

**KALASHNIKOV KULTUR**

By Ricky Savage, the voice of social irresponsibility

One born every minute

In the wild and wacky world of the Internet, the year 2000 was the year of getrichquick.com and of thousands of mindless investment bankers losing someone else's shirt on the latest scam.

Usually it was some bizarre idea about being able to do something yesterday for more or less than it should cost and based on the bright ideas of a couple of computer freaks. Your average bright sparks were an Oxbridge graduate with mummy's money and an implausible name like Hyacinthia Fox-Hunter and an implausibly tall Norwegian called Sven Wunderkind. Within two weeks their shares were worth millions, within four weeks the whole show had gone down the toilet.

Boxing Clever

In the year 2001 things have started to change and the old phrase 'buyer beware' has come back with a vengeance. Take the genius who spotted a picture of a Rolex on the net and bid £5,000 for his dream watch and won! Sadly he didn't read the small print and that's what he got, a small print of a Rolex. At least it was framed. My favourite was the bloke who bought a 'Playstation2 box and instructions' over the Internet and got a Playstation2 box and instructions, but no Playstation.

Phineas T Barnum said you should never give a sucker an even break and back in the 1920s Arthur Furguson took that to the limit by separating gullible Americans from their money as he sold them Buck House, Nelson's Column and Big Ben. In France another smooth talker offered the Eiffel Tower to a French scrap dealer at a knock down price, proving that greed knows no national boundaries.

In Britain's class ridden society Maundy Gregory made a fortune by selling titles to the kind of person who fancied being a knight or a lord. His scam was to find out who was due to be offered a gong, approach them before they were officially told and offer to get them the title they were going to get anyway in return for a large bundle of cash. Until the government changed the law he made serious money.

But it doesn't end there. Clifford Irving made a mixture of half truths, rumours, lies and press cuttings sound so convincing that U.S. publishers McGraw Hill forked out mountains of cash for his fake Howard Hughes autobiography. Salt Lake City bought London Bridge in the late 1960s in the belief that they were getting Tower Bridge not a load of Victorian stonework.

The message is, as always, read the small print. Get it wrong and you'll end up with an empty box and the sound of the rest of us having a good laugh at your expense. Now anyone want to buy a genuine Lotus Elan kit car? I've got an old Airfix model sitting in my loft...

A Phoney Call

By Diana Cormack

Someone rang me the other night with "good news." He told me that I had recently taken part in a telephone research quiz about mobile phones and I was lucky enough to have won one! In fact, I had won a whole package - phone, hands free bit, case, insurance for three months and other things which went completely over my head.

You see, you could write what I know about mobile phones on the back of an ant's kneecap. I don't even know how to work one. My family hooted with laughter at the thought of me even understanding the questions, let alone answering any.

One to none

So I knew I hadn't taken part and asked the caller if he was sure it was me he wanted.

Yes, it was definitely me, Mrs Diana Cormack, wasn't I excited and when would I like to receive the free phone? He could tell that I wasn't excited when I told him that it wasn't free because, after three months I'd have to pay for the insurance, then I'd be locked in to that particular phone company and their tariffs in future.

Dialectic

"Well, you have to pay for petrol to put in your car," he replied.

"Yes, but I chose it and all that goes with it myself," I answered.

"Do you have a mobile phone?" he snarled (I think he was beginning to rumble me).

"Oh yes, we've all got one," I said airily.

"What package are you on?" he demanded.

"We've got a different one each," I fibbed, trying to sound confident, but then he asked,

"So are you interested in this one then?"

Well, I was going to tell him what I thought of a company who used this sort of scam to get people to use their phones, but as soon as I said "No," he cut me off. I wonder why?

Peruvian paintings at Chorak

Throughout March you will be able to see a rather unusual exhibition of paintings at Chorak, by the Peruvian artist Maruja Silva Villacorta, known in short as Masilvi. Maruja's paintings depict life in rural Peru - particularly the life of women, who live their lives today much as they have done for centuries.

Jose Luis arbul, painter and Professor of Painting at the National School of Fine Arts in Lima describes Maruja as "A painter of lively temperament and great devotion, who communicates her love for the indigenous people and their landscapes with strokes and colours that spring alive. The symphonies she generates allow us to experience the vitality and harmony of life in the Andes."

MASILVI**MARUJA SILVA VILLACORTA****Another Phone Scam**

Some unlucky people in the London area have been opening their phone bills and getting a huge shock at the amount they are being asked to pay. Many bills have been hundreds of pounds in excess of their normal total and often include an inordinate amount of calls to services such as directory enquiries, which have not been made. Other calls have been made to distant countries with which the bill recipient has no connection.

But there does seem to be a clue connecting these high bills to a clever con trick. Someone rings you and says they are checking your line for clarity of sound or some other apparently feasible reason. They then ask you to help by keying in certain numbers on your phone. DON'T DO IT!

By keying in the numbers you can give them access to your phone line and end up being billed for calls you know nothing about.

Get their number

Ask for their number and say that you will phone them back or, better still, ask to be sent details in a letter. You won't hear any more from them!

The elderly and other vulnerable people are being greatly distressed by this scam. If it has happened to you seek help from BT, your phone company or the Citizens' Advice Bureau. If you do receive such a call, don't be intimidated. Be strong, be firm and be sure that the only calls you pay for are your own!

GARDENING**Still waters run deep**

By Zena Robson

I have been visiting some gardens where work is being done (spasmodically) and it has been a depressing sight. The word 'quagmire' springs most readily to mind and I am increasingly worried about the damage that is being done to the soil structure. In one garden, an irrigation system has been installed and we have been discussing whether it should have been a drainage system instead!

If we have four or five days of dry weather, you will be able to get out to spike that lawn. This will allow some air to get to grass roots and also aid drainage. As for cutting - nothing yet, but by the time you read this a first cut may have been attempted. Set your mower blades high for the first few cuts, gradually lowering them to a sensible non-scalp height. Worm casts are numerous and some folk get very aerated about them. Yes, they can be a pain when wet and if you have a roller on the mower, but to be honest, mowing wet grass is not a great idea anyway, so why not pick a dry day, let the casts dry out and use a broom to sweep them over the grass before cutting. I would certainly never recommend using worm killer that is present in some lawn dressings.

Snowdrops are out and about at the moment and the winter aconites having been trying to make up their minds! I like to pay a visit in March to Myddleton House (near Forty Hall in Enfield). The place is carpeted with early crocus and wonderful wood anemones (Anemone nemrosa). If you wander down to the wild bits there are narcissus and chionodoxas growing amongst the grass. Be on the lookout for bluebell open days as well.

Much ado

Soil permitting, you can start to plant herbaceous now

and if you did not get around to lifting and splitting existing big clumps, you can do that now as well. A good covering of mulch is always a great idea. I like to use well-rotted horse muck myself but it is heavy to lug about. If you need something lighter, try cocoa shell. It's not cheap but is a good mulch and soil conditioner. Only apply any mulch to damp soil - probably NOT a problem! Applied to dry soil, it will prevent water getting through. The idea is to use it as the soil is warming up to retain moisture. I have a feeling that I might be leaving it until April - I don't want to walk on borders, and you never know - it may have dried out a bit by then!

If you are a veggie grower and are worrying about rotting off etc. then think about building yourself some raised beds. That way crops can be more accessible and be lifted out of any sog collecting underneath.

Rose pruning is another job to tackle - not ramblers or climbers which are best done in autumn. Again they will appreciate a good mulch.

Notice on a front door: Please do not put free newspapers through the letterbox. Put them in the black box. Except *The Archer*. Cheers! That really made our day.