katherine. Katherine is the most accident prone person in our family, though we all like to swim/surf/splash about in the sea. So of course it was her that trod on the Weever Fish....

Weever Fish are nasty little buggers that live beyond the low water mark, hidden in the sand. They have poisonous spines and if you stand on

one, or pick one up that you've caught, you get a nasty sting. Untreated, you can end up in hospital, but if you put your foot (or other appendage) in very hot water for half an hour it neutralises the poison. Luckily there were signs up along the beach warning you about them and telling you what to do if stung. Hence the lifeguard and the bucket. And the brisk sales of plastic swimming plimsoles in the Beach Shop. We bought some after the incident, but it felt so sad not to be able to swim in the sea and put your bare foot down into the sand.

Now, Weever Fish are commonly found in the Mediterranean. And we were on holiday in Wales, on a beach that I visited many, many times as a child and never heard of a Weever Fish. They were apparently a menace on beaches all round the south of Britain this year. (Apparently very low tides during August didn't help.) Global warming, anyone?

Milt Stevens (again)

Mike Scott makes commuting in London sound really easy. I've been on the trains in Tokyo, and Tokyo is a rough commuting town. Consider the fact that the Japanese armies which ravaged much of Asia in the first half of the twentieth century were nothing more than a bunch of armed commuters. With centuries of martial arts tradition, the Tokyo commuters are the deadliest in the world. Even granny ladies can throw an elbow and crush a kidney.

The first thing you learn about commuting in Tokyo is that Banzai means MY TRAIN!!! Then you learn about human wave commuting. You don't have to worry about stopping and inconveniencing anybody in Tokyo, because you ain't going to stop. In less time than it takes to write about it,

you find yourself and ten thousand Japanese occupying the same train car. It can get a little crowded, because Japanese tend to carry a lot of electronic equipment with them. However, things aren't too bad once you learn the secret of Japanese synchronized breathing.

Henry L Welch (again)

Jellyfish can certainly reduce water fun. During my teens they used to infest the tidal estuaries of the York River in Virginia (I assume they still do). You neglected to mention that even when they are half-dead they can still sting. This is rather irritating, but they also smell terrible. Nothing like the rotting jellyfish smell to drive you away.

SMS
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I'm dropping this one into the SF 'Pond' in the hopes that this idle piece of info will get passed onto someone who is interested in books.

That's right:
Books.
The Shirley Bookshop.
(Off Shirley High St. Shirley. Southampton. Hampshire.).

Is one of those truly excellent bookshops. Down a sidestreet, with a canopy and excellently organised books ranging from the populist, through the specialist to the, frankly, valuable.

It has three rooms to it.
One of the rooms (Ok, that one is only big enough for four people to stand in without touching) is the 'SF/comics' one.

I've been going there for over seventeen years, but it's a great deal older than *that*.

Run by a cabal of charming gentlemen with gorgeous Hampshire accents (They're

not making *them* anymore either).

They're looking for someone else to join them in joint ownership.

Their present partner has to back out as he has to go and look after his aged parent.

If they don't find one, then the place might have to close... which would be a pity for everyone in Southampton who likes books, a bit of a pisser for the people who run it... and a waste of what *might* be a fun opportunity for a bibliophile.

I can dig up more info if anyone wants it.

John Dallman
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[Resending an old loc Alison probably lost in her study.]

Why Croydon? Martin Morse Wooster wants to know

Well, it's kind of complicated. But basically, Croydon is a state of mind more than a place, although that gets obscured by the presence of many practitioners of Croydon in Croydon. It goes back a long way in British fandom; I think it started with the first Clarke/Gillings "Epicentre" site in Croydon, before they moved to central London. What it means gets kind of hard to explain, but I feel like breaking taboos tonight, so I'll do my best.

Croydon, in its present-day sense, is basically the condition of having reached a personal accommodation with the differing demands of traditional forms of fandom and the present-day world. Many fans never attain it; lots don't even realise that it's there and some achieve it naturally without ever being aware of the conflicts involved. It doesn't get talked about much, simply because many fans don't like to consider their pre-Croydon state. It's like thinking of yourself as a noisy five-year-old: your parents may have thought you were cute, but you cringe at the very thought of it. Mike Moorcock tuckerised it—he picked up a lot on his trajectory through fandom in the late fifties and sixties - as Tanelorn. If you've read the more hackwork bits of the Eternal Champion saga, this may suddenly make sense, but if not, you're probably too old to appreciate them now.

So Croydon is a state of mind, and Croydon is also an in-group of those who possess it—plus, of course a few who don't, and think it's just a local fan group. Getting the nineties generation of humour/SF fans to centre themselves in the town of Croydon was a masterstroke of disguise by whoever thought of it. It required a certain amount of bravery to assume that they'd figure out the deeper meaning of the

name for themselves, but a satisfactory proportion of them have managed it, and they're now bringing in new generations of already-Croydonian fans.

But a Slan Shack is a hopelessly naive concept for Croydon, Martin. Do you see?

British fans don't have organisation, right? Well, that's a bluff, too. We don't go for societies with rules and dues much, but we have leadership and hierarchy, of a kind. Rob Newman is the current Secret Master of Croydon (SMOC), a title so silly it can't possibly be real—except that it is, covered in plain sight. We like this kind of joke, and even weirder ones, such as Rob's assistant, Jim de Liscard, who is simply Dave Hicks with his hair done a bit differently. Everyone knows these guys, even if they don't know why they're around or what they're for. They're a clue, intended to make new people realise that this can't be all that there is to Croydon, as well as being its guiding minds. At least, they *appear* to be its guiding minds....

Terry Jeeves
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7 things I didn't know about Christina Lake is too short. I have an eighth. 8 Who is Christina Lake?

Sad news, *Erg*'s printer has just died and if I can't find a new one I can't publish the 45th Annish.

Andy Sawyer
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Let me do a quick keyword analysis on Tanya's piece: "molluscs", "worms heaving mud and ooze", "jellyfish", "sunburn".

Yes, really enjoyed reading it. Beaches are great, I could

read endless descriptions of them all day, as long as I'm not actually sitting on one.

John Berry

Tanya Brown's *On the Beach* made me sigh with utter relief, especially because of the two shots showing sand detail. I say this because I am the world authority (honest) on ridges and furrows which cover our hand and feet surfaces and are also found on other items in Nature. In 1975, when my research commenced under the general title of Ridge Detail in Nature there were about a dozen items recorded with ridge detail; sand obviously, zebra, cloud formations, tree trunks, etc. The total is now over fifteen hundred. I have recorded these discoveries in my fanzine journal *Strabismus*, over 100 pages, published annually, 25th issue pending.

Circulation is to interested people, mostly fingerprint experts, all over the world. In case you publish this and *Plokta* readers think I am being vainglorious, er, yep, I am the world authority for the simple reason that I am the only person in the world stupid enough spending much of my spare time on this research.

Brad W Foster (again)

So, Cindy and I started up on a diet early in the new year. The "odd" thing about all this is I also got my dream part-time job a week into the diet. At least, it would have been my dream several months ago. I am now a "Mystery Guest" for a major fast-food chain, which involves driving about most of North Texas a few days a week, ordering up huge helpings of hamburgers, french fries, and other heavy-calorie-and-carb items, and writing short sentences about them. Actually being paid to eat fast-food would have been a gift from God a few



"I want to report a stalker."

months back. The "getting paid" part is still very much appreciated, but now I end up nibbling just enough to get a taste, then tossing the fries and buns out the window to the birds, eating just the "meat" (?) and veggies from the inside. I've still not figured out how to peel the breading off of the fried chicken pieces, but I'm working on it.

KRin

What is the funny creature on the cover? No, the one that looks like a sloth, drinking a bottle of rot-gut, the one next to the wheel.

I can sympathise with Mike (p.8) but looking from the other side. I'm one of those slightly disabled people. I stand on the left side of the escalator (the fast lane here is the right side). I wait for people to get off the train before getting on, but the

main thing that seems to annoy people is that when I get off the train, I move to the side and wait till the wave of people has passed, then I go to the back of the crowd. This seems to be something no one else does so I get stared and glared at! I also get glared at for wearing bright clothes and ankle bells. In the city of the black (clothing, that is), people seem to take it personally that I'm not conforming.

Martin Morse Wooster

I've only been in the London Underground once and don't remember much about it, but from Mike Scott's account it's not too much different from travelling in the Washington Metrorail system. From what he says about "slam door trains", they seem to be ones where the passengers push the doors shut. Here the train conductor closes the door, after a recorded voice

announces, "DOORS ARE CLOSING!" Our "social contract" also says that people are supposed to get off the subway before anyone else gets on. This contract, however, is routinely violated by passengers who feel compelled to get on the train before everyone else gets off, resulting in confusion and delay. And as for luggage, one of the recurring debates is whether to put your luggage on the seat next to you (thereby preventing someone else from sitting there) or leave the seat next to you unoccupied and put your luggage in the aisle so that someone can trip on it. This debate, conducted for over 20 years, has never been satisfactorily resolved.

Then there is the matter of fares. For years, Metro had a regular fare, with surcharges during rush hours (5-9:30 and 3-7). They have now declared the higher fare to be the regular fare and the non-rush

hour fare a "reduced" fare. Metro regards this change as a significant advance.

We Also Heard From:

Janice Gelb ("I hope you love all of your Macs as much as I love mine"), **Dave Weingart** ("The Pindar 2000 Merlot Reserve Barrel Select is a sorely disappointing wine"), **Gary Mattingly** ("I have no electronic bed-controls"), **Ben Yallow** (deconstructing the differences between the New York and London underground systems), **Tom Feller, Jeff Schalles** ("This is not a loc"), **Jerry Kaufman** ("Who is the blond person with the camera? Is that Mishalak?"), **Murray Moore** ("Sue, if you are ever desperate for money, melt your golden rocket"), **Jim Caughran** ("I am breaking long habits by writing locs") and **Dwain Kaiser** ("Whatthehell does a webcam know about good whiskies?").

The Reluctant Costumer

IT'S ONE of those critical rites of passage that parents go through. I'd been dreading it, in a sort of subliminal way, ever since Marianne started school. I knew that one day I'd get that awful letter. Marianne handed it to me with shining eyes.

"Year 2 classes will be visiting *The Ragged School Museum*. They spend the afternoon in a Victorian classroom and take lessons just as if it was 1900. To make this a more meaningful and educational experience it is necessary for the children to *dress up*. The teachers and staff also dress up... girls have mob caps, aprons, long dresses, strong boots or shoes, dark colours... The children who went to the Ragged school were very poor so please do not go to any expense with your child's costume."



Luckily, the basic tenets of chaos costuming have rubbed off on me. 'An old plain shirt with the sleeves cut out makes a good pinafore'. Hmm. Steven's just lost a lot of weight; surely he doesn't need all his work shirts? I wonder if they made girls' pinnafores out of neat red-and-blue pinstriped cotton poplin in the Victorian East End? Oh well, perhaps it could have been cast off by a City gent, or maybe it fell off the back of a Hackney carriage. A second shirt in white quickly transformed into a half-apron, using strips cut from the sleeves to tie in a big bow at the back. The widest part of the sleeve of the pinstriped shirt yielded a circle large enough for a mob cap, gathered with a probably overly luxurious piece of ribbon.

Marianne already had a suitable petticoat; cut down by Giulia from one that was already generations old when I wore it as 'something old' under my dress at my first wedding. And every schoolday we fix her hair in two neat plaits; they

just need to be tied up with ribbon instead of bobbles.

The entire process took less than an hour, and I didn't sew anything. It's lucky they did say 'ragged'.



—Alison Scott

Olde Plokta's Almanack

DISCLAIMER: The authors of this almanac do not take responsibility for any injury sustained by any person carrying this almanac in the vicinity of any member of the US Secret Police. Remember, according to the FBI, carrying an almanac is the best indicator of a mad-eyed terrorist seeking to subvert the United States of Shrubbery by identifying the best weekend to plant beans. It is the responsibility of all loyal citizens to oppose the evil bean planters seeking to destroy the government's god-given right of oppression. Trust the computer. The computer is your friend.

More Disclaimer: The authors of this almanac do not take responsibility for any injuries sustained by readers attempting to use the information in this almanac for the purposes of subverting democracy, creating weapons of mass destruction, opposing the whims of the rightful monarch of the USA (his Royal Highness G Bush) or planting beans.

Even More Disclaimer: Oh all right. We admit it. We are really wild-eyed loonies intent only on the destruction of Western civilisation (what little there is of it). Now can we get on with the wretched almanac before we run out of year?

9th-13th February: International Flirting Week. Damn, missed it again!

1st-7th March: National Procrastination Week (postponed).

13th March: Steve's birthday. Hummph!

14th March: Cabal produce new issue of *Plokta*. Now all we have to do is put it into envelopes and mail it. Cabal go home too exhausted to stuff envelopes.

3rd April: Traditional day for sowing wild oats, corsets and beans. Pythagoras

declared patron saint of FBI.

9th April: Annunciation of the Blessed Eastercon. Sue appointed Pope.

24th April: Envelope stuffing session. *Plokta* finally ready for mailing!

1st May: Birth of the People's Soviet Socialist Republic Of Plokta at the Chequers Hotel in Newbury. Ancient festival of eggs, bunny rabbits, Lilian Edwards and other overt sexual symbolism.

1st May: Eleven new countries join the EU, including the little-noticed Eastern European country of Wingdingia. EU translators walk out in protest.

5th June: TAFF voting closes. Vote early and vote often. *Tobes for TAFF*.

12th June: Cabal ask Alison when *Plokta* is going to be mailed (Real Soon Now)

19th June: Feast of Corsetmas. Traditionally, on this day the young men of the village walk out in the fields with local maidens to take organic ecstasy and listen to trance music.

20th June: Massive crop failure in vicinity of Croydon.

29th June: Alison's birthday. She celebrates by not mailing *Plokta*.

10th July: Government announce Mutton inquiry to prove they aren't responsible for screwing everything up and anyway how were they to know there weren't any weapons of mass destruction.

11th July: Lord Mutton declares government innocent of absolutely everything despite them having screwed up everything in sight.

12th July: Lord Mutton retires to South of France waving massive cheque from grateful government.

18th July: Sue's birthday. Please send chocolate-covered elf-boys to the usual address.

7th August: *Plokta* still not mailed. Spiders start to colonise laser printer.

13th August: Olympics open in Athens

26th August: Steven's birthday. As a special birthday treat, Alison spends ten minutes looking after the kids.

29th August: Olympics close in Athens

30th August: Construction of the Olympic Stadium in Athens is completed

3rd September: Feast of St Noreascon the Fourth (only in Boston). *Plokta* still not mailed

4th September: Mike's birthday. If you're wondering what to get him, a Hugo would be nice. Remaining maidens in Croydon flee the country vowing never to return until the place is cleansed of debauchery

5th September: Croydon swamped with seekers after debauchery.

19th September: International Talk Like A Pirate Day. Aaarr!

2nd November: US election day. Vote Dr Plokta for Supreme Dictator. Remember, things can only get better...

6th November: Novaconus in Walsallensis. *Plokta* still not posted out. Nova award won by Anonymous Claire, the doyenne of LiveJournal. Cabal sulk.

25th December: Alison takes *Plokta* to Post Office! Post Office closed due to obscure mid-Winter festival.

26th December: Giulia's birthday. EU takes action to dispose of European bead mountain before it engulfs Reading and the rest of Southern England.

