

THE CONVERTIBLE BUS

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Why?

Well, it's cheaper than paying £15 to stay on the *Plokta* mailing list ...

But seriously ... After starting to go to the Tun and to BSFA meetings, and more cons than just Eastercon, I've been meaning to put something together for some time. I nearly produced a one-sheet after Novacon (including observations on the street names of central Birmingham), and again after 2Kon. For one thing, people keep giving me fanzines, and I haven't yet reciprocated with a LoC or anything (Doug Bell and Christina Lake have been giving me 'zines for years now and never got jack shit out of me). The trouble is, time always seemed to run out (and I'm not convinced I really have enough time now). Finally, after <plokta.con> the accumulated guilt became too much, and that, plus a fair degree of encouragement from others, some of whom ought to know better, has resulted in the slight piece you hold in your hands.

Plus of course I want to win friends and influence people.

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Why the title?

At the last BSFA London meeting I was idly looking out of the window, when I saw an odd-looking bus. On closer examination, this turned out to be an open-topped bus, but with a tarpaulin spread across the top (it was bucketing down with rain at the time). I realized that this actually was a convertible bus, a sufficiently bizarre concept to name a fanzine after it. Well, I thought so.

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<Plokta.con>

Midway through <plokta.con>, I was struck by the thought that, though I was having a good time, I wasn't enjoying myself as much as I had at SECCON. This, I hasten to say, was nothing to do with any of the *Plokta* cabal, or anyone else associated, but emerged entirely from my personality and the circumstances I found myself in. At SECCON, the *only* people I knew beforehand were Bridget and Simon Bradshaw. Since they were the committee, they were obviously going to be busy, so I was forced to speak to people I didn't know, in order to avoid having an utterly miserable time (well, I could have retreated into my hotel room and watched television all weekend, but that seemed a bit of a waste). At <plokta.con> there were enough people I'd either known for years, like Doug and Christina, or had got to know in the intervening time between the two cons, like Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey, that I could get by all right just talking to people I knew. The trouble is that this made it a little too easy for me to slip back behind my natural diffidence. This meant that, come Sunday morning, (a) I was worried that people would interpret that diffidence as simple rudeness, and (b) I had a definite feeling that I should have been doing more in the way of meeting new people or getting to know better people I was on nodding acquaintance with.

And then on Sunday night I did all those things I thought I ought to have been doing.

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Of old things and less old things

One of the nice things about <plokta.con> was its location in interesting surroundings. For ten years I was a professional (if badly paid) ancient historian, so the presence of Leicester's archaeological museum, the Jewry Wall Museum, and the Roman baths of the city, were a definite bonus. It gave me somewhere to go for a breath of fresh air on Saturday. Unfortunately, I made the mistake of taking a guidebook's advice and visiting the Museum first, and then going around the bath remains. When I got there, it was glorious bright sunshine; when I finished in the Museum, the heavens opened and it bucketed it down like nobody's business.

Another of my passions is railways (yes, I was a train-spotter when young, no, I'm not now). In the other direction to the Jewry Wall Museum from the Holiday Inn there is the Great Central Way, a cycle path along the route of the old Great Central Railway main line, which once ran out of London Marylebone up through Leicester and Nottingham to Sheffield and Manchester. I walked along a stretch of this on Sunday morning. Much of it has been landscaped with park benches and the like, and in some places housing and industrial estates have completely obliterated the route of the railway. It's also (at least on Sunday morning) liberally spread with torn-up porno mags. It doesn't make you think much of railways unless you concentrate, but the first section you walk on runs along some of the bridges that took the railway above the town on its approach to the city centre. In that particular section, it wasn't a great leap of the imagination to see the great steam behemoths thundering their way to Loughborough or Quainton Road.

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Other good things about <plokta.con>: The lifts (spacious, punctual and above all, polite). ★ The badges, easy to read from a distance and thus identify who you were talking to, rather than which con you were at (if you don't know that by the con, you never will). ★ Ken MacLeod works for the CIA! ★ Kari Maund and Phil Nanson's very fun item on Hong Kong action girls, which brought back memories of some of the movies I'd seen on tv when I was living in China. ★ An insane conversation with Liam Proven, that began with the idea of curry-scented underarm deodorant and ended with beer-flavoured mints ("so you won't be suspected of working late at the office"). ★ The real ale. ★ Hotel staff who gave a monkey's.

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Bad things about <plokta.con>: The heater that turned a small part of the bar into Dante's *Inferno*. ★ Dicks out for the lads (if there's a Hugo for fannish patience in the face of morons, Victor Gonzalez deserves it).

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This is not a fanzine review column

The trouble with all the fanzines I get given is that I never get the time to read them. I'll dip into them immediately after being given them, and they will then sit on a pile waiting for me to find the time to get around to them, before I finally put them away in a box for storage. So this is just brief reactions to those bits I did manage to read. The very idea of Doug and Christina giving me *Head!* is a crude joke that could (and did) run and run. I agree with Doug about 2Kon, and wish I hadn't read Lilian Edwards' *Buffy* piece, as she's seen episodes I haven't. An article of Lilian's I have no regret reading was the one in her own and Victor Gonzalez's *Gloss*, exposing unspoken male fantasy subtexts. I also en-

joyed Christina's piece there, since I was at the meal she describes. *Plokta*, of course (personally, I think SMS's full name is one of those things one *shouldn't* know). Sandra Bond's *Bogus* had a nice bit about T.V. Smith ("One Chord Wonders"!). And I also enjoyed Bridget's *Squiggledy Guide to <plokta.con>* — how come it usually takes you years to get a *Squiggledy Hoy* out, Buglet? And now I've descended into platitudes and clichés, so I'll stop.

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BBC Weather at its best.

Every so often, the BBC weather will do something so utterly stupid and trivializing that you wonder who gives them their ideas. I can see why occasionally one might want to know about the weather in Europe as a whole, but who watching BBC1 is really going to want to know about a heatwave in Tashkent. Just now, they've been telling us about the weather in the Channel on June 1st 1940. Apparently the little boats on their way to Dunkirk would have had a smooth passage, as if this was their major concern, and

they weren't much bothered with the minor little difficulty of the Luftwaffe. Still, for utter stupidity, you have to look no further than Scottish television, who showed a travel programme on the friendliness of Fiji the day after the coup broke out.

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I think I must have been drunker at <plokta.con> than I thought — I just got my photos back, and there's a whole load I have no recollection of taking.

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The Convertible Bus is a work of inconsequence from the word-processor of Tony Keen, [old address deleted]. E-mail: [old e-address deleted]. Format blatantly stolen off *Parakeet*. Distributed at whim. No thanks to Boots. According to the contract I've just signed, all this is ©IBM, but if you won't tell, I won't.



Steve and Sue Mowbray are friends of mine, who've been active in local fan groups wherever they might be for many years now, but don't do much on a wider stage beyond attend Eastercons and Novacons. I was Steve's flatmate for four years, and he's as responsible as anyone else for me starting to attend cons. So even though <plokta.con> was not the sort of event Steve would go to, it was nice that the Dealer's Room, where he'd have spent all his money had he been there, bore his name.