

FREE POCT SARCO PLOKTA

2/6

SUMMER SPECIAL 2008

INSIDE-
WIZZO
FUN &
PUZZLES

PHOTO STORY
OF ALL YOUR
FAVOURITE
CHUMS

WHAT
DR
PLOKTA
SAW
2.d

KEEP FEEDING!



MAD MAX

THE ST MARYS ST KIDS

DR P

Colophon

This is issue 39 of *Plokta*, edited by Steve Davies, Alison Scott and Mike Scott. It is available for letter of comment (one copy to Mike's address is fine, we pass them over to each other), trade (copies to each of our addresses if possible, please), contribution, editorial whim, or breeding pairs of land animals (excluding *pediculus humanus capitis*, for which we're sorted).

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

Photos by Darren Copley (3), De Vere Venues (3), IceNineJon (5), Mike's auto-timer (7, 8, 9) & Alison Scott (10).

Art by Sue Mason (Cover, 12), Andy Bigwood (2), Flick (Colours on cover, 6) & Alison Scott (8, 9, 13, 14).

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Just in case of inclement weather. Not that we'll have any of that this summer, will we, chaps and chappesses? Oops...



Editorial

Welcome to the *Plokta* summer special! Just the thing to enhance the British summer. We've all been out and about enjoying the glorious weather. Mike and Flick have been to Cornwall! It rained. Steve and Giulia have been to Glastonbury! It rained. Sue's been to Criccieth! It rained. The Scott-Cains have been to multiple folk festivals all over England and Wales! It rained a lot. We're finishing off *Plokta* at Steve and Giulia's house. It's raining.

While in Cornwall (and being rained on), Mike and Flick were rather concerned to see that one of fandom's more dubious sub-cultures had preceded them by several hundred years:



As befits the summer special, this *Plokta* is even less serious than usual. Many thanks to Kari for providing the entire serious content of the issue, and to Andy Bigwood for his summer-special-themed scifi art.

In other news, Sue has joined the computer industry and is now manning the IT support desk for a bank. Alison has discovered that she needs more blood to dilute her cholesterol. Marianne has discovered FanFiction.net, and Steven is investigating NetNanny software. Flick is going back to college to be a Mistress. Of Arts. In paper conservation. And the Cabal are looking out of the window and considering building an Ark.

<plokta.con> Release 4.0

<plokta.con> Release 4.0 is go! It will be held at Sunningdale Park in Berkshire from Saturday 23 May 2009 to Monday 25 May 2009, which is a bank holiday Monday. We plan to start programming at around 11am on the Saturday, and finish at around 6pm on the Monday. The convention room rate will be available on the Friday and Monday night, and we intend to be sitting in the bar on Friday night.

Sunningdale Park is famous for being the Civil Service College, although it's now formally the home of the National School of Government. All the facilities are named after famous civil servants; sadly, we couldn't afford to book the Willis Suite, the Kettle Theatre, or the Fishlifter Tavern. De Vere Venues have completely refurbished the site, so it no longer has that authentic student feel. For which we're sure you're very grateful.

It's a mile or so from the town of Sunningdale, near Ascot, which is half an hour from London Waterloo by train. Our overseas readers should note that it's about twelve miles from Heathrow Airport (easiest by taxi, but you'd want to book one in advance). The site is a former stately home set in 65 acres of landscaped grounds around a lake. We don't get to use the stately home (think wedding conveyor belt); instead we have the modern purpose-built convention centre at the other end of the site. The

accommodation and restaurant/bar are close by, and it's all been refurbished to make it beautiful. There's also an outdoor, heated swimming pool, and diversions such as tennis, squash, giant chess, pool and croquet. And there's free WiFi. Alison's been wanting to run a convention at Sunningdale for years; it's a truly lovely site.

Attending membership is £30 payable either by cheque (payable to Plokta) posted to Mike Scott, 13 Collette Court, Eleanor Close, London, SE16 6PW or by PayPal to mike@plokta.com. Free for under 12s, £15 for 12-17.



Bedroom



The convention centre seen from the accommodation block

The room rate is £80 per twin/double room per night and £60 per single room per night, including breakfast and VAT. Some family rooms are available; check with us if you need one. Booking arrangements will be advised later.

We've set up a LiveJournal community (<http://community.livejournal.com/ploktacon4>) and a Facebook group, and any news and updates will be posted to both locations.

More information on guests and programme will follow.

Trente Ans Après, ou L'héritage d'Aramis

(Thirty Years Later or The Legacy of Aramis)

By Kari

I BELIEVE in pilgrimages: I believe in heroes and gratitude and the value of respect. I believe in honouring the dead and remembering and commemorating the past. I believe in war memorials and memorials to lifeboat crews, in wailing walls and ancient temples, in the immanence of history and the significance of collective memory. I have my private gallery of heroes; I admire Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, the only man ever to unite Wales, and Brian Boruma, who made a reality of the myth of the High King of Ireland. I admire Yevgenia Ginzberg, who survived Stalin, Shaheed Bhagat Singh, who was not afraid to die for the cause of freedom, St Martin of Tours, who understood equality. I've visited the graves of the 47 Ronin, who made honour a reality in a cynical age. Pilgrimages and memorials bind the past to the present and shape—or try to—the forms of our behaviour. Heroes matter: they open up the new roads for the rest of us to follow. I'm a romantic, in the old sense and my instincts run towards veneration (although my sacred cows are not always mainstream, alas).

The Christmas that I was fifteen or sixteen, the BBC showed Richard Lester's 1974 film, *The Four Musketeers*, adapted by George MacDonald Fraser from the second half of Alexandre Dumas' classic swashbuckler, *The Three Musketeers*. They must also have shown Lester's precursor, *The Three Musketeers* (1973), but I have no clear memory of that. What I do recall is that I sat riveted to *The Four Musketeers* until 15 minutes before the end. Then my father insisted that we had to change channels so that my mother could watch *The Sting* which was about to start (this was the 70s. We had one television and no video recorder). On screen, Michael York was about to square off against Christopher Lee in their final showdown. I was desperate to know what happened next. As soon as the holiday ended, I headed into the school library to find the book.

(I'd already checked the small local library. They didn't have it.) It was the beginning of a lifelong obsession with the musketeers, 17th century France, and the works of Dumas. I met a lot of books and authors between the ages of 13 and 18, and loved many of them and continue to read them and admire their works. I was one of those serious teenagers who decided to read her way through as many classics as possible because that was Literature and Literature mattered. But somehow Dumas was different. His novels didn't appear on the lists of greats; nor did they feature anywhere on the A level French syllabus. Other novelists were as full of melodrama and sentiment, derring-do and dash (Victor Hugo, Hardy, some of André Gide and Turgenev, Pushkin) but they somehow accrued a respect which Dumas did not find. Perhaps that made me love him all the more. He was stuck in some kind of ghetto, just like a bunch of other novelists whom I also adored and yet who were snubbed and sneered at by the mainstream—Robert Heinlein and Samuel R Delany, Isaac Asimov and André Norton, Richard Cowper and Michael G Coney. His long, sprawling, erratic books were filled with the same kind of élan and sparkle that I had sought out in Heinlein juveniles, and his canvases of courts and duels as exotic and exciting as Norton's alien worlds. To this day, I don't quite know how it is that, under Dumas' influence, I failed to turn into an early modern historian specialising in the age of Louis XII and Richelieu. Perhaps the die was already cast: if I was 16 at that particular Christmas, then I was already embarked on the set of A-Levels that led me towards mediaeval languages and history. (I blame Tolkien. But that's a whole other story.) But Dumas did ignite another fire in me*. I wanted to write—and more particularly to plot—like him.

I have, it must be admitted at once, always been a closet writer, although, as

advised by Heinlein, I did it in private and washed my hands afterwards. I had written my first attempt at sf at 13, inspired by Norton, Heinlein and Star Trek. By 15, I was embarked on my first fantasy novel, which mercifully never made it beyond the first few chapters (although I had plotted out the entire sequence of seven books and my friend Jonathan had drawn me a map). I'd experimented with writing in the style of Sir Thomas Mallory, a phase appreciated only by my long-suffering mother and had a go at writing an allegory. About Star Trek. (That one is still extant. No, I'm not letting on where.) I'd discovered an entirely useless ability to imitate Margaret Drabble (and I can still do this, too, but why I know not). But Dumas made a lot more sense. I didn't need, after all, to try and get to grips with physics (which I had abandoned aged 13 on the grounds that I was terrified of the physics teacher), nor did I need to be over thirty and possessed of a colourful past. Dumas had set off for Paris determined to make it as a writer, armed only with beautiful handwriting, plentiful self-confidence and optimism and somehow he had made it. (Those of you acquainted both with me and with Dumas' career are hereby invited to heave a collective sigh of relief that I didn't decide emulate him exactly and start with writing plays. Just think what fandom has escaped. Although Dr Plokta would make a neat d'Artagnan...) In my mind, his books and heroes were the direct linear ancestors of those sf and fantasy heroes I loved so much. Behind Fafhrd loomed the long shadow of Porthos, while the Grey Mouser had much in common with Edmond Dantes. Elric shared his angst with Athos and the worldly-wise voice of Lazarus Long echoed the hard-won scepticism of the older d'Artagnan. I wrote a lot of words between around 1977 and 2007, and while many of them were non-fiction, many were not. In 1989, possessed of a free summer, I finished my first serious

* And yes, I did fall in love with Aramis. But we knew that, didn't we?

attempt at a novel, inspired in part by *The Three Musketeers*. And around that time, I made myself a promise.

If, one day, I were to manage actually to sell a novel, I was going to go to the grave of Alexandre Dumas and put flowers on it, with a card reading, “Merci, maître”.

In May 2007, I finally achieved that sale, although that first novel was long since retired to my bottom drawer. I’d managed to write and publish six books, all of them non-fiction. When I made the promise, Dumas had been buried in his home village of Villers-Cotterêts. In November 2002, the French government had translated him to the Panthéon in Paris, to lie in a crypt alongside many of the great men of French literature, politics and science. (And two women. Marie Curie and another lady who is there because her famous husband—whose name I completely forget—wished to be buried with her.) He shares a crypt with his friend and contemporary Victor Hugo. I visited the grave in 2004 when Phil and I were researching our book on the real three musketeers, but I hadn’t left any flowers. It wasn’t appropriate: that wasn’t the kind of book I’d had in mind all those years earlier. But in November 2007, I dragged Phil back to Paris to fulfil the promise.

Dumas is one of my heroes, and I owe him in a very real sense. (You can tell how much it mattered: I went on the Eurostar and in second class. I’m majorly claustrophobic: I really really really hate tunnels. Whenever we use Eurostar we have to go first class because they distract me with champagne. But the first class was full.) We booked on line, which was useful as no-one asked me the purpose of the visit. That started once we arrived, with the hotel.

No, it’s not a new Euro-rule. I needed to find a florist, and the easiest thing to do was to ask. You know: ‘Est-ce qu’il y a un marchand des fleurs près d’ici, s’il vous plaît?’

‘Oui, madame, mais nous pouvons vous trouvez des fleurs.’

‘Non, je dois les acheter. Ce sont un cadeau.’

‘Oh, vous avez des amis à Paris?’

‘Pas exactement... Je voudrais les laisser sur la tombe de M. Alexandre Dumas.’

‘Ah, c’était un grand homme. Pourquoi voulez-vous le donner des fleurs?’

‘Ah. Alors, je suis écrivaine anglaise et je viens de vendre un roman à une maison d’édition Américaine, et alors quand je suis beaucoup plus jeune, je me suis promise...’[†]

And so on. And on. The florist wanted to know my favourite Dumas novel and then got confused by the mention of the US publisher and asked me to put flowers on a grave in the US. Only he couldn’t remember the name of the man he wanted to honour: we tried Washington and Lincoln and Kennedy, but none of those were right. Then he worked out that I was, in fact, British, and settled on Shakespeare. It only occurred to me later that he was probably thinking of Thomas Jefferson, on whom the French are often rather keen. We arrived at the Panthéon with me clutching my bunch of blue Irises (musketeer colours, blue and gold) and bought our tickets. And then I went to speak to the security guard.

I had no idea of Panthéon protocol in these matters. It isn’t the kind of subject covered by guidebooks, nor, I’d discovered, on line. I think I was expecting to be told to hand the flowers over to be dealt with by the staff. It’s the sort of thing you’d find in most British historic buildings. The guard smiled at me and asked me who the flowers were for. ‘Monsieur Dumas,’ I told her. ‘Is that all right?’

‘Of course. Go ahead.’

At the foot of the stair down to the crypt, another guard was waiting for us—the upstairs staff had radioed down. This lady escorted us to Dumas’s sub-crypt and took down the security gate to let me go into the chamber itself. These are long and narrow, with room for five tombs: two against each side wall and

one under the window. Dumas has been interred at the end, with Hugo to his right and, if I recall rightly, Marcel Proust to his left. Flowers had been placed recently for both these other two, but Dumas’ grave was bare. I had to climb onto the pediment to reach its top—these things are monumental. But nobody seemed to mind. It was still and cool and dim and I was as close as I will ever come to my hero.

We lack any equivalent to the Panthéon in the UK. We are more diffident, perhaps, about our persons of note, less prone to displays of reverence that are disconnected from faith. But I, for one, am in favour of this secular temple, where Foucault’s pendulum swings over the bodies of the admired, the talented, the creative and, yes, the obscure. On the way out, I bought a postcard of Dumas from the book stall. It sits over my desk, with my picture of St Martin, my moon mirror, my photos of Phil and my cats, my lucky bamboo, the tiny champagne bottle my best friend gave me when I was admitted to study for a PhD, and the toy tiger which is a complicated in-joke between my other best friend and me. It’s part of my rosary, if you like: the complex of memories and reverences, touchstones and relics with which I bind my past to my present and my daydreams to my day-times. And yes, on the card with the flowers, I did indeed write ‘Merci, maître.’

As I said. I believe in pilgrimages, in memories and reverence. And I now I have another trip to make, to the grave of William Shakespeare. You see, I made a promise to a Parisian florist.



[†] ‘Is there a florist round here, please?’ ‘Yes, madame, but we can find some flowers for you.’ ‘No, I have to buy some: it’s a present.’ ‘Oh, you have friends in Paris?’ ‘Not exactly. I want to put them on M. Dumas’ grave.’ ‘Oh, he was a great man. Why do you want to give him flowers?’ ‘Well, you see I’m an English writer and I just sold a novel to an American publisher, and you see when I was a lot younger I made myself a promise...’

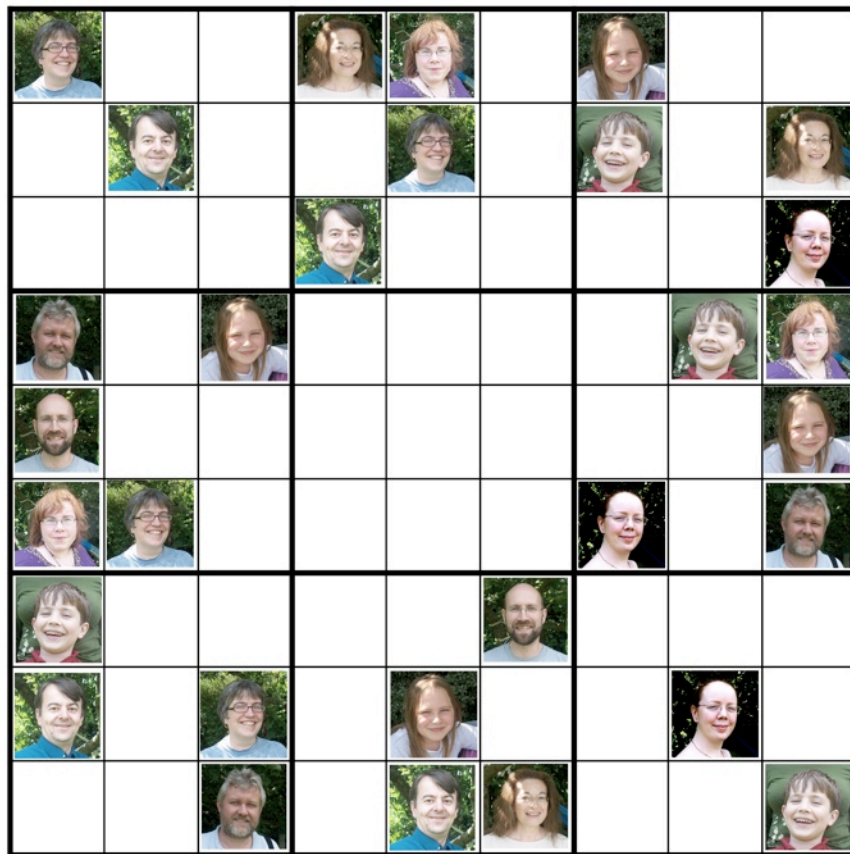
Flick's Super Big Fun Summer Puzzle Page

Welcome to the bumper fun puzzle pages! Answers can be found in the box on page 13. To start off with, here's the *Plokta* word search:

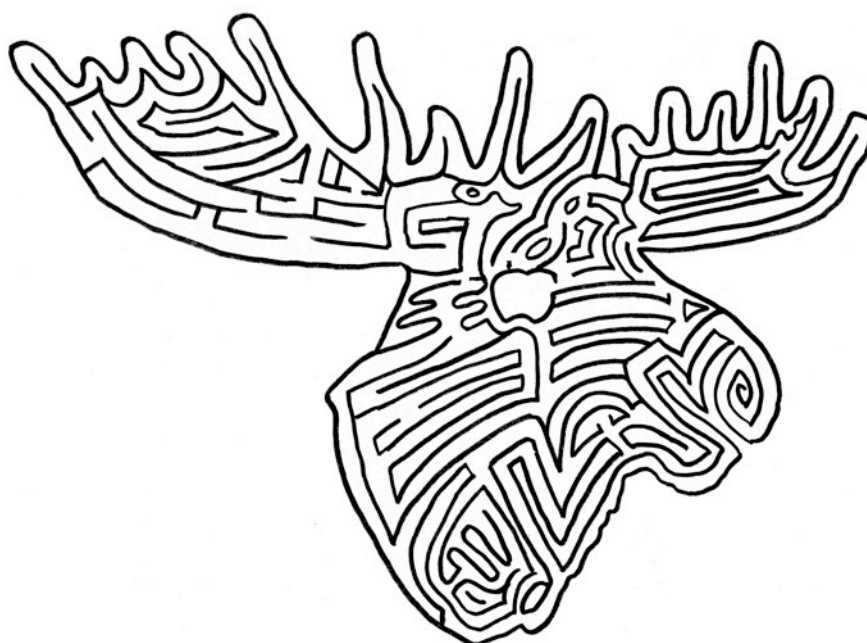
Apple	Nova
Award	Nunchuk
Beer	Orbital
Cabal	Ornithology
Cats	OS X
Conventions	Pirates!
Duplicator	Plokta
Fanzine	Rocket
Future	Sake
Gaming	Science fiction
Gin and tonic	Seaside
Holiday	Stop that
Hugo	Jonathan!
iPhone	Summer
Lasers	Superfluous
MacBook	Technology
Margaritas	Wifi
Melodeon	Wii
Nintendo	

! K U H C N U N F D D A I B R N
N O R B I T A L U I E R P F S I
A O E O P L O K T A P K A P I N
H B I N C T H L U I A N A W L W
T C I T I K E T R C Z V S S A E
A A W I C N E A E I O Y G U S E
N M D O O I T T N N C G N P E R
O G U H R E F E R O T O I E R M
J E P G S L E E N T E L M R S D
T I L ! T R D V C D L O A F E I
A S I S A I E C O N O H G L A X
H D C O C N A L O A E T I U S A
T N A I T B E E R N A I I O I C
P P T I A M N U H I N N C U D N
O H O L I D A Y N G R R Y S E N
T N R M T E C H N O L O G Y H W
S A T I R A G R A M S U M M E R

Play Sudoku with the *Plokta* Cabal! Conveniently, there are nine people in the cabal, so you get something much more aesthetically pleasing than digits with which to play Sudoku.



Try the fabulous Moose Maze!



House for Sale

The Illingworths are selling Bell House (in Coveney, near Ely) in preparation for their forthcoming emigration. The price to a fan would be £350,000. Please contact Tim or Marcia direct if you are interested (you can email <address redacted>).

	Raspberry	Lime	Passionfruit	Mango	Nuts	Ice cream	Chocolate	Smoked salmon	Kitchen	Hot tub	Hammock	Sofa	Playing with cats	Reading LiveJournal	Avoiding children	Reading a book
Alison																
Flick																
Sue																
Giulia																
Reading LiveJournal																
Avoiding children																
Reading a book																
Playing with cats																
Hammock																
Sofa																
Hot tub																
Kitchen																
Smoked salmon																
Nuts																
Chocolate																
Ice cream																

Four cabal members, all lounging around at the Plokta Summer Residence, have ordered the men to bring them drinks and snacks while they relax in a location and activity of their choice. Can you work out who drank and ate what, where, and what it was they were doing that meant they had to be waited on hand and foot instead of fetching their own snacks?

1. Giulia, who finds smoked salmon to be nicely Atkins-friendly, didn't need to avoid the children: they were already hiding from her Hard Stare. Flick isn't that keen on raspberry margaritas.
2. The cabal member who was in the hammock wasn't reading LJ, because the sun was too bright to see her laptop screen. Sue wasn't drinking passionfruit margaritas, because someone else got to them first.
3. Alison, lime margarita in hand, was failing to find the nuts, so she went for the ice-cream instead. Sue couldn't find the chocolates, but the person with the passionfruit margarita had a firm grip on a good book.
4. The person with the raspberry margarita was in the kitchen, where it was easier to intercept new batches as Dr Plokta whipped them up in the blender. She got away with this because Flick was out in the hammock.
5. Alison wasn't reading LiveJournal. The person with the passionfruit margarita wasn't eating ice cream or on the sofa.
6. The person who was eating chocolate was also playing with the cats. It wasn't the person with the mango margarita that Steve was annoyed with for eating smoked salmon in the hot tub. Giulia didn't have the raspberry margarita.

Name	Margarita	Snack	Location	Activity
Alison				
Flick				
Sue				
Giulia				

Bollocks

Web Roundup

Dr Plokta found what claims to be "Canada's #1 dating site", <http://www.adultmoosefinder.com>. He won't say what he was actually looking for at the time.

Meanwhile, there's been some more chocolate teapot action. The research reported in *Plokta* #23 on the utility of a chocolate teapot has been replicated by a couple of intrepid researchers from the Open University Communication and Systems Department. They're at <http://candace.open.ac.uk>, and the video of their experiment is at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWdYXco3RMg>.

A Taste of Mold

Another weekend, another festival; and this time the Scott-Cains were in North Wales for a joint English/Welsh folk festival (it rained). The local town was getting into the spirit of the thing with a food festival. Foods from all over the world! The only dodgy thing was the festival's name; A Taste of Mold. Or, alternatively, Blas Yr Wyddrug.

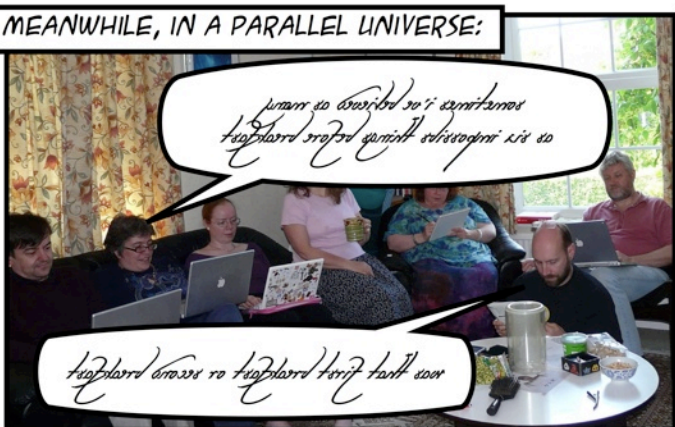
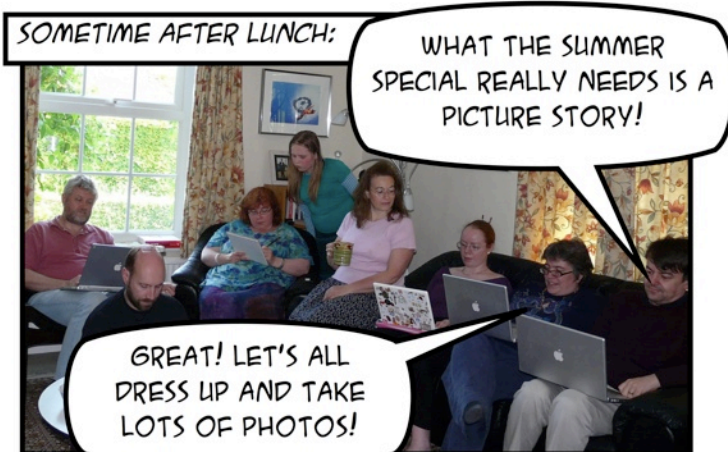
Overheard in the Kitchen

"I'm not having you gutting them and stuffing them with mung beans after what happened to the hedgehogs."

Now, can you spot the subtle difference between these two pictures of the Cabal hard at work?



PLOKTA PHOTO STORY: ADVENTURES IN THE SURREAL ZONE





A Green and Pleasant Lad

By Alison Scott

There have been lots of festivals this summer. Lots of rain, lots of wind, and lots of festivals. We've enjoyed damp weekends in muddy fields all over England. On this one particular weekend, we were camped in a field that had been recently cleared of cows. The music wrapped up Saturday night. Fine, we thought; we will travel to my parents for lunch on Sunday, the children will be charming, domestic harmony will ensue.

Sunday morning dawned. We cooked coffee and bacon sandwiches on our tiny gas ring. We found the grandparent-pleasing clothes for Jonathan. I looked at my smartly dressed son. His hair looked a bit odd. I had a sudden flashback to Thursday afternoon.

"Is it OK if my friend sprays my hair green?" asked Jonathan. "Of course," I said, entirely forgetting the whole Sunday Lunch with Grandparents scenario. But surely his hair wasn't still green. I mean, it was days later, he'd showered, how green could it be?

Quite green, it appeared. I took him out in the sunshine for a clearer look. Looking between the strands of hair, his scalp was quite green.

Green... and wriggling. Hmm. Oops. I looked at the scalp some more. The spray-painted green lice waved back at me. Oh no, not again. I thought about lunch at Grandma's. Hmm. "Your head is full of lice, Jonathan", I explained. "Green lice".

Jonathan started to scratch his head. "Stop scratching your head," said Steven. "People will think you've got lice".

"I can't stop scratching" explained Jonathan. "Of course you can. Put your hands between your legs and clasp them together;

then you won't be able to scratch." Jonathan looked dubious, but did as he was told.

Indeed, he could no longer scratch his head. On the other hand, it turned out he could no longer balance either. He pitched over backwards neatly into the middle of a particularly large and steaming cowpat.

Lunch. With the grandparents, an arse covered in cow poo, green hair and hundreds of unexpected parasites. We made an unscheduled stop for insecticide and threw Jonathan under the shower in a service station for a quick delousing.

Steven looked worried. "It says the showers are £14." I looked confused; the shower was very basic and didn't mention a charge at all, let alone such an astronomical shower. "There's a sign". I returned to the task at hand. Steven took another look at the sign. "Ah. Apparently it's for lorry drivers. They suggest that as well as having a shower, you give your lorry a shower. It's £14 to shower your lorry". I looked at the lorries. They looked pretty clean, at least compared to Jonathan.

We arrived late to lunch, and blamed the traffic, quite unfairly. Jonathan looked clean and tidy. He scratched his head. "You don't have lice, do you, Jonathan?" said Grandma. "Not any more," said Jonathan.



PARAsite OLYMPICS

This year's Lice Olympics are being held on Jonathan. Lice from all over East London are congregating to watch or participate. The Lice Olympics started in 1932 on a Master M Bentine's head and are now held every four years.

The opening ceremony was magnificent, with hundreds of lice marching around Jonathan's head, each bearing little flags showing who they came from... but we've just been informed that the first event is about to start.

Seven lice from different heads participate in the qualifying heats for hair climbing. In this heat, most people suspect that Perdita Nitt from Mr T Pratchett will win but some experts aren't so sure.



Reports are coming in from the stadium above Jonathan's left ear that the dandruff discus is underway. The world record for this event is 9.5 mm!

Everyone is waiting with baited breath for the women's NitPutt which is one of the most interesting events of the first day. It involves throwing a dead nit across an area of the scalp.

But while we wait we can look at another interesting sport, Synchronised Drowning. This contest is suicidal but at least they die for their hosts. The mo...

WE INTERRUPT THIS FOR AN IMPORTANT NEWS FLASH—Despite our best efforts to prevent terrorist acts by local megafauna, the Lice Olympics has been subjected to chemical warfare, and has been cancelled. We are searching for an alternative venue, and when we find a suitable location, normal service will be resumed.

—Marianne Cain

Lokta Plokta

If you posted a loc on paper to Alison's address then you really should know better by now. We recommend sending them to Mike's address, so that Flick can be Organised with them and they have a better chance of getting into the fanzine rather than being buried in soft peat for three years and then recycled as firefighters.

Brad Foster
bwfoster (at) juno.com

I love it when a new issue shows up that, upon being slid from the envelope, has me trying to figure out just what the hell kind of odd publication has popped up in my mailbox this time. Took me a minute or two to find the first "Dr. Plokta" text to give it away. Much fun, and Alison just keeps setting the bar higher every issue for having to come up with something different the next time. I have faith that she will continue to impress us all.

Nice Japan Trip Report, though the item that struck me the most was in the side bar of "Lost in Translation Moments", about Mike wanting to go out of the way to avoid more bowing to overly polite hotel staff. I've always had this odd uncomfortable feeling when *anyone* serves me anything. Bad enough when a waiter comes by to see if I want a refill, when I know perfectly well I could get up and go get more water myself. I feel guilty I'm making them work. Even going through the drive-through at a fast food joint, rather than up to the

counter, gives me a slight tremble. How lazy of me not to walk inside! So, people wanting to carry my one piece of luggage, or walk me to my room, or park my car... well, I'll go out of my way to avoid that. Not sure what it all means, but I think it even overlaps into my guilt at getting fanzines without sending artwork or locs to 'em. I feel that every time, no matter what the editors say. "The usual" can, in my own case, be rephrased as "the overwhelming urge"!

Marcus Rowland
marcus.rowland (at) gmail.com

The cure for Guilia's curious incident is toads. Get a few toads to live there, as well as the frogs, and you can be pretty sure that after the first taste they will no longer be interested. We currently have two cats in the lower flat and 50+ frogs/toads in the garden pond, so I can vouch that it works.

Guy Lomas
guy.lomas (at) virgin.net

While I'm sure I'm not the only one to point it out, I must say that I am disappointed with the cover of the latest *Plokta*—surely you know that Ming the Merciless has not despatched War Rocket Ajax to bring back Flash Gordon's body but, rather, General Kala has. The Emperor would *shoot* you for interrupting his wedding with such news.

Colin Greenland
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Sue Mason recalls a customer "whose wife was totally pots for rags over her pedigree cats". I read that line two or three times before concluding that "pots for rags" must be a

colloquial phrase of some kind. I supposed it meant the same as potty. Google finds me a few pages, not many, that say it does—in fact, one poster suggests the phrase may be the origin of the word.

Apparently the phrase was originally the cry of a travelling trader, a sort of rag and bone man, who would give cheap pottery in return for old clothes. He would bang the plates together to announce his arrival. What I still don't understand is how the accompanying cry comes to signify dementia.

I mean, it sounds like a perfectly acceptable deal. The donor got rid of something that was, presumably, beyond use, even for patching or mopping, and got something that took up less room and could be used every day. And presumably the trader made a profit, however small, or the business would never have lasted long enough to bequeath a phrase to colloquy.

So which of them was potty? And why?

Pamela Boal
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Thank you for this ish. Until a few weeks ago I would have been utterly bemused by your cover. I have recently joined the official website of a society of which I am a member. Although not a face book, "my page" on that site has similar functions and headings. So with the aid of my magnifying glass I was able to not only read but also comprehend. As my eyes and monitors seem to have a conflict of interest I use the

web sparingly and have yet to look at your web site. Is this a print out of your actual page or is it one you have made up for *Plokta*? Which ever it has all the zany qualities and pointed comments we know and love.

All is chaos here as we are having our bathroom completely revamped so that I can use it unaided. If you are into noise I suggest for maximum decibels you try breaking up an old bath with a sledge hammer (it was too big to get out whole) or for maximum reverberation drilling a sewage size hole through a house wall from inside an empty room. True to type our plumber downs tools for five days, less true to type he has gone off to a circle dancing festival. We are without a sink or toilet in our bathroom. Somehow a chemical toilet and washing in the kitchen sink lacks comfort. When he is here I can't get to my computer so I'm catching up on a lot of mail hence a rather brief scatty LoC.

Milt Stevens
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Flick's trip report reminded me of how movies about Japan had skewed my perception of the place when I actually visited. For instance, looking at Tokyo Tower reminded me of the time Mothra destroyed it. I thought about how Godzilla had eliminated the need for urban renewal in Tokyo. Most movie monsters don't perform a useful function like that. As a contrast, Nessie seems to be a very shy monster. She doesn't even eat paranormal researchers. I guess they might not be to her tastes.

Sue is right. Most people aren't like us. They don't fill their homes with books and other printed material the way we do. For years, any plumber or electrician who entered my front door would look around warily and comment "You must read a lot." If they had seen dismembered human body parts instead, they would have used the same tone of voice to observe "You must be an axe murderer." Somewhere around a decade ago, they stopped making comments. I think it became unfashionable to comment on lifestyles no matter how weird or pervert they might be. As an example, hotel employees don't usually refer to us as Sci Fi Freaks to our faces anymore.

Sarah Mooring
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I'm gradually recovering from the Bad Back From Hell, which was exacerbated (but not caused) by the recent move to a rather posh, much larger flat and, now that I have finally managed to wrest a phone line and my broadband from BT I have some "spare time" to catch up with things, mostly involving my COA.

Andy Sawyer
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I assume that your cover is a satirical reference to something I know not of, although one of my daughters drops remarks about people she knows with Facebook sites to the extent that she must be familiar with the concept. Perhaps I should ask her but I prefer to remain sceptical. Personally, I think that Facebook et. al. don't actually exist and there's just one person filling up the Internet with a host of imaginary friends—sort of like the theory that 90% of

the people in the world don't actually exist and most of those crowds we see when we walk down the street are actually ghosts. (A theory which could easily be tested by choosing someone at random and poking them with your finger to see if they're solid, but which I will that leave to someone else.) I did read something in the *Guardian* the other day about someone who sent complimentary messages to his own blog under a range of pseudonyms, which seemed pretty much a good idea to me. I mean, if I wanted friends I wouldn't be a fan....

I will send the "Observer's Guide to Mud" to my daughter. The other one. Who is famous in family circles for making mudpies. Give her a break, she's only 32.

Part of Flick's fascination with paper, as you know, comes to my benefit with her restoration of the celebrated *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition Issue of The Year 2,000 (or 1928), with some really neat flying cars for us people lucky enough to last until the 21st century. It's a shame the *Astounding* Dec 1933 was far too fragile even to restore....

Lloyd Penney
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Amazing who's on facebook these days! So am I. Who gets the cover credit this time? Not Alison... A friend of mine got me onto facebook, saying it was the greatest time-waster known to man, after LiveJournal...

Is Flick's job to pester all of you bunch into writing something for the next issue? This is a valuable skill, Flick...it's called an assignment editor. Put that on your resume...

Hiya, Chris! Wal*Mart can go sink into the earth, preferably Type V. Long live IKEA!, and the 99-cent breakfast. IKEA has made it known around here that they will take in any dead batteries and lightbulbs for recycling. Not only are they helping the environment, but they get people into their stores, so I guess everyone wins. We do enjoy the Swedish food store and the food within, perhaps a little too much. But then, where else do you get lingonberry products?

I'd like to see Dennis the Menace (UK) versus Dennis the Menace (US). UK would kick US's butt within two minutes. US is just a bratty kid, while UK is evil incarnate. I work with a guy at the local tradeshow who, like me, remembers the *Beano*, *Dandy*, *Hotspur*, *Wizard*, *Rover* and all the other comics, some of which aren't around any more. [Your wish is our command.]

Kate Yule
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Next time I see Flick she can explain to me what shadow zones are and why they differ so markedly on laid paper vs mesh paper; I know nothing about this but it sounds interesting, for the first hour or so at least. And unlike joining in Mike's enthusiasms, I can be reasonably sure that it won't involve Type III mud.

Joseph T Major
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Numberplate "P10 KTA": You and Dale Speirs. His numberplate says "OPUNTIA".

"Flick does have an impressive collection of new knives." And they all open so handily, too. Did she inherit them from Granny MacHeath?

The ultimate example of mud, or perhaps "mud", comes from the history of South Georgia, British Antarctic Territory, where a





naive explorer stepped onto what he thought was a beach and discovered what happened to dead whales there.

I'm surprised you could lay your hands on a copy of *Forbidden Pleasures* by Penelope Plokta at all. Now that comics have peaked, the hot collectors' action is in old paperbacks.

Steve Jeffery
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HTML tags that ought to have been included as standard

<⁵⁶Fe>irony</⁵⁶Fe>

<⁵⁷Fe>heavy irony</⁵⁷Fe>

Jerry Kaufman
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Flick's trip report was all too brief, but entertaining. Was the ice cream green tea ice cream, by any chance? [Yes.]

I have been known to break into the Hippopotamus Song (to the consternation of those around me) with very little provocation. Suzle blames you.

Fred Lerner
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Combine creative spelling and hasty reading and you can get bizarre results. I mistook Sheryl Birkhead's "Parmigan +garlic Pringles" for "Ptarmigan+garlic". This would be an unusual taste treat indeed—and might furnish Mike with some variety should duckspotting pale.

KRin Pender-Gunn
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I doubt I am the only person to check if Doctor Plokta's Facebook page was a real one. You have to stand on the left on escalators in Australia—the right hand side is for the

people who have enough energy to walk up or down.

There is a kimono exhibition, visiting from Osaka (apparently a sister city to Melbourne) in the Immigration Museum here in Melbourne, the kimono Flick is wearing looks very familiar.

Please keep sending *Plokta*. I was recently sick and spent a lot of time in a certain room in my house. Oddly, although I am the only person who lives here, the only copies of *Plokta* in that room were 27 and 36. The cat must be taking them to read.

John Nielsen Hall
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The best thing in the ish was Giulia De Cesare's account of a Frog In The Night, and I'm not just saying that because she is evidently the sort of woman who keeps long whippy twigs in the bedroom (and therefore the sort of woman who will always gets respect from me), but also because of her uncanny ability to hear high pitched squealing from very small frogs at 3.45 a.m. which indicated to me supernaturally evolved hearing or maybe even telepathy, given that most frogs I've come across make croaky noises when they are not completely silent.

I was also much engaged by Sue Mason's tales of fielding complaints from householders for a living. Like a lot of independent accountants, the construction industry in one form or another is the bread and butter of my professional diet, and one of my clients is a very small general builder and house builder and I'm often times regaled with similar tales of the apparently outrageous demands of their customers. I say nothing, but I do think a lot, and one of

the things I think is that if a house is a machine for living in, its an exceedingly complicated one. I live in a hundred year old cottage with a listed monument attached and I do not expect that things will work, stay dry, stay oiled etc.—but I would feel differently if I bought a five year old house—houses, not being cars, should be capable of going that long at least without major work. Builders appear very often to have a contrary opinion. If you bought a new car you would not expect to have to know what exactly is wrong with it if it didn't start, but simply ask that it be fixed. With a new house the owner is supposed by the builder to know a lot of stuff he or she has probably never ever thought about. On the other hand, new cars don't even come with spare tyres necessarily anymore, but new houses have to be provided with both an upstairs and a downstairs loo in case someone is disabled (A fan had something to do with drafting that law, by the way) which is the equivalent, it seems to me having a spare tyre behind both the front and the back seats. In short, I can see that bit of life from both sides now.

We also heard from: Tim Kirk ("Will write something coherent later") and **Rich Lynch** ("The cover is amusing as always").

In Memoriam

We were shocked and saddened by the recent deaths of both Chris Cooper and Ann Green, who were taken from us far too early. Our thoughts are with their families and friends.

Puzzle Page Answers

- Fruit:**
1. Two cherries and a banana
 2. Avocado purée
 3. A lemon (trick question)
- Games:**
1. Stomp on the Goomba
 2. Collect all four empty bottles
 3. Do not reverse polarity!

Multiple Choice:

1. A
2. C
3. A
4. AE
5. O
6. H
7. E
8. (㊦)
9. C

