

Gegenschein 92

July 2002

Eric Lindsay, PO Box 640, Airlie Beach, Qld 4802 Australia

<http://www.ericlindsay.com/sf/geg.htm>

ISSN 0310-9968 Copyright © 2002. All rights returned to the contributors upon publication.

Our 2001

In terms of doing fanzines, 2001 was a disaster. *Gegenschein 90* appeared in January, and *Gegenschein 91* appeared in November, but neither contained much about trips we had taken, which were what occupied much of our year. At least I kept up with apa mailings, in ANZAPA, FAPA and FLAP.

A lot of the start of 2001 was occupied with learning about and moving our web pages to using cascading style sheets. I got tired of battling the free *advertising sponsored* web sites I was using, so in 2000 bought my own web space. That took over as my main site by January 2001. I later bought my own domain name, which will make things much easier if I ever have to move my site.

The big travel for 2001 was the GUFF Trip to Britain for Paragon, the Eastercon. We took in Corflu in Boston on the way, and Wiscon in Madison as we returned. We were surprised to find that we got cheaper tickets that way. We have reports on Corflu and on GUFF on our web sites.

After six or seven weeks of GUFF travel we returned via the USA to see Jean's mother for a few weeks, and then attend Wiscon in Madison. Jean returned to Washington state to help her mother with the house, while I got back to Australia after only a little over two months. Jean was away from home for something like three months.

Sixteen days after she returned, we set out in the motorhome for Lake Eyre, via outback Queensland and South Australia. Our original plans were to avoid flooded areas by travelling via NSW, however by the time we reached South West Queensland, the tracks were open again.

We covered some familiar territory, through Clermont and Barcaldine, but then went south west via Emerald and Charleville. We changed plans at Charleville. We had expected to have to travel through NSW via Burke and Broken Hill, but taking the dirt roads through the interior of Queensland and South Australia took thousands of kilometres and several weeks off the trip.

Although the interior roads were reported flooded when we left, the Strzlecki Track from Innamincka down through South Australia was clear when we got closer to the area. That was the longest stretch without even a pub or service station, some 500 km to Lyndhurst.

Up the Oodnadatta Track, we took a flight from Marree over South Lake Eyre and the Marree Man. A little further up, we took another flight from William Creek over North Lake Eyre. We returned to Marree, much earlier than expected, with mission accomplished.

Then up the Birdsville Track and through Boulia and towards the coast. Our only real 4WD was on this section, when we found an interesting little lookout, which just had room at the top for our truck. Our attempt at shopping at Townsville was a total flop. The truck was too heavy for the roads at the caravan park! First time we ever encountered that. We did manage to stop at Sizzlers for lunch before we left town, despite having to do some creative parking.

Distance on dirt roads something over 2000 km without bitumen. Greatest distance on our existing fuel tanks without refuelling, 1863 km. You can find a full report on our travel web site starting at www.avalook.com.au/newsletr/oznews24.htm over four issues.

After some time at home, we went to Carnarvon Gorge, and enjoyed the National Park there. We were so remote we didn't hear about the terrorist attack on the USA until several days after it occurred. Our Carnarvon report is also on our Avalook site at www.avalook.com.au/newsletr/oznews28.htm

During August there was a sculpture symposium at Airlie Beach near the Sailing Club. The artists doing the stone carving were Silvio Apponyi from near Adelaide, Foot Young from Hamilton Island, and Adriaan Vanderlugt from nearby Proserpine. As well as government and community sponsorship, many local businesses contributed. We took to walking down to the area each day to inspect progress. It gave us a new appreciation both of the merits of angle grinders as a fine art tool, and also of just how hard the artists worked. As well as the live production of the works, many businesses in the area exhibited various smaller works for the month. When complete, the sculptures went on permanent display around the area. There is a rock wallaby outside the council at Proserpine. There is dugong and calf on the Airlie foreshore, and another dugong at the lagoon. In the lagoon, in the shallows, is a stingray and a crab.

A Second Partial Alphabet of Rants ABC

Why do we bother to waste a half billion dollars of taxpayer money to have a public broadcasting system such as the Australian Broadcasting Commission? The bits that were politically advantageous to Australia in the region, like Radio Australia, have been basically killed off. Personally I'd have kept Radio Australia. The best propaganda for a way of life is to present it, warts and all, and let the listener decide they like your ideas.

If it is reasonable for the government to sell off the Commonwealth Bank and Telstra, why not sell off the ABC into commercial hands? If there really is a market for their snob culture, then the people who view and listen to it (if there are any of them left) can either put up with crap advertising, or they can pay for it from their own pockets. In this user pays world, it is time and past time for the culture consumers to pay for the culture they claim we should preserve. The same goes for opera, orchestras, dance and the entire high culture scene. The rest of us can get back to cane toad races and wet T shirt competitions at the local pub, where we have to buy our own drinks.

British American Tobacco

When a dying cancer patient Rolah McCabe was awarded A\$710,000 against BATAS, we all expected the usual. That is, BAT would appeal, and keep appealing until their victim died. After all, that is what tobacco companies usually do, if they can't make a settlement. As their spokesman said, "There have been three previous cases in Australia of a similar nature, and they've all failed."

However, this time in the case, BAT were caught shredding documents, under advice from lawyers Clayton Utz (who say they gave this up in 1992). In line with BAT policies on document retention, their spokesman Scott Hailstone said, "We didn't know anything was going to be filed against us so we've acted perfectly within the law." For some reason, the judge was not impressed.

Cars for Fuel Misers?

Hybrid petrol electric cars can give good fuel economy, especially in city conditions. I note the Toyota Prius (a 5 seater 1.5 litre 53kW with a 33kW electric drive for

A\$39,990) and also the Honda Insight (a lightweight two seater 1 litre 56kW with 10kW electric motor for A\$48,900). The petrol engines shut down at traffic lights and so on, and are restarted by the electric motor. The electric motor also assists when accelerating.

In a 750 km test in Brisbane, a Prius returned 5.3 litres per 100km, while an Insight returned 3.8 litres per 100km. It is said an average family car does 15,000 km a year, and averages 10 litres per 100km. However that is an average car. A regular small car (and both these hybrids are small) like a Toyota Echo returns 6.7 litres per 100km, and is about half the cost.

You can't save enough on fuel costs to make these hybrid cars make any sense whatsoever. I predict they won't sell worth a damn here. The Honda Insight sold 30 vehicles here in 2001. What a total bad joke! This stuff isn't even a band aid, it is just a publicity stunt.

I have a deep, abiding suspicion that these cars are mostly publicity stunts. Take the Honda. The 10kW electric motor is about 13 horsepower, hardly enough to help, even in a lightweight car. The batteries are basically 120 D cell NiMH, which means a mere 20kg package producing 144 volts and only 6.5 Ahr. They even have a regular lead acid battery to start the engine and run the lights and so on. However the petrol engine has been cut back to 60 kg, which is pretty light for a 1 litre engine. Lightweight materials all over, and a heavily streamlined body with a Kamm back, giving a phenomenal drag coefficient of 0.25 (vs 0.36 on say the Civic Hatchback), so it can get away with 32% less engine power at US highway speed. If all cars had the same 1.9 m² frontal area, and that drag coefficient, they would be fuel efficient too. The petrol engine has been thoroughly reworked. The crankshaft axis is offset 14 mm to cut friction, and the piston skirts are shot peened so they retain lubricating oil. They saved close to 5% friction in the engine. Then they used a 40% lighter body, which drops roll resistance.

OK, the electric motor helps in city stop start conditions, but on the open road, I bet it is hardly used. I also reckon that if all petrol cars had the same engineering, they would get nearly the same high fuel economy on the open road. The electric stuff has little to do with it (except maybe in Los Angeles). It certainly will be interesting to get long term reports from real users.

What you really need however is a replacement for oil. Not even so much for the environment, or because all the massive oil fields have already been located, but because of the politics of oil. Clean burning hydrogen could become the replacement. However the easiest, cheapest, and most effective technology would be shale oil, if Greenpeace would just stop acting as spoilers.

DotComs

Fewer dot com companies have gone bankrupt this quarter year. Cynics insist this is because there are very few left who haven't already gone bankrupt.

I'm not surprised. What were the dot.coms selling? The demand for something like films can continue because you expect something new each time. But computers? Give me a break. You mostly don't need to buy a new one, because the old one is working fine. You get conned into spending up big, because something won't work if you don't. I believe that increasingly people and businesses are simply saying that they are not putting up with this treadmill of spending any more.

Exercise

Medical problems from exercise cost \$1.65 billion last year, more of a medical problem than obesity. One in five people injured themselves each year while trying to get fit. Mind you, this is being reported by Sports Medicine Australia, who say injuries are under-reported because only 30% of sports injuries get to hospitals. What happened to the rest? Did they die before anyone could haul them away to hospital?

So, I figure we all better sit back and drink another red wine (good for the heart) and avoid even thinking of exercise.

Yet another reason to avoid exercise and eat up instead. A Canadian woman, Linda McKay-Panos, complained to the Canadian Transportation Agency when she had to pay Air Canada 50% more for a first class seat. She wouldn't fit in a regular seat. The ruling was that the airline had to accommodate her, same as anyone with a disability. An airline spokesman said the ruling didn't distinguish between people who are obese due to illness and people who are obese due to overeating. So, you may get a better seat if you don't exercise.

Statistics show those who exercise less than two and a half hours a week double their chances of having a heart condition. In 1999, 15% of Australians did not exercise at all, and 43% didn't do enough, up from 38% in 1997.

Globalisation

Despite the demonstrators, the moves by both China and India to become more a part of the world economy probably moved more people from poverty towards middle class than all the aid in the history of the world. Three billion people live in countries more involved with world trade, and in general their economies are expanding rapidly, around 5%pa. The sticking point is whether their trade increased relative to income, which it did by a factor of almost two over two decades, while their income per head increased by two thirds.

In contrast, two billion people live in countries marginal in the world economy. Mostly their poverty is increasing. Most of these countries are not free, are not democracies, and a disproportionate number have a Muslim government.

It is about time the demonstrators read the economic figures.

Hydrogen Economy

One of the neat space power station ideas is large mirrors in space powering lasers aimed at gigantic barges off the coasts. There in large tanks, water with titanium dioxide mixed in is dissociated into hydrogen for fuel. You would probably eventually want to use fuel cells rather than burn it using conventional internal combustion engines, but there are a number of experimental fuel cell vehicles around. Not before time either; the fuel cell was invented 200 years ago!

BMW in London are trialling a 7 series sedan with a standard 4.4 litre engine running off hydrogen. The refuelling station will be used by buses initially (one of the experimental buses is running in Perth). The liquid hydrogen costs \$1.66 a litre, the car does about 6 km a litre, and the 9.5 kg tank takes the car 290 km. Pricing for the hydrogen is all wrong at the moment, but need not stay that way.

Internet Assistance Program (IAP)

An Australian Government initiative to help rural users achieve a Telstra fixed line phone connection equivalent to 19.2 kilobit per second. I quiver in excitement at the thought of all that speed. Pity they think it acceptable, or even adequate. I note that from June to December they had 35,000 calls for assistance, only 301 of which resulted in a call out to a Telstra technician regarding the line. They try

to target interference (electric fences, other devices, call waiting) first, and modem initialisation strings. In short, it pretends to provide real solutions, while offering mostly advice.

Junk Mail

Why have fanzines moved to the web? I say postal costs are a big factor. Although domestic postage has been the same for ten years, international mail (my main item for fanzines) has been rising steadily.

Back in 1975, I noted sending 146 copies of Geg 24 out for \$16.06, and 138 copies of 25 for \$15.18. For Geg 24, the overseas postage was 11 cents each. I sent 18 copies to the UK, 88 to the USA, 5 to Canada, and one to each of Japan, Turkey, NZ, Belgium, Norway, Argentina, and South Africa. Local postage was around 11 cents, overseas around 33 cents. A little earlier that year, Geg 22 went to 90 USA fans, 12 to the UK, and 40 within Australia. Mind you, a Worldcon Attending membership was \$5.

My physical mail inward back then was considerable, by present levels. By month inward, 138, 79, 82, 87, 100, 102, 79, 84, 103, 103, 78, 85, for a total of 1123 items. Outward (excluding bulk fanzine mailings) was 53, 69, 56, 41, 85, 53, 60, 25, 54, 31, 80, 35, for a total of 642. The total cost of all this mail was A\$149.87

My monthly costs these days for having a phone service is around A\$64 (about A\$30 of which is internet access). My web site costs me under A\$200 a year. Given the relative wages and inflation, internet access is way cheaper now than postage was then. Another typical example of technology providing a better, cheaper, faster service, by replacing human labour with machine efficiency.

Kid Free Zones

If you holiday at various island resorts, you may find some specialise in 18-35 year olds, and don't want anyone older.

Aurora, on Hope island in the Gold Coast, is a luxury, high security residential community whose purchase contract and body corporate rules don't allow children. Given that 25% of women of childbearing age in Australia don't expect to have children, it isn't surprising that there is a market demand.

Now, when will the first age discrimination case take place?

Lost Unstolen Generation

When I was growing up in the 1950's and 60's, we were told that we were helping Aboriginal Australians by integrating their children into city families. Happy children were shown playing with toys at their fine new homes. There was no mention that these children had been in essence kidnapped from their families (albeit legally). Likewise, there was no mention that assimilation means that the children lose their aboriginal culture, as a way to be integrated into the majority culture.

However what happened to aboriginals on tribal lands, attempting to maintain some remnant their old culture?

In Queensland in the late 1980's, Commissioner Lewis Wyvill, QC reported on aboriginal deaths in custody. He also reported on sly grog, drunken fights, aboriginals unconscious in the streets, and children left hungry after welfare money had been spent on alcohol.

Tony Fitzgerald now repeats the story in his three volume report. He quotes Cape York aboriginal death rates due to alcohol 21 times the general population, and consumption rates four times the general population. More important for victims, Fitzgerald found homicide and violence rates 18 times higher than the general population.

Now the state government is to make another attempt to reduce alcohol abuse, in the hope that also reduces the violence. It is taking alcohol licences away from the councils, and having a special body responsible. If it doesn't work within three years, Premier Beattie already foreshadows removing alcohol entirely from aboriginal areas.

Meanwhile, an Australian National University study for the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research surveyed 10,235 people, 3% of the indigenous population. They found one aboriginal in three had been arrested, and their chance of going to jail was twelve times higher for those who drink alcohol. If removed from their family, the chances of arrest were five times higher. That certainly doesn't seem like a good result. Over a five year period, one in five aboriginals would be arrested. Many of these arrests are for obscene language, resisting arrest and assaulting police.

The question that comes to me is that if there are going to be arrests, then why were not more of them for domestic violence and sexual abuse? Medical records show the assaults are occurring.

There is a greater percentage of total abstainers in the Aboriginal population than in the general community. Probably over 30% abstain. However another 30% in many communities are uncontrollable drunkards or substance abusers, even in communities that don't permit alcohol. It seems likely that some staggering (pun unintended) percentage of aboriginals are going to write themselves off, and take many in their families with them.

Yet some apologists see autonomous Aboriginal areas as a wonderful liberal solution, rather than an intractable problem. It would seem to me to be more an invitation to turn a blind eye to routine domestic violence, sexual abuse and genocide.

Unfortunately, while it is easy to pick paths that will not work, finding something that will work has been elusive for decades (banning booze as a method dates back to the 19th Century). I suspect it will unfortunately remain that way. However if something isn't done, then the result will be the continued decimation (in the literal sense of one in ten dying needlessly early) of remote aboriginal communities.

Migration and Multiculturalism

Should anyone who wishes so be able to leave their own country? Certainly if they find their country intolerable, then that seems what is needed for their freedom. However what if their behaviour at home is considered criminal? What if no other country considers it criminal? Should they be extradited back home if they escape and are accepted elsewhere?

Should anyone be able to migrate to any country? If free movement of capital is good, and free movement of products is good, and free trade generally is good, then surely free movement of people wherever they want to go is good? Surely then the WTO would want everyone in the world to move wherever they like?

Are all immigrants of equal value? It seems obvious that this can't be the case in economic terms. Some have greater assets, or greater skills than others. Obviously a country will try to attract and retain those likely to best improve its economy. This is discrimination. You can buy your way into Australia, with official approval; I believe if you want to retire here it takes around \$600,000.

On the other hand, even the most disadvantaged immigrants often improve their economic position within a generation or two, converging on the original population.

The major problem occurs when populations have widely different cultures that prove incompatible. In Sri Lanka you have the Tamil Tigers. In Ahmedabad, in the Gujarat state in India, you have Hindu mobs torching and killing 27 Muslims in a shanty town, while in Bombay a train was derailed by Hindu activists. These were said to be in response to a Muslim attack that killed 58 train passengers at Godhara. I hardly need mention the Irish problem, nor Palestine, and pretty much any place you want to point in Africa. I need hardly point to the unfree character and unstable politics of most countries with a major ethnic or religious divide.

Basically, multiculturalism is a total failure in every country that has large mixed populations. To the extent that it works in Australia, it works because there are simply no large minorities. So we may have had as many as 200,000 Vietnamese enter Australia, but that is around one percent of our population. The same sort of thing has happened with many other immigrant groups. If the percentages stay low, then you tend not to have too many problems. However as far as I can see, any country with more than a ten or fifteen percent single minority runs into problems.

I say multiculturalism has already been shown, by history and by the example of most other countries, to be a total failure. Luckily, most Australians agree with me, and not with the social elites who promote this idiotic politically correct multiculturalism policy.

With small groups, you have relatively minor social conflicts. You may still get some, where a vast difference in attitude exists. Lots of people have noted that the only political assassination in this country in recent times was by an immigrant.

Assimilation works. In a few generations, most of their descendents will be totally indistinguishable in attitude to the mass of Australians. You can see this in some country areas, where Chinese settled during the gold rushes in the late 19th Century. Some of their descendents are still there, and some even run the traditional Chinese restaurant. However, wait until you try the food. In lots of small towns, it is about as Chinese as something I'd make. And the owners speak Chinese about as well as I do. They are not Chinese any more; they are Australian.

{{This article predates the recent set of articles on multiculturalism in The Australian. I decided to leave it totally unaltered, and incomplete. EL}}

Nick Park's Wallace and Gromit

Six years since the three wonderful Wallace and Gromit plasticine animations (*A Grand Night Out*, *The Wrong Trousers*). However there are going to be 12 one minute movies demonstrating Wallace's inventions. They will be available on the internet. Nick Park is said to be working on a script *The Great Vegetable Plot* for a full length Wallace and Gromit feature.

Office Energy

The Office of the Renewable Energy Regulator is looking after the Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act 2000, which requires renewable generation of energy in Australia to reach 9,500 gigawatt hours by 2010.

They are presently looking at solar heaters. That at least seems sensible. Low grade heating. Solar is good and efficient for that. It isn't much use at all for actual electricity generation. With hydroelectric being deprecated (dams silt up and downstream dries up), wind power is the least impractical, so that will probably be the next big push. There are several wind farms here already.

Harking back to an earlier idea, I wonder whether anyone is following up Assoc Prof Brian Roberts and Dr Clive Fletcher's idea of glider based tethered windmills? They came up with the idea while at the Department of Mechanical Engineering at Sydney University in the late 1970's. At around 30 degrees latitude, there are jetstreams at over 10,000 metres that have far more energy than ground level, up to 20 kilowatts per square metre. That is twenty times solar input, and a wind turbine is more efficient than a solar cell. Tethered by Kevlar cables, a 40 metre wingspan glider weighing 3000 kilograms could produce about a megawatt from four turbines of five metres diameter. Australia is a great (empty) spot for that sort of device.

However low grade power like solar and wind just doesn't do the job for an industrialised society. Giving up industry isn't acceptable, so that means using coal, oil, gas, or nuclear. All the eco protestors in the world are unlikely to change that, because most of them don't seem to have much of a connection with the real world.

Past Life and Future Promise

There was a TV show about people living in a typical middle class home set up as it was at the turn of the 19th Century. Instead of instant, convenient electric lights, you had to light gas lamps. A messy coal fired stove for cooking. Laundry required lots of time heating water, using inefficient soap, a hand wringer, and a fire heated iron for pressing clothes (which naturally lacked no-iron features), and the results were not particularly clean. Food quality was poor, because only local foods could be accessed, so the variety was small. You had to shop every day, as there was no refrigeration or freezing, although some foods could be preserved or salted. The home was dark, and cold, and not particularly clean.

Contrast the present, with cheap, efficient and bright room and street lighting, microwave ovens, fully automatic laundry facilities and non-iron clothes. A wide variety of fresh and frozen foods distributed via a massive road, truck and rail network. All this a direct consequent of science and engineering. Why would anyone want to live anywhere except in the technological future?

Quit

An Australian Cancer Council survey of 250 hit films found 85% featured characters smoking, and smoking is shown once every three to five minutes. That is three times what was shown twenty and thirty years ago. Fifty seven percent of leading characters in films are shown smoking, whereas only 14% of people of similar social background actually smoke. There is a proposal to give movies with excessive smoking an R rating. Couldn't happen soon enough.

I'd think we would do better to acknowledge tobacco is a deadly dangerous addictive drug, and treat it like the medical problem that it is. That is, not permit any commercial dealing in tobacco at all, and get the tobacco pushers out of our faces. What individuals do about tobacco is their own concern (let them grow it in their own garden plot if they like), but we should get rid of the commercial pushers, and treat nicotine addiction as the medical and social problem it is.

Luckily smoking has now been banned on public health grounds in all enclosed public spaces, except bars and nightclubs. It is banned in all areas in pubs where food is served, in all restaurants, and in all casino gaming rooms. Selling tobacco to children now attracts up to a A\$10,500 fine.

Railroaded

The Australian Inland Rail Expressway project will use existing standard gauge from Victoria through NSW north to Boggabilla on the border with Queensland. Across the

Macintyre River is Carrington, on the Queensland Rail link between Inglewood and Goondiwindi. Just 15 km and one bridge away. The Queensland narrow gauge is to be widened. New track will be laid from Wandoan north to Emerald and Aramac, and on west to Hughenden. This meets the Townsville to Mount Isa line. From Mount Isa a new line will head west to Tennant Creek to meet the new Alice Springs to Darwin line. I sure hope this plan gets off the ground, as it could replace thousands of trucks on busy roads. We need to be building infrastructure that can run without oil.

Sharemarket

The US sharemarket is still dramatically overvalued after the decline of 11 September, and was absolutely silly during the peak of March 2000. The DOW and SandP are up 55% from December 1996 when Greenspan warned of "irrational market exuberance". They are up 120% from 1995 when the bull run began. The long term average for US price earning ratios is 16, not the present 30. Likewise the dividend price ratio, and also equity market capitalisation to GDP. In short, the US market is still heading for a dramatic fall in price back to normal values. The only question is how many years can it run? Given the recession in Japan, and Asian problems, and European costs, the USA will continue to look good for a while. However if any attractive alternatives appear, the house of cards comes down, and the US exchange rate with it.

Telephones

I take it that anyone who noticed how much the European telephone companies paid governments at auction for radio spectrum for 3G phones know this indicates their executives have their heads up a dark hole? Then afterwards they rush around saying "maybe we paid too much", and "we will all be ruined". Germany US\$46.1 billion, UK US\$35.4 billion, Italy US\$10.2 billion, Holland US\$2.5 billion, Switzerland a more sensible US\$119.8 million. In Australia, Telstra paid A\$302 million, Vodafone A\$253.55 million, Optus A\$248.55 million, Hutchinson A\$196.1 million, with a total spend of A\$1.17 billion. That is over a hundred bucks per user they have to recover, and the phones and subsystems don't even exist as yet. That wouldn't be so bad, but no-one has really shown a pressing need for 3G phones. Sure it is technically cool to be able to get your email via your cell phone, but being able to send video phone messages probably won't cut it for most businesses.

Meanwhile, in Australia, who has noticed that Telstra want to increase their monthly service charge from under A\$20 a month to A\$30 a month? This is the same line rental charge that was \$A11.65 a month in 1997. So much for competition lowering prices. But wait. Telstra own every bit of copper wire that connects to every home, so just where is the competition coming from?

University Funding

DEST reports Federal government contributions to university education will reach A\$6.35 billion in 2004, up from A\$5.9 billion in 2001. Student HECS payments were A\$1.7 billion this year and will be around A\$1.9 billion in 2004.

Verify by Visa

Smart chips in your credit card, already standard in Europe, and possibly in the USA. Harder to imitate than the magnetic stripe on a card (that you can do with cassette tape, some glue and a mag tape head). Password as well, and if you are a merchant or bank, you have some pretty good evidence that the correct card and person were involved in a transaction. No advantage to the card user of course, as they may end up with yet another password to memorise. No safer for the user really, despite the fancy (well, actually

dead cheap) card readers for their home computer. I'm very unsure about any merit to this scheme.

Web Sites - the top ten

According to Nielsen Net Ratings, the ten most visited sites at the end of 2001 were AOL Time Warner, Yahoo!, MSN, Microsoft, eBay, Amazon, Lycos, About-Primedia, Google, Walt Disney Internet Group. I found it interesting that the only one of these I'd consider using was Google.

On 7 January 2002, Web Developers virtual library did an informative review of the home page of each site, to see what they had in common. I would imagine that high visibility sites like that would have probably spent big on doing a good job.

The background colour was white except for Disney. Two had some blue elsewhere, and only Disney (with little text) had a blue background. I think that says a lot about background colours. Basically, just because you can, doesn't mean you should have a fancy background.

Only two used the default font (usually the serif Times Roman), with two more using it some places. Two used Ariel, with one mixing it. Six mostly used Verdana, a very readable sans serif font from Microsoft, similar to the earlier Ariel. This is a total opposite to what I would expect in a print publication, where normally a serif font is used for all body text. Jean and I have been using Verdana followed by Ariel (and finally the generic san serif) as our suggested style sheet fonts for a year or so.

Zero Power

We are near the far end of a long distribution network from the nearest power station.

04 Nov 2001. Power out twice for a half second at 7:55 p.m. in high wind.

11 Nov 2001. Power out twice for a half second around 6:45 p.m.

13 Nov 2001. Power out at 7:38 to 7:45 with lightning in area.

11 Dec 2001. Power out at 8 for half a second with lightning in area.

12 Dec 2001. Power out at 1:30 to 1:33 with lightning in area.

12 Dec 2001. Power out at 1:51 to 1:53 with lightning in area.

15 Dec 2001. Power out at 11:17 p.m. until 1:35 a.m. (high voltage termination failure)

16 Dec 2001. Power out for a half second at 8:07 p.m.

22 Dec 2001. Power out late at night.

28 Dec 2001. Power out half second in rain at 5:30 p.m.

28 Dec 2001. Power out half second lightning at 5:37 p.m.

29 Dec 2001. Power out half second at 7:03 p.m.

30 Dec 2001. Power out half second at 7:07 p.m.

30 Dec 2001. Power out half second at 7:51 p.m.

01 Jan 2002. Power out for 18 minutes from 8:56 a.m.

01 Jan 2002. Power out half second at 4:09 p.m.

25 Jan 2002. Power out at 12:58 to 1:17 p.m.

7 April 2002. Power out at 10:20 p.m. until 11:10 p.m.

14 May 2002. Power out for an instant at 8:07 p.m.

Books

The Return by Buzz Aldrin and John Barnes

Tor, July 2001, 340pp, US\$7.99 ISBN 081257060X

A nice fast paced near future novel of a space entrepreneur, with money, political and sabotage problems with his new designs. Meanwhile, dispute between India and Pakistan and a nuclear explosion leaves the orbital industry in chaos, and those on the international space station at risk. So who will manage to rescue them? Good stuff. Not deep, but good old style fun.

***The Depths of Time* by Roger MacBride Allen**

Bantam Spectra, July 2001, 476pp, US\$6.50 ISBN 0553574973

Hard science fiction approach to a mystery. Temporal wormholes link systems, with the Chronologic Patrol charged with preventing time paradoxes. Anton Koffield stops one such paradox, at the cost of losing contact with an inhabited planet. His duty was clear, but he is the greatest mass murderer in human history. Also, the robot attack ships appeared to demonstrate FTL capabilities, and that is impossible. A century later, he attempts to stop a famous terraformer from allowing a planet to die, and in the attempt finds out where the robot ships came from. Yet, perhaps all such actions to preserve humanity are futile. This leads to another mystery, and perhaps another novel. Good adventure, and social speculation. Probably his best yet.

***Second Contact* by J D Austin**

Ace, Nov 2001, 199pp, US\$5.99 ISBN 0441008798

When the first earth spaceship arrives near Kivlan they are greeted by warning shots. But they return, with a full military crew, determined to make second contact. This one is old fashioned space opera (including the cover) well done as broad satire. Attributed to Joshua Dann, which somehow makes me suspicious.

***The Light of Other Days* by Arthur C Clarke and Stephen Baxter**

Tor, Mar 2000, 316pp, HC US\$24.95 ISBN 0312871996

A driven industrialist uses quantum tunnels as a communication system. However only one end of the link is required, and from then on there is no privacy anywhere. The link can also be extended into the past, so that any event can be followed. The novel looks at the possible reactions and consequences to society and individuals of these technologies. Interesting piece of speculation, from similar shorter pieces, with the title a nice homage to Bob Shaw. In many ways, old fashioned tech change SF, and I enjoyed it.

***The Shadow Kingdom* by Cory Daniells**

Bantam (Random House), May 2002, 1393pp, A\$19.95 ISBN 1863253432

A romantic fantasy trilogy complete in one large binding. Consists of *The Last T'En*, *Dark Legacy* and the conclusion *Warrior Code*

***Foreign Bodies* by Stephen Dedman**

Tor, Nov 2000, 286pp, TPB US\$14.95 ISBN 0312872593

Down and out in San Francisco, after a bodysnatcher from the future takes over his body (hence the cute title). Does a nice job on race and gender identity, as he ends up a homeless Asian woman, while rushing along in a crime noir mode through lots of questions as to what sort of strange future the bodysnatcher is trying to create amidst the destruction. Well done, fast paced, and thoughtful. I was impressed.

***The Right to Arm Bears* by Gordon R Dickson**

Baen, Dec 2000, 431pp, US\$6.99 ISBN 0671319590

Combined edition of *Spacial Delivery* and *Spacepaw and The Law Twister Shorty*.

***The Skull of the World* by Kate Forsyth**

Arrow (Random House), June 2001, 420pp, A\$18.95 ISBN 1740510429

Book Five of The Witches of Eileanan series.

***The Fathomless Caves* by Kate Forsyth**

Arrow (Random House), June 2002, 448pp, A\$18.95 ISBN 0091840554

Book Six of The Witches of Eileanan trilogy.

***All Tomorrow's Parties* by William Gibson**

Putnam, 1999, 277pp, US\$24.95 ISBN 0399145796

Well written fast paced tale with various characters manipulated by two people with special abilities to see social change pivot points. The idoru also appears. Interesting stuff, but I'm not sure what it all means, if anything.

***Greenwar* by Steven Gould and Laura J Mixon**

Forge, June 1997, 380pp, US\$25.95 ISBN 0312852614

Environmental thriller, with extremists being misled by an unidentified saboteur into a terrorist attack on an ocean power plant producing hydrogen. Lots of nice ideas, and a good thriller with sympathetic characters.

***My Favourite Science Fiction Story* edited by Martin H Greenberg**

DAW, March 1999, 372pp, US\$6.99 ISBN 0886778301

This was a little strange, but worked better than I thought. A bunch of current SF authors selected their favourite SF story. So it contains some real classics that I'm delighted to see again. So when were the classics published? 1942 1949 1950 1953 1953 1954 1955 1956 1956 1962 1965 1966 1966 1974 1975 1980. It would be interesting to correlate the original publication dates with the age of those who selected them.

***The Coming* by Joe Haldeman**

Ace, Nov 2001, 278pp, US\$6.99 ISBN 0441008763

A message from space reaches a polluted and crazy earth, facing perhaps a final war. When translated, it merely says they are coming. It has to be a hoax, but they will arrive in three months, decelerating from impossible speeds. All of earth couldn't produce the energy to do that. We glimpse a surprising number of people reacting to the message, or simply to events. Is it the end of the world, long predicted by some religious figures? Will we learn technological marvels? Is it an alien invasion? I'm not giving away the ending, but I enjoyed this one a lot.

***Sold Down The River* by Barbara Hambly**

Bantam, June 2001, 409pp, US\$5.99 ISBN 0553575295

Historical novel.

***Year's Best SF 6* edited by David G Hartwell**

EOS, June 2001, 500pp, US\$7.50 ISBN 0061020559

I don't think it is any secret that I'm pretty happy with David Hartwell as a SF editor. This volume isn't likely to change that view. The authors are pretty much all ones I've been impressed with in the past (and I'll check out the few I didn't already know about).

***Mars Crossing* by Geoffrey A Landis**

Tor, Nov 2001, 434pp, US\$7.99 ISBN 0812576489

The third Mars expedition, following up two failures. Landis does a good, albeit brief and offstage job on why each earlier trip failed, pointing to us not actually being that clever in our engineering or or ecology. Refuelling on Mars is a concept Robert Zubrin and David Baker pioneered. Landis shows why the plans built in as much redundancy as possible, a luxury his lower cost expedition does not have. Things go wrong, and the four men and two women who landed on Mars have only one possible escape. A trek across the entire planet to the ship of the failed earlier expedition. This one is a hard science treat, with good handling of the characters also.

***Blue Silence* by Michelle Marquardt**

Bantam (Random House), April 2002, 404 pp, A\$17.95 ISBN 1863252517

Orion launched into space 180 years ago. Now it had returned. Well, except that it was ten times larger externally. Instead of a few crew, it came with five hundred life forms, all genetically human, and none knowing how they came to exist. Half are armed with fangs and claws. One reacts

violently to the initial party onboard. Rival space stations want possible technologies they bring. Some very nice writing at the start in this ambitious novel, however it not only fails to answer the questions it raises, it seems to forget that it raised them at points. I have to rate it as a failure.

Time Future by Maxine McArthur

Bantam (Random House), 1999, 454 pp, A\$16.95 ISBN 1863251944

Winner of the George Turner Prize. Human head of an alien space station given to the humans. The station is now under siege by an alien group. Politics of the haves and have nots in the various societies, a quest to get the secret of FTL travel, plus a murder mystery. A cold sleep ship from Earth of 100 years ago arrives. However that is impossible, as Earth doesn't have FTL, and they could not have reached the station in the time involved. There is a lot going on here, but not much is character development. Reminds me a lot of a TV show.

Time Past by Maxine McArthur

Bantam (Random House), 2002, 554pp, A\$16.95 ISBN 1863252843

The station head, a hotshot engineer, take the stolen parts from the cold sleep ship, with the FTL engine bits, and ducks into a wormhole, ending up on Earth in the past, a little before the first visit of the aliens. A lot more character to this one, and then we end up back at the station with more conflict, and supersoldiers a threat. Maybe if the books hadn't been the length of a fantasy novel?

Freedom's Ransom by Anne McCaffrey

Bantam (Random House), Feb 2002, 320pp, A\$45 ISBN 0593048326

Fourth in the Catteni series. Botany is trying to get essential spare parts looted from Earth from the merchants of Barevi. Not sure where this series can go from here.

The Skies of Pern by Anne McCaffrey

Corgi (Random House), Feb 2002, 587pp, A\$19.95 UK£6.99; ISBN 0552146315

Pern, soon to be free of the threat of Thread, thanks to the Dragons and dragonriders managing to change the orbit of the Red Star. However the discovery of their lost history, and the technologies revealed in the records, mean massive change to all of their society. The secrets of the craft halls are secrets no longer, competition is starting, and many still wish to cling to the old ways. Many will do anything to cling to the old ways, and some will disrupt society to cling to power. Meanwhile, Thread is not the only menace in the skies of Pern. McCaffrey is right back on target in her storytelling with this novel, and I suspect any sequels will open new twists.

Infinity Beach by Jack McDevitt

Eos, Feb 2001, 510pp, US\$6.99 ISBN 0061020052
Sold in Australia by Harper Collins as "Slow Lightning", much to my annoyance. Centuries of search have shown there is no-one else out there, no aliens. SETI searches, and physical voyages alike revealed nothing. However after settling nine worlds, an starship returns from another unsuccessful search for aliens. Dr Brandywine wants to know why the entire ship crew, including her clone sister, have disappeared, and why the logs are a fake. Very well written, with lots of character, as is typical of McDevitt.

The Miocene Arrow by Sean McMullen

Tor, May 2001, 416pp, TPB ISBN 0312875479
Sequel to *Souls in the Great Machine*, this continues the rich story of a world where humans are subject to the irresistible call to the sea (explained herein), where electrical devices can not be used, nor any but small vehicles (also explained). A multisided war is taking place in America, with hidden forces and hidden motives on all sides, battles and action and

some wonderful plotting. I think the set will become a classic, and can not understand how it took so long to penetrate the US market. However the story is more complex than many.

Against the Odds by Elizabeth Moon

Baen, November 2001, 529pp, US\$7.99 ISBN 0671318500
Partial overlaps *Change of Command* in time. The emphasis this time is on the Fleet, and the reactions to the mutiny. Familiar characters from previous novels appear, for a meeting with their various destinies in this fast paced space adventure. Very well done adventure. Esmay Suiza is booted out of Fleet, additional enemies appear, and the problems of a society using rejuvenation drugs appear likely to be explored.

Wild Angel by Pat Murphy

Tor, August 2000, 341pp, US\$6.99 ISBN 0812590422
By Mary Maxwell, by Max Merriwell, as part of a set with *There and Back Again*. This time the story is Tarzan, or the Jungle Book, with young Sarah McKensie's parents murdered, and she is raised by wolves. It has the same rush of action and pace that worked for ERB, and shows that Pat Murphy read those books at an impressionable age. Some wonderful pieces about women and expectations of society, and more character development than a Tarzan style story would lead you to expect. Well done, and a lot of fun.

Needle in the Groove by Jeff Noon

Black Swan (Random House), June 2001, 287pp, A\$21.95 ISBN 0552999199
Too weird for me.

The Amazing Maurice by Terry Pratchett

Doubleday (Random House), Nov 2001, 270pp, A\$29.95 ISBN 0385601239

Actually, *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents*. You could call this a retelling of the Pied Piper ... if you are a rat, and educated, and organised, and the piper is a friend of yours. Where Maurice the cat gets into this is a bit less certain, except that any money the piper and the rats are involved in getting probably originated with Maurice. Of course, Maurice does have a bit of a problem with the rats, but he has learnt to ask food whether they can speak before eating them, so the rats get along reasonably well with Maurice. The other rat catchers seem to have been in the con game well before Maurice and his rats hit town. Then there is the problem of the rat king ... This is the first Discworld story for children, and I think it is too good just for children.

Nanny Ogg's Cookbook by Terry Pratchett and Stephen Briggs

Corgi (Random House), Nov 2001, 175pp, A\$24.35 ISBN 0552146730

"Twelve inches of pure pleasure", reads the sign in front of the Subway franchise here in Airlie Beach. This entire book seems to take the same attitude towards writing about writing about recipes (not a misprint), despite the desperate efforts of the overseer, one Thos Cropper, to find and remove such unwelcome additions to what should be a cookbook and guide to etiquette. From the same author as *The Joye of Snacks* (banned), and *Mother Ogg's Tales for Tiny Folks* (withdrawn). Mentions and provides substitutes, but fails to include such fine recipes as Sticky Toffee Rat Onna Stick, Sheep's Eyes and Dried Frog Pills. Does include Spicy Spotted Dick.

Thief of Time by Terry Pratchett

Corgi (Random House), May 2002, 430pp, A\$19.95 ISBN 0552148407

The Monks of History store time, and move it where it is needed, like the hearts of cities. However a Time orphan is being tricked by the Auditors, who find all this human stuff

very messy and bad for bookkeeping, into building a clock that will stop time. Lu Tze, the temple sweeper, and his apprentice Lobsang Ludd, the Thief of Time, must find and stop the end of the Discworld. Meanwhile Death finds that the other four Horsemen are not really ready for the Apocalypse (the fifth is Ronnie, who left the group early). Learn the mysticism of Lu Tze, and Rule Number One. Full of the usual horrible puns and asides, and a delight to read, as usual.

Web Site Story by Robert Rankin

Corgi (Random House), Nov 2001, 381pp, A\$17.90 ISBN 0552147435

Too weird for me (nice title however).

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban by J K Rowling

Bloomsbury, 1999, 317pp, A\$17.95 ISBN 0747546290

There is tension at Hogwarts school, as Sirius, the mad wizard and mass murderer has escaped from the soul destroying wizard prison of Azkaban. As always, friends are not always friend, and enemies not always enemies, but Quidditch is always the game to win. We start to see a darker side of the magic.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire by J K Rowling

Bloomsbury, 2000, 636pp, A\$18.95 ISBN 0747550999

The fourth novel is much longer than the previous ones. I thought at first that perhaps the editors were not sufficiently restraining the author now she is so well known, but in truth there is plenty happening in the novel, and it doesn't feel like padding. As you would expect, Harry is having Muggles troubles, but fewer now. However there are plots developing in Hogwarts, and people are not who and what they seem. Even Quidditch takes second place to a new and dangerous quest. Voldemort increases his powers, his old allies join him, and he becomes a real threat, thanks in part to Harry himself. But the novel as a Hugo winner? I can't see that.

The Spheres of Heaven by Charles Sheffield

Baen, Jan 2002, 532, US\$7.99 ISBN 067131856X

Exploration ships have disappeared through a link that can't exist. The aliens want Earth to check it out, but without using the violence that was what got them banned from using the links. Chan Dalton's crew can't use weapons, as that will banish Earth from the links forever, yet they face hostile invaders. Some nice stuff here, with many a nod to more traditional space opera, and some neat ideas.

Law of Survival by Kristine Smith

Eos, Oct 2001, 394pp, US\$6.99 ISBN 0380807858

Sequel to *Code of Conduct* and *Rules of Conflict*. Jani Kilian is employed as a freelance paper expert, but is still heavily involved (even when she doesn't want to be) in the delicate negotiations with the Idomeni. Plots of all kinds twist and turn, with no-one sure just who is on what side, nor what they want, but any of them could be deadly. Some great paranoid reading here, with as twisted (but controlled) a plot as I've seen. Keep an eye on this author.

Colonization: Aftershocks by Harry Turtledove

DelRey Ballantine, March 2002, 611pp, US\$6.99 ISBN 0345430247

Alternate history. It has been more twenty years since the alien Lizards invaded during WWII. Both sides were taken by surprise. The Lizards expected to be facing knights on horseback. The humans didn't unite, but they did slow down the Lizard attack, and start using part of the Lizard technology. The USA and Russia had stopped the Lizards, as had Germany and much of occupied Europe. Now Germany launches a suicidal attack, which it loses, with many cities destroyed, but the Lizards do not want to face more attacks from others. The USA has bases in the

asteroids, while the Lizards know the threat of humans in space. The series sorts of tappers down, but leaves space for yet another sequel.

Star Wars Dark Journey by Elaine Cunningham

Arrow (Random House), 2002, 301pp, A\$18.95 ISBN 09941032X

Janina Sola and her crew take their stolen Yuuzhan Zung ship to Hapes Cluster, seeking escape, and a way to strike back at an enemy that has taken Corsucant. Part of The New Jedi Order series, set 25 or so years after the original Star Wars.

Star Wars Attack of the Clones by R A Salvatore

Century (Random House), April 2002, 353pp, A\$39.95 ISBN 0712684077

The novel of the second episode of the film series. I doubt there are any real surprises for those of you who have seen the film (I suspect I am unlikely to manage that). Certainly reads well enough for that style of novel.

Ashes of Victory by David Weber

Baen, March 2001, 647pp, US\$7.99 ISBN 0671319779

Honor Harrington has returned, and while she recovers manages to teach at the Academy, provide the treecats with a means of communication that will forever change their status, and get involved in yet another assassination plot. Meanwhile, the counter offensive is underway and working well for Manticore. Haven is plunged again into revolution. Lots going on, but you really did have to have read the past few novels to catch up with the story. One of the better written military SF series.

The Deepest Water by Kate Wilhelm

Mira, 2000, 376pp, US\$6.50 ISBN 1551668467

Murder mystery, wherein the murderer of a writer was clear to me very quickly, but I remained interested in the exact how and why, as his daughter sought to understand the reasons for his death.

No Defense by Kate Wilhelm

Mira, 2000, 440pp, US\$5.99 ISBN 1551667851

Murder mystery, with lots of local politics. The best bit is the lawyer reading the contract for a law book from a shonky publisher.

The Dark Imbalance by Sean Williams and Shane Dix

Voyager (Harper Collins), 2001, 388pp, ISBN 0732268370

The conclusion of the Evergence trilogy, set a half million years in the future. Morgan Roche tries to identify the cloned warriors from the past, learns the secret of AI called The Box, and its links with one of the High Humans. As many groups converge on Sol, the future of all of them could be a stake. Great old style fast paced escapist science fiction (only better written).

Echoes of Earth by Sean Williams and Shane Dix

Ace, Jan 2002, 413pp, US\$6.99 ISBN 0441008925

Engrams, electronic replicas of humans, explore the nearby stars in slow ships, mining to replenish their fuel. One crew watch a mysterious alien ship build gigantic skyhooks around a planet, and leave them as gifts. They explore the artifacts, finding an FTL ship. However while using it to explore other systems, they find yet another alien race destroying any civilisation that uses the FTL signals. This is a wonderful piece of space opera, on the grand scale. I haven't enjoyed a novel more in ages.

Sea As Mirror by Tess Williams

Harper Collins, 2000, 350pp, A\$14.95 ISBN 0732270804

A killer whale followed Elizabeth to the research centre, and they learnt to communicate, in a fashion. However what drove the whale to this desperate attempt? Disaster lurks in

the outside world, as a fragile society starts to fail. I'm not at all sure what I was missing, but this just didn't seem to hang together. No more communication than between us and whales.

Other Books

***Heartbreak Corner* by Fleur Lehane**

Central Queensland University, 1996, 2000, 256pp, A\$21.95
ISBN 1875998616

Woman's story of the Irish immigrants to South East Queensland in the mid 1800's, and of the deaths in those areas as they settled the area. The Tullys, Costellos, and Duracks (whose move to the Kimberleys in West Australia was told in *Kings in Grass Castles*). Added a lot to our knowledge of the area as we travelled through.

LoCs

Various search engines now index almost everything they find. Spammers seem to use email addresses they find in web sites. As a result, I will now be suppressing email and street addresses from my fanzines. If you would prefer your address to still appear, please comment to that effect when you loc. If a fan has a web site, I am happy to provide a link to that.

Lloyd Penney

This is going to be interesting. I have your website with *Gegenschein 89* on the screen, and my WP programme is in a small area below. I shall scan and type, scan and type, and with luck, I shall make some comments while going back and forth_this may be another reason why I prefer paper fanzines. No matter, it's time to press on, and write.

Yes, the closing ceremonies of the Sydney Olympics were spectacular, even if the parade of floats with various Australian stars seemed to cater to every stereotype its American audience believes about Australia. It was a marvelous sight, and we may have our own Games to worry about. Toronto is one of the leading cities to win the Summer Olympics for 2008.

I never realized that like many pests, kangaroos would mooch and beg from passers-by. Our version isn't nearly as big though. I have raccoons in mind, even though tree squirrels would also qualify.

I said in my letter to Jean's latest WWW that I was amazed that a small place like Barcardine could support six bars. I guess this array caters to the tourists that may make in to the town. My parallel was that I used to live in Brampton, just NW of Toronto, and it somehow supported an amazing number of strip joints. I never frequented them, but I knew the location of seven of them, just by regular going past them on major streets.

I am pleasantly surprised that there are lots of amenities in some of the villages and towns you go through. Barbecue sites, toilets, sights to see, museums. I guess tourism keeps many of these places going when past industries dry up and go away. Also surprised to see you refer to an IGA - there are IGA supermarkets all over the place here, and I never thought they'd be in Australia. In Canada, IGA was recently purchased by Sobeys, a big supermarket chain from the Maritime provinces. *{{I suspect that IGA here are more of a co-op so perhaps it isn't as easy for them to be purchased. EL}}*

I had wondered where Craig Hilton had gotten to. I think he must know, but lots of fanzine fans miss his Rats of the Underworld cartoons. They were great, and I'd like to see more. But, I understand Craig has his hands full with the hospital at Doomadgee. *{{Craig and Julia have left Doomadgee now, and were last heard of in Melbourne. EL}}*

Of course, with the differences in the hemispheres, we have just entered winter according to the calendar. However, we've had winter actually for some time now, and we have got lots of snow on the ground - probably we've had almost a metre, and we've have been promised a lot more. We're having a hard, cold winter.

It's a little surreal that as I respond to issue 89, I can look forward and see what you've done so far for issue 90. Yes, this Web thing takes some getting used to, but I am, slowly but surely.

Anyway, I doubt I've done issue 89 justice. I found it a little tough to dodge back and forth between windows to read some issue, make some comments, and back again. Now, I have to do the same for John Foyster's last two issues of eFNAC. He may have to wait a bit. Take care, we hope for you the most relaxing and enjoyable of Christmases, and a Happy New Millennium! See you when issue 90 is done.

Lloyd Penney

I just recently accessed the Gegenschein website, and downloaded the contents of issue 90 into a Word document I can scan and make comments on as I go. This comes a little later than I expected (I promised Jean I'd comment on the latest Geg right after the latest Wrevenge), but better late than never.

The closest I've ever gotten to a West Coast convention was the 1984 Worldcon in Los Angeles, and last May, when Yvonne and I guested at VCon 25 in Vancouver. I'd like nothing better than to go to another one of them, but there's most of a whole continent in the way, and not much I can do to get past it. I'd like to go to Seattle, too - soon, I hope.

I would very much like to see the magazineart.org website. Next weekend will be a one-day pulp convention in Toronto, and we'll be going to see some sights and be with friends. I've seen examples of pulp magazine art, especially from romance and other genre pulps, and I've been told that less than 10% of all old magazine art still exists - much of it was trashed about as soon as it was printed on magazine covers.

I have to agree on electronic books - they are inconvenient, but they could sell on price. That also means that rich authors could be a thing of the past. I have been trying to find work as a proofreader with publishing companies in Toronto without luck; maybe you've hit upon the reason why. I've always looked at proofreading as a value-added feature, and cutting corners cuts costs and quality. That's the way business is done today.

Story ideas? They're from a clearing house in Schenectady! Just ask Rob Sawyer and Barry Longyear. I have little patience for ultra right-wing SF, so I have read little of Jerry Pournelle. When Steve Stirling arose writing stuff to the right of Jerry, I knew which books I wouldn't buy. And Steve is an acquaintance when he lived in Toronto. Tsk, tsk.

Anyway, it looks like I haven't done much here. I'll promise more for next time. Please let us all know when *Gegenschein 91* is available, and I'll have a better letter a little quicker. See you then!

Henry L Welch

Thanks for *Gegenschein 90*. I have no basis for understanding the economics of your extended vacations from both a time and monetary standpoint. The typical US employee probably gets about 2 to maybe 4 weeks of vacation a year and most have no way to afford the cost of the trips you describe. *{{Australia has mostly had a more laid back attitude towards vacation time than the US. This has unfortunately been changing dramatically over the past decade. EL}}*

I have had better luck with internet shopping than you seem to have. Most of it is probably due to the high-reliability T3 gateway I have to suffer through at work. All but the most poorly hosted sites suffer little or no delay to load all those annoying graphics, applets, and pop-up browser windows. One of the fringe benefits of that university job. Bandwidth at home improved last week with the upgrade from 28.8k modem to access through our cable provider.

Damien Broderick

Dunno if I've commented yet on yr mini review, Eric: *The Book of Revelation* by Rory Barnes and Damien Broderick

Some fine pieces of situational humour here, plotted by the Goon Show, and I'm sure they were ingesting recreational chemicals at times.

Only the very finest red and white vintages, but those in abundance. Thanx for the nice remarks.

Erika Marie Lacey

www.grailsearch.cjb.net

I agree with you about the usage of public money on advertising for the government. It always gets my goat at seeing the pamphlets in the mail, pamphlets everywhere. Advertisements on television, radio -- especially when the elections are near. I don't get why the local seats have to have their own little offices in buildings, either -- why not have an office in the local council? I know that the member for Rankin (probably Labor's Craig Emerson again) has one in the local shopping centre. When I had a look in it, there was nothing but a desk, some chairs, and lots -- and I mean, lots -- of pamphlets and other advertising paraphernalia.

Then again, I think that the government gets away with an awful lot because a lot of people are unconcerned about what goes on unless it involves something like boat people, who they perceive will steal away their jobs. I had a friend the other day say to me that he wished that Australia was like the United States and other countries without compulsory voting. I'd say that would be something of a disaster -- they have something like 30% voting over in the US (that I can remember). If people are so unconcerned at the moment so as to not make a fuss about things, they're not likely to go vote the arses out (though I must admit ... like after this most recent election ... that Howard-voting people had stayed at home or suddenly had an irresistible urge to go overseas this weekend).

I don't know about the death of printing. Sometimes there are people (gasp!) who don't have internet access you have to print something out for. I don't have a printer, myself, so that means trekking down to the local library and paying 20c a sheet and waiting 10 minutes for the bloody page to print out. One would think that they'd acquire a faster printer. At least it comes out looking okay, especially at that price. The alternative is fast printing at my university, 11c per sheet, and prints out *really* fast. Unless I go to the Women's Room, where I can get dodgy printing for free. But ... not the death of it, yet.

SmartTags. I remember something vaguely about those. There are so many things about IE that tick me off -- and this looks like it's another one. It didn't help that when I installed IE6 (to test it out) it froze my computer and blue-screened at me most of the time. Reminded me of why I like Opera so much. So, how do they edit webpages? I would have thought that one would have to have access to that person's website ... unless it's some sort of, hmm. An awful lot of information would have to be stored upon one's computer, right, to keep this alive? *Not really. Only has to store the tag list. The rest it can pull down over the internet. Given the pushy advertising via internet now, I now refuse to run insecure and vulnerable Microsoft applications*

entirely. EL}}

Whenever I phone to do something -- rarely -- I don't get stuck in queues for very long. Admittedly, whenever I do phone places it's to complain about service, as nobody else in this household seems to care that they're paying money for substandard service. Everyone gets up my nose for complaining, too. But the good side of it is that I only press the "Press 1 for complaints about our service" or something like that and get onto an operator fairly quickly. The only ones that doesn't happen for are government people, but I've always found that it's best to go harass them in person for that sort of thing. If I phone I always get the runaround.

Quite a list of books read there. What makes it even more impressive is the fact that most of those look like they've been published fairly recently. Most of the books I've read are pre-1995, for I can easily buy those in second hand bookstores and get in the libraries, whereas the newer ones aren't in used bookstores and have a long waiting list in the library. Not that it matters too much, as there's quite a long list of stuff I've not read from the past century.

Lucy Huntzinger

I thoroughly enjoyed the GUFF report, particularly as it was heavily illustrated. I am afraid I made many comic faces and gaped aloud as I saw photos of British fans I haven't seen in person for 6 to 12 years. I did not recognise Greg Pickersgill or Rob Hansen, frankly. They would most likely be equally surprised at current photos of me.

In your London report you misspelled Alun Harries as Alan Harris. He wouldn't like that! *{{Opps! EL}}*

Clive Newall

You asked (in geg90):

Are Books Still Good Value

I saw one of those lists of what we paid in the 1970's for various items. Bread was \$1.40 (\$2.50), milk 48 cents a litre (\$1.50), eggs \$1.14 (\$2), steak \$6 a kilogram (\$12), postage stamps 20 cents (45 cents). However a newspaper was 10 cents (\$1.10), and a paperback book \$1.25 (\$16.95). How did all the farm producers get so much more efficient, while publishers simply raised prices?

The answer, of course, lies in that contentious area "competition". Food producers have been squeezed to allow the two big supermarket chains to compete with ridiculous prices on the so-called "staples" (bread, milk etc) so as to attract customers who (they hope) will then purchase other, more profitable, items.

Newspapers and books have both suffered from worldwide price increases in the cost of paper, although Melbourne did have the luxury of a daily newspaper for 10c/day for approx. a year recently (*The Australian*, trying to hurt the *Age*). And for six months we also had two free daily throw-aways (one each from Fairfax and Murdoch). Fairfax decided after 6 months that they'd bled enough, and killed their freebie, Murdoch's freebie soldiers on.

Books have serious problems. Competition only comes at the retail point, since the product (each individual book) only comes from a single source. Books don't compete with each other in the way that chocolate bars do. (See also: CDs)

I suspect that electronic books are awaiting the arrival of a really good reader. Cheap. Lightweight. Robust. And, like it or not, some form of (acceptable to the big rights holders) Digital Rights Management. The other possibility is that instant printing's price point will come down to meet the increasing price point of traditional printing and distribution, and then the bookshop becomes a kiosk out front of the printing hardware.

"The Internet is an important cultural phenomenon, but that doesn't excuse its failure to comply with basic economic laws. The problem is that it was devised by a bunch of hippie anarchists who didn't have a strong profit motive."

-- Thomas Nolle, a New Jersey telecommunications consultant. (LATimes,26Jul01)

Catherine Mintz

I just made a quick pass over things, but I think your comments on web site buying missed my all time favorite, which is the site that demands you enter your email address and a password and then sends them back to you, uncoded, for confirmation. Suggestions on what to type back appreciated, excluding the obvious, "That's it, you idiots, forget it!" Something with a real zing.

Alf Katz

re EAT: I think part of the problem is the children aren't really interested in electronics anymore, buying a computer and the instant gratification of the net is so much easier. There's still *Silicon Chip*.

re Hard to Buy Over the Net: You're starting to sound like the people in newsgroups like comp.arch.embedded who flame top posters and those using html. You've got to wake up and realize that the net no longer belongs to us geeks. It now belongs just as much to the technologically mundane. Yeah, you don't have to buy stuff that requires cookies to be enabled (although I like cookies with the right ingredients), but four mundanes probably will. *{{Don't forget sites that fail when you don't enable referrer logging. Grrr! EL}}*

Joseph Nicholas

Thanks for the information about the latest *Gegenschein*, which I have now read. Except for the book reviews -- in theory I'd like to keep up with what's happening with SF, but in practice there isn't the time, and I'm usually content if the number of novels read per year just crawls into double figures. And I didn't really follow your complaints about HTML and the web, but that's entirely attributable to the fact that I don't know much about them or how they work -- people tell me that it's all a lot easier to learn than it actually looks, but my response is that (as with the desire to read SF) I simply haven't the time....compounded, in the case of HTML and the web, by an utter lack of inclination. (There's too much else to do!)

Anyway. You noted at the end of the issue that you'd lost Judith's e-mail address, but seemed to hint that this might be a server problem.so just keep trying to send whatever it was that you were trying to send!

We should be working on another issue of IRG round about now, given that the warmest autumn since 1659 has come crunching to end with the sudden onset of winter. Should be....

Judith Hanna

Yo, cobber -- Good to hear from you. Enjoyed skimming through Geg, with what seems a characteristic Eric mix of tech and politics. On tech: agree with you on the Works of Bill Gates being anathema. Apart from that, I just want a machine that will do what I want when I press a few buttons -- which means mostly glorified typewriter and visual ansaphone. Beyond that, I come over all Luddite and my brain hurts. I remain a paper addict -- but want printers that cope with refillable ink-jet cartridges, not to be locked into having to keep buying expensive and wasteful new cartridges. On politics -- similar brain hurts effect, which gets worse the more I have to do with trying to get something sensible happening on environment locally.

Thanks for your sterling efforts measuring allotment while still recovering from jet-lag. Autumn has closed in, and we are harvesting cold weather crops of spuds, jeerusalem artichokes and spinach beet. Warmest October since 1659 when records began last month -- and another 'fine mild' spell forecast for next week. Global warming ... *{{Yes, wonderful stuff. Seems to me we just got the coal fires burning in time to prevent a mini ice-age. Thames frozen over, all that nasty sort of stuff. EL}}*

JN and I have been muttering on and off all year 'Must do another IRG RSN'. Hasn't worked yet...

Cheers to you and Jean, hope you're enjoying warm weather. *{{Of course. Global warming ... EL}}*

Tara Smith

How are you both? Thanks for keeping me on your distribution list - I always enjoy Gegenschein, even though I never respond.

I actually flew over your part of the world 6 weeks ago. I flew from Perth to Guam, via Cairns, and returned the same way. Yes, I know Cairns is not exactly close to you, but it is at least in the same quadrant..... :-)

The reason I passed through Cairns and headed to Guam was to visit my daughter and be with her when she produced her first infant and my first granddaughter. So I am now an insufferably smug and boring and proud grandmother! Never thought I would see the day, and also never thought I would be so clucky about it. Looks like the wicked witch of the West does have some soft spots after all.

My very best regards to Jean. Keep on travelling and enjoying yourselves, and don't let the bastards (HP, Microsoft, etc) grind you down.

Roy Lavender

Your gripe column restores my faith. I am not alone.

Wireless World.

Long ago, in the dark days lighted by the glow of vacuum tubes, I was involved in a classified project that needed a highly linear amplifier. The answer was a Williamson amplifier, right out of the pages of WW. We substituted 6L6 tubes and General Radio output transformers and removed all trace of the word valves. Not so we could steal the credit. Our work was classified. We kept the Wireless World circuit non classified so we could use it to build hi-fi amplifiers. Lots of magazines went down the same tube. Audio, Modern Mechanics. Not enough people building things at home to keep the magazine alive.

Keith Walker

Thanks for the info. Yes I too feel like demanding AOL allow me the change my main address. I don't know where all this spam comes from? All I know is it's a damned nuisance. For some reason with the other six screen names they're pretty spam free. Nice to hear from you.

Another ish of FF is currently in active preparation. If you give me a check on your current snail mail address I'll send you a copy.

Craig Macbride

As I've read it within a decent period of receiving it, I thought I might as well make some comments.

"Hard to Buy over Net" is certainly no surprise to me. Some web sites have irritating Flash crap as their home page, so that you can't even navigate to the HTML pages without having a Flash plugin! Luckily, most sites I use are sticking to vaguely standard HTML. However, I did come across two recently which had style sheets which had clearly never been tested on Netscape and, presumably, any other browser other than IE: One caused the page to be totally blank, while the

other caused it to take 5 mins to display. In both cases, turning off style sheets altogether in Netscape caused the pages to display quite adequately, if not in exactly the format intended. *{{A lot of Netscape 4 versions are so broken in their handling of style sheets that I can't find any way to display my pages correctly in them. I'm thinking of taking advantage of another Netscape bug to convince Netscape not to even attempt to render my style sheets. I can't think of any way around the problem of Netscape being broken. EL}}*

As for IE6, I believe I have read that they have removed Smart Tags. Even if they put them back, I don't believe that preventing your content being visible to users of Internet Explorer 6 is the right answer. While deliberate, it is the same in effect as the sites which use Flash or faulty HTML to prevent you seeing their sites. Reducing access based on what browser is being used is bad for everyone. Some of us browse the net from friends' machines, net cafes and airport lounges in which we have no choice over the browser installed. Surely it would be better to simply inform users of the situation and let them continue on? *{{At the moment I simply try to turn SmartTags off, but I resent the number of kludges my pages need to cope with browser compatibility problems. EL}}*

In regard to telephone systems, what amazes me is how few companies are using the nifty, but by no means new, systems that estimate how long it will be before the call is answered by a human. I hate being on hold for ages hanging onto the phone, but I don't mind a message telling me that my call won't be answered for 10 mins. I can either decide that's too long and hang up, or do something for 8 mins and come back to the phone.

I don't know any current figures, but last I heard something like a million of the "criminals" in US jails were there for drug offences, including dope smoking. Lots and lots of victimless "crimes", and definitely the result of religious fanaticism.

Email lists that include ads don't worry me. Anyone with the right tools (eg. procmail under Unix/Linux) can filter out the ad portion of the messages if they wish, since the ads tend to be inserted in a quite predictable way. *{{Mind you, it is easier for someone with access to more than a POP3 port. I get annoyed about the crap occupying download time. Luckily even Windows users can get nice tools like Nick Bolton's MailWasher to gain many of the advantages of procmail. EL}}*

Cy Chauvin

Thanks for your e-mail. Geg 91 is certainly a pithy fanzine, a b/i/t t/a/r/t and w/i/t/h l/o/t/s o/f s/e/e/d/s. Actually some are seeds of thought. I don't think I would have thought about printers and printed material becoming unnecessary, but what you says seems convincing. One wouldn't know it from this office, however: every one page report printed also generates a page identifying who printed, each fax sent generates a page indicating whether it went through or not, every sheet in the ream-thick semi-weekly "call bulletin" produced is interwoven with another sheet blank except for a reporter number. Perhaps CMD is a front for a major office paper manufacturer. (By the way, we have a branch in Australia: Cordell. CMD reports on construction projects.)

I'd forgotten that in Australia one is required to vote; it does seem one should have a "No Award" (so to speak) option in that case. What happens if one repeatedly spoils one's ballot? Are people also required to vote in primary elections (elections to determine who will run as the candidate for a particular party)? *{{There are no primary elections. Anyone can be a candidate, with or without a party. Parties select their own candidates without reference to the electorate. Very, very few people are members of a political party. If*

you could get a typical fan group into one district, they could probably stack the local political party branch. EL}}

Apple or other computer executives aren't the only ones who drive around without license plates, unfortunately. I see an awful lot of "temporary" ones in my neighborhood.

I'm really sorry to hear your explanation of the solar cells cost problems, the story that always went around was that if there was ever enough demand so there was true mass production of the units, the price should go down enough so solar would be truly competitive. An chicken and egg theory, so the proposal was that the federal government should order enough of the high priced eggs to get the cost down. I guess we'll have to switch to biodiesel fuel instead, although since we're all trying to cut down on fried foods for health reasons, where will all that used veggie oil come from? Perhaps methane gas derived from broccoli stalks would be a surer bet.... *{{About time for us to move to a nuclear and hydrogen economy. Or if the greenies don't like environmentally friendly atomic power (well, OK, blowups happen), then orbital solar mirrors powering lasers, pointing at offshore barges of water with titanium dioxide catalyst, producing hydrogen. (And the generals get a free weapons system as well.) EL}}*

Tracy Benton

Enjoyed reading *Gegenschein 91* on line. I like the alphabetized rants--so handy and organized of you. If you come to Wisconsin again, do stop by my house and help me organize mine. Not that you shouldn't rant against IE 6 -- you probably should, we're ranting against it plenty here -- but I think the SmartTags menace may at least be lessened. It wasn't bundled into XP, or so CNET says (<http://news.cnet.com/news/0-1003-200-6399150.html>). But I wouldn't put it past them to say one thing and do the other.

Also, thanks for the many thumbnail book reports. I have been eyeing my copy of Ash - Vol. 1 with some trepidation, but it sounds like you liked the series in general, so it'll be next up after I finish Rowling's HP and the Goblet of Fire. (No, not Hewlett-Packard, although it sounds like their merger with Compaq may mean they drink from such a vessel.)

Take it easy -- hope to see you at Corflu next February!

Lloyd Penney

I've accessed your website and downloaded a .pdf of *Gegenschein 91*. Remember when the mailman made it all so easy? Anyway, time to have a quick look at what's on the file. *{{I have to walk down twelve flights of steps to collect my mail. I don't think the mailman is making it easy. EL}}*

Government ads should not be allowed for many reasons. One Canadian political cartoonist of the 1970s and 80s, Duncan MacPherson, put it best...the government is trying to bribe the electorate with its own money. Whatever money the parties have of their own are political contributions, and they should be reported, no matter the size. I think there is a rule here that contributions above a certain amount must be reported, but many corporations get around this by issuing cheques just under the proscribed amount, and lots of them.

Selling merchandise on the Web is good in theory...however, trying to find what you want on the Web is much like looking for a very small needle in a very, VERY large haystack. Not even large and diversified manufacturers are making much money this way. No wonder businesses that are too specialized couldn't make it on the Web...they certainly wouldn't be able to do it in a store or similar public outlet..

Fan funds...Yvonne and I have about exhausted the market for our trip report based on our 1998 CUFF trip. We sold 30 issues, and that's half the print run. I keep hoping that someone will send us \$10 for an issue, but the appeal is understandably limited. Still, there's some value there, so I expect I'll sell one or two a year from now on. Still, it raised about C\$1000 for CUFF, so we're pleased, and anything else is gravy.

We've all argued about American interference in foreign affairs, and no one likes it, but it has become a fact of life. In fact, some have braved public opinion, and said that the attacks of September 11 are the results of that interference. I certainly notice this because I live right alongside the USA, but will say that American involvement is the lesser of various potential evils, considering what other countries could be involved in our affairs. We want it all; we want America to be knowledgeable about the rest of the world, but we also want it to mind its own business. (Instead, it interferes where it can, and knows next to nothing about anywhere else. Go figure.)

Mandatory voting...perhaps not so difficult to envision, nearly impossible to implement. It might be the only way to find out exactly what the public wants and needs. In the province of Ontario, there's a proud tradition of voting against, not for. When the next provincial election comes around, and I hope it's soon, I don't know who I'll be voting for, but I sure will be voting against the incumbent Conservatives. They've taken a hostile policy to those who work in health and education industries, and too many nurses, doctors and teachers grab lucrative jobs in the United States.

Your review of *The Martian Race* doesn't list who the author is...looks like it might be Ellen Zubrin, but I'm not sure on that one. I'm now reading *Black Wine* by Candace Jane Dorsey, and now have a complementary of *Perdido Street Station* by China Milville. Looking forward to it. *{{It was Gregory Benford. EL}}*

I've got a CD coming out in the spring! It's a spoken word CD, with six horror short stories written by Canadian authors, and the stories are converted to radio-style plays. I am a voice actor on two stories, and two more stories are yet to be recorded. Look for Fears for Ears coming out soon.

I've gotten to my regular page of comments, and I've run out of zine, so I guess this loc is done. Always looking for more...take care, say hello to Jean, and see you next issue.

Mark Loney

You have my whole-hearted support on the general need for and utility of rants - I don't know whether I'm getting older and grouzier or just more intolerant of people wasting my time (and/or money) but a soundly based rant is a good thing.

Like you, I am amazed at the number of websites that make the user (customer) experience as difficult as possible - particularly those that try to make it mandatory to use plug-ins like Flash or Shockwave. It's not that I have anything against plug-ins but if I don't already have one installed on my computer, the value proposition generally isn't there for me to spend time downloading and installing a new (and probably superfluous) application when all I want to do is buy something.

The worst site I ever saw for this was the Dr Martens website (www.drmartens.com) circa 2000. It was unbelievably bad - even when I went to the effort of using a computer with the appropriate plug-ins, it wasn't actually possible to get to price and ordering information about the actual shoes (I couldn't believe that a company that made such good shoes could have such a cock-eyed website so I went to a bit of effort over it). There were lots of fancy graphics that took

far too long to download but it was the logic path through the site, an inexorable path to a logic dead end that would put the worst of telephone queuing systems to shame, that made it a completely pointless waste of time.

I was so impressed by the nugatory nature of the experience that I went so far as to send a short (but polite) email to the contact email address pointing out that the website was impossible to use for its stated purpose (buying shoes). A couple of days later I got back an email that basically told me to 'get f**cked' - clearly from a highly motivated 'customer service officer'. Interestingly, a couple of weeks later, I received a much nicer email from someone more senior that agreed that the website had problems and invited me to come back and look at the all-new website that they would be launching in a few months time... not that I've got around to doing that yet (the old truism that it's far easier to lose a customer than it is to get a customer springs to mind).

My diagnosis of the problem is that website developers forget that the average punter is accessing their fabulous site through a modem at the end of a PSTN line with a connection speed well below 56k and a computer that's probably a couple of years old (or more). Website developers forget this for three reasons. The first is that they are working in a LAN environment with hardware that is probably reasonably up to date and software that is probably completely up to date. The second is that, if there is more than one person working on website development, they are probably competing to come up with the 'coolest' graphics and effects. They should, of course, be competing with each other on a completely different basis - which leads us to the third reason. And that is that most website developers don't know anything at all about the art and science of form design - even really basic stuff like how to make it easy for people to transfer a credit card account number from their plastic credit card to the input field on the screen.

That's probably enough of a rant for one day but I feel the urge to make a couple of other comments. The first is in defence of telephone queuing systems. Studies show (don't you just love that phrase) that many people don't call back if they don't get through when they first ring. And my own experience of queuing systems since we got back from the US at the end of 1995 is that the logic paths are pretty good these days - I haven't been trapped in a logic dead end since I was in the US (and that only happened once when I was trying to get through to someone in a particular USAF office where you had to know a valid extension before you rang the main switchboard number or you could never get to a person). But there probably isn't a solution to the tinny music problem...

The second is to say that, if you want data access in remote areas, an Inmarsat Mini-M terminal (www.inmarsat.com) is probably a much better bet than Globalstar - though it may be a bit more than you're prepared (or able) to pay. Inmarsat also has a 64k service (called M64 I think) but both the Mini-M and the M64 are aimed at the corporate market (oil and mining companies and aviation and shipping businesses). *{{Inmarsat are indeed too expensive. However Globalstar went broke, so that isn't much use either. EL}}*

Please say hello to Jean for and I trust that you both enjoy the Christmas and New Year period.

ps: Just in case you ever revert to using snail mail, the PO Box in Campbell is in the process of being retired so please don't use that anymore.

Neil Kaden

Thanks for *Gegenschein 91*. Finally took a break from building (verry slowwwly) a consulting business -- but after non-voluntarily leaving Nortel (which, I must say,

helped kick me into this direction) it's now "what I do."

RAE, and if was an added bonus to click on the NEXT button and find a new issue -- G92. Must say that perhaps the slower rollout of issues in 2001 was probably a factor in many more and longer LOCs on 90 and 91. {{Well, Geg 92 isn't out until I tell all you folks it is out. EL}}

Web Sites - the top ten: what do many have in common? A service that many subscribe to that forces most naive users to use their site as a home page -- AOL in point. Those few sites that sold stuff that people actually bought (e.g. Amazon). Google wasn't a surprise, other than it appears to be a winner in the old search-engine-wars.

Back now to my volunteer work (MIT Forum) which I at least have more time to do.

Lloyd Pennay

Thank you for issue 92 of *Gegenschein*. I can't remember if there was a note to a listserv about this issue being available, but I do have a printout in front of me to read at my leisure, and a computer with which to compose this loc. {{Well, Geg 92 isn't out until I tell all you folks it is out. EL}}

You mention what looks like an attempt to integrate Australia's aboriginal population into the mainstream of white life. Native Indians in Canada have many of the same problems Australia's aborigines have, such as housing and alcohol abuse. Many of the problems come from frustrations at not being able to live the life their ancestors lived, and the difficulties in trying to fit into the foreign culture surrounding them. In the United States and Canada, some tribes have obtained some autonomy because they have demonstrated they can manage their own affairs well. Other tribes simply can't, and must rely on the state, to their own self-loathing. An autonomous state simply wouldn't work; odds are it would turn into a pit of poverty, and social problems would be worse than ever.

Can't agree with you on selling off public broadcasting, though. Yes, the CBC here is expensive, but shows off Canadian culture to Canadians and the world. Canadian culture is a bright light, but is sometimes hard to see when it's right beside the bank of klieg lights that is American culture. We need to showcase and brag a little. In this overly commercial age, some non-commercial television and radio is welcome, and fosters some national community. Same goes for Radio Canada International. Funding for public broadcasting has been iffy over the years, but the public has spoken, and the funding has been found.

The US stock markets are definitely too high, but they must drop, I hope it happens gradually. The US owns so much of Canadian business, should their stock market drop, they'll take us right long with them. Our dollar is worth about 63 cents, and we feel that's undervalued. Should the US dollar and stock markets drop, the 50-cent dollar wouldn't be too far away.

My letters for issues 89 and 90...of course, we know now that Beijing got the 2008 Summer Olympics, and it's up in the air now if Toronto will ever bid again. There are plenty more problems to deal with other than the Olympics. The letter to Geg 89 is more than a year old, so having a hard, cold winter applies to the previous winter, and not this one just wrapping up. This winter's been very mild, to the point where it's referred to as the winter that never was.

There's been comments on immigration. It's a hot potato, and the Canadian government has to handle it, too. It uses a point system to evaluate the desirability of any particular immigration candidate, and just recently, the number of points needed for approval rose from 70 to 80. The details of the test that assigned the points was recently revealed, and

most native-born Canadians wouldn't qualify to become Canadian under the test. Too many PhDs from other parts of the world are delivering pizzas and sweeping floors in this country, and it has to stop. Some parts of Canada have nursing and doctor shortages, but foreign doctors who have emigrated to Canada are not allowed to practise.

These days, my locs always seem to come down to a page or so, no matter the size of the zine. A few have said my letters are far too long, with little content. Perhaps I am now mentally editing as I write. Then again, it could be just fatigue, and a mild headache, which is what I have as I'm typing. Anyway, thanks again, and keep them coming.

WAHF

Mike O'Brien

In the meantime, I'm not publishing a fanzine at present but you can read my on-line journal at tasmania.diary-x.com

R Laurraine Tutihasi

A lot of so-called criminals in this country are there simply because they used illegal drugs. I don't have exact figures, but it seems to me I heard something on the order of fifty percent.

Lucy Sussex

Hi Eric, good to hear from you. Ah yes, bugger the Government!

Dave Rowe

Atlantis is the last Disney full length cartoon. *Monsters Inc.* is the latest Pixar (*Toy Story*) movie. *Zombies From The Beyond* was an off-Broadway musical (actually it was just an off-musical).

Tom Feller, Marty Cantor, Mark Olson, Roy Tackett, Denny Lien, Loren MacGregor, Mike Resnick, Peter McNamara, Gerald Smith, Bob Smith, Jack Dann, R Laurraine Tutihasi, Michelle Muijsert, Dave Rowe, Pete Presford, Sean McMullen, Don Ashby, Pam Wells, Bob Sabella, Charlotte Proctor, Wendy Weller,

Xmas cards - 1991

Womble and Gerald Smith, with an invitation to their fine - but distant - New Year party. Neil Rest sends a cool party invitation from Chicago, alas even more distant. Has a satellite map of the Great Lakes, etc, down to his block! Paul and Cas Skelton send a great personalised card. John and Diane Fox send a painting of Tinka (a black cat) on a black sheet! It is actually very like Tinka to hide in the dark, and then complain when stepped on. Leanne Frahm. Paul Kincaid and Maureen Kincaid Speller. Karen Johnson. Al Fitzpatrick sends a card and his annual handwritten letter. Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown send a card showing their various very pretty cats. David L Russell sends a weird card, and copies of the Darwin Award books (which we didn't have). Sarah Murray-White. Alison Scott and Steven Cain. Sue and Graeme Batho Bob and Margaret Riep. John and Eve Harvey. Hugh S Gregory. Tim and Heather Rees. Martin and Fiona Caden. Chris Callahan and Dick Roepke. Ben Yalow.

Bounced

I've had email to the following bounced James Allen, David Arblaster, Lenny Bailes, Jean Bowman, Jeremy Byrne (Eidolon), GasBooks (over quota - maybe they don't collect their email), Lee Harding, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Karen Herkes, Chris Holmes, Bev Hope, Marci Malinowitz Laurie Mann, Robbie Matthews, Jeanne Mealy, Craig Miller, Ro Nagey, Ian Nichols, Eunice Pearson, Laura Seabrook, Jonathon Scott, Mike Scott, Peter Simpson, Steve Swartz, Bruce Townley, Karen Vaughan, Gary Wyatt,