

Gegenschein 93

Xmas 2002

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Ray Faraday Nelson

Comrade Lindsay,
It seemed to me that a single thread ran through all your various rants in *Gegenschein 92*, and that was energy consumption. Would that our governments could take such an intense interest in the best use of humanity's great but not infinite resources! First there was the matter of selling off the public broadcasting system on the grounds that it was a misuse of resources for the general population to have to support programming of interest only to a minority of "snob culture" viewers. Our solution here in the People's Republic of Berkeley is listener-supported radio. Our KPFA began as a voice for a pacifist minority, eventually developing into a multicultural marketplace of ideas representing the entire community, largely staffed by dedicated volunteers and supported by listener pledges. KPFA eventually cloned itself in several other cities, becoming the Pacifica Network, all without advertising or government subsidy. Indeed, the government has done its damndest to knock KPFA off the air. Some years back I had a science-fiction program on KPFA myself.

So you see, government broadcasting and advertiser broadcasting are not the only options on the table. And culture snobs are not the only people who would be served by the Berkeley Alternative.

Then there is your rant about hybrid petrol/electric cars. I follow you as far as you go, but here in Berkeley we have gone a lot farther. Here we have had all-electric cars cruising our streets for decades. Several companies have been putting out all-electric cars since the sixties, in particular the Kaylor electric featuring a rack of batteries that can be removed when depleted and replaced with a fresh rack. A local wholesale grocer has even set aside a recharging area where customers can plug in and recharge while shopping.

Here in the Bay Area a car does not have to go any great distance at one time. One goes to work, returns and shops, all on the charge one can take on overnight.

Serious Berkeley people go a step further and buy a bicycle. A bicycle goes as far as you like on no fuel at all and produces no pollution at all, and if you want to carry stuff you can hook a little cart onto the back.

Non Berkeley people believe those commercials that show drivers chugging off into the wilderness in their Sport Utility Vehicles. Berkeley people face the fact that, with luck, you may chug off into the wilderness once a year. Berkeley people know that if they really want to get away from it all, they can rent an SUV.

What do I do? I walk.

You decry the medical problems resulting from exercising. You may be right about some forms of exercising, but the true Berkeleyite doesn't run or even jog, let alone work out on some television-advertised torture machine. A true

Berkeleyite like me puts on some comfortable shoes and walks. A few years back, as a result of backsliding, I ballooned up to almost 300 pounds and, predictably, had a heart attack. Today I weigh in at 180 pounds and I'm still losing weight. Walking was my only exercise. My diet? I followed the Berkeley diet of fruits, flakes and nuts. And of course vegetables. You are what you eat!

You go on to maintain that "multiculturalism is a total failure in every country that has large mixed populations." Clearly you have forgotten the People's Republic of Berkeley. When California became a state, the area that is now called Berkeley had a Spanish majority, with large Asian and White minorities, and in World War 2 we took on a mixed influx of immigrants from a very troubled nation on the planet, representing every conceivable religion and ethnic identity, yet today we all live here together with no more than an occasion scuffle.

I think, in fact, that the term "multicultural" originated in Berkeley.

Your bit on harnessing jet streams for energy fails to take into account that jet streams change their route on a daily basis. Berkeley is situated at a point particularly favored by jet streams, but we could never count on them staying put long enough for us to get our tethered gliders in position. Berkeleyites are so familiar with jet streams we can recognize them on sight.

In this area they tend to look like vast herds of sheep trudging from one horizon to another.

Like you, I'm glad I live in a technological age, but I recognize that there are 2 different technologies deployed today, bad technology and Berkeley technology.

Keep on truckin'! Comrade Ray Nelson

ConVergence

The Australian National Science Fiction Convention. The usual sort of con report, leisurely notes while travelling to the con, since then there was time, followed by a complete blank at the con, since I was too busy to take notes. I do recall enjoying it a lot.

Wednesday 5 June 2002

We organised to leave Airlie mid morning. Problems occurred when we had the first daytime rain in months. In addition, the bus company phoned to say they couldn't get up our street due to road construction, and could we catch the bus on the main street. We carried our bags down to reception at ten, collected mail at the Post Office, and a take away lunch at Subway, before returning to reception. Tim at the Terraces reception kindly drove us (and our heavy bags) down to the bus stop.

Obnoxious music on a long and convoluted bus trip. Next day, in Melbourne, Jean collected two voice mail messages from Qantas saying the flight was delayed. Had her phone been on, these would have allowed her to announce to the entire bus that the flight was late, thus plunging a busload of passengers into deep depression and flighty decisions.

At the airport, our flight to Brisbane was not in, and departure was almost an hour late. There goes our connection to Melbourne. Luckily Jean had booked tickets where this was a problem for the airline, not for us. They had rescheduled most passengers, but we had somehow been missed. Being suspicious flyers, we noticed this and had it fixed. No great problem, and we got a lunch voucher out of

the delay, so we ate at Whitsunday Coast (normally known as Proserpine) Airport, and preserved our cut lunch for a potential dinner.

I got picked on by security at the airport. My shoes set off their metal detector, despite my not even realising there was any metal in the shoes at all. Who had ever heard about security at Proserpine airport before? On weekends, they didn't even turn the machine on in the past, and I've never before encountered a metal detector on full sensitivity. If this happens repeatedly, it reinforces my opinion that air travel is now probably too much of a hassle to be worth doing.

We even, unexpectedly, got a tiny roast beef and cheese sandwich on the flight to Brisbane. We had not been expecting anything Jean could eat. We had about an hour stopover, not bad as Brisbane is one of the more comfortable, spacious and uncrowded airports. Travel hassle factor declines.

We had an uneventful, albeit late, flight to Melbourne. Got a snack Jean couldn't eat (poisonous to her), and were in the uncomfortable very last seats of the flight. Travel hassle factor increases.

We located the airport Skybus to Melbourne city easily, and were dropped at Spencer Street railway station. The taxi driver didn't have a clue where the Hotel Y (or the YWCA) was, and I'm not sure he could even read a map. I thought taxi drivers were supposed to pass a city locations test? Travel hassle factor increases again.

The Hotel Y reception were helpful, and the room adequate, albeit small. The air conditioning is far too noisy, and the room too cold (but we regard all Melbourne as too cold). We were pleased to see a curved built in table with phone and powerpoints. The phone access was above the desk, and had both 610 and RJ11 sockets, which would make modem access easy. That was very good. Less helpful was the sharp projecting piece of the curved desk. With a small reverse curve, they could have made it a less dangerous place in the dark. There was a handy desk lamp, however the main room light was totally inadequate, like most hotel rooms. There was only one bedside lamp, and only one chair. I should have packed my portable fluorescent lamp.

The bathroom sink tap was mounted high, so you could fill jugs and cups without problems. The negative was no soap holder. Pretty good design otherwise.

I was pleased to see a late opening Seven11 store on the same block, less pleased with their prices and limited range of actual food. However there was also a Subway and a MacDonalds, if sufficiently desperate, and the charming Victoria Markets are only a block away. It was better for walking distance food than the Aussiecon site, and much better than the Ascot that some Swancons have been forced to use. However since I don't go to conventions for restaurants and dislike large group restaurant meals (unlike many fans), I wasn't too concerned.

Thursday 6 June 2002

After breakfast, we wandered through the Victoria Markets on the next block. This was a wonderful shopping experience, at least until we got tired and bored, despite not finding one single thing on our shopping list. We did however get a bunch of things that were not on our shopping list. Moccasins for me, although they are of use only for two weeks in winter. A replacement backpack for us each (my new one promptly fell apart soon after, indicating perhaps quality is not a strong point at the markets). A replacement bumbag for us each, and a replacement purse for Jean. All stuff that shouldn't be hard to find, however we had not managed to locate suitable ones where we live. We found

some wonderful Australian map T shirts and a map tablecloth from Peter Brohier, maptag.com.au and figure these will be really nice for showing people where things are in Australia.

Met Gary Hoff as we entered the hotel. He had been in town since the start of the week. That is enthusiasm for you. Mind you, I don't think I saw him again after that initial encounter. That pattern repeated, and somehow made Convergence feel like a much larger con.

We went Vodafone shopping, as I'd heard they were selling off all their stocks of software for Psion organisers. It is a measure of my need for cities that this, the markets, and bookshopping, were the only things I could think of seeking out. There must be something else worthwhile in cities? The only reason I can see to stay in a city is work; that was certainly why I stayed in Sydney.

The phone book listed one Vodaphone store at shop 182 Melbourne Central, Lonsdale Street, but it was actually at shop 107, 211 Latrobe Street, which did somewhat confuse us simple country folks. There I got spare styluses, and a parallel printer link cable, each at \$5. I was very pleased about the spare printer cable, as they are normally a hundred dollars or more. To our delight, we also found pouches to attach our phones to our packs, something we had sought unsuccessfully at the markets in the morning.

At Elizabeth and Bourke Street, I got copies of Purple Software's Allegro handwriting recognition, their Powerbase relational database. and a Psion modem adaptor, reduced from \$250 to \$5. Also a 9 pin null modem adaptor (mine is hand made), a genuine Psion power adaptor (again, mine is hand made), and a spare GoldCard modem to phone cable (mine disappeared for several days a few weeks ago, so I was pleased to have a spare of this unobtainium). 265 Burke Street had nothing on hand.

Next was general organiser stores, such as The Organiser Shop at 173 Melbourne Central, listed as 300 Lonsdale Street. I also got to Organiser World, 333 LaTrobe Street, and later to the Melbourne Calculator Market, 435 Burke Street. Genius Communications at the corner of Latrobe and Elizabeth had little, despite listing themselves as an organiser store. The Calculator King seemed too far away to be worth the effort, as my luggage capacity was stretched by my success already.

We also found a supermarket down near Flinders to get breakfast materials to store in the room. Walked feet off by the time all this was done, but what else would you do in Melbourne? The core is after all a very reasonable and compact walking city.

The late afternoon event was to Justin Ackroyd's *Slow Glass Books* for the Joe Haldeman autograph signing. I didn't locate any extra books to buy, but Justin had our mail order put aside for delivery at the con. I spent a lot of time talking with Gay Haldeman. I had sort of expected that many of her other friends would have been there before me, but I guess most attendees wanted to chat with Joe. During the quiet times, Joe played with my Psion 7 PDA, which led to some not very sensible sentences added to my notes by various parties. Some users had more problems than others with the small keyboard.

The graphic on the web was a drawing Joe did of Jack Dann. Considering it was his first time using a stylus on a touch screen, I think Joe did pretty well. Mind you, Joe has been doing some nice work as an artist with more traditional painting tools, so it isn't the first time he has done a portrait.

I was invited by Rose to tag along on the bus to a committee party at Southbank, which gave me a welcome chance to see some of the hard working committee in a social setting with their GoHs. Despite my dislike for restaurants, I did like the bar they picked, which didn't blast away all conversation with inane music. People actually got to form into small groups and have some decent conversations. It made for a very pleasant evening.

I was even lucky enough to get a lift back to the Y, rather than having to walk or cope with public transport in my befuddled state.

Saw Graham and Susan Batho from Sydney (well, Blue Mountains) at reception as I returned to the hotel. Saw Stephen Boucher bringing Janice Gelb and multiple bags of books, presumably for auctions. Janice was next door to us, pleased to have quiet neighbours. We have shown her the Australian map T shirt, which impressed us greatly.

Friday 7 June 2002

Lots of fans in the bookshops around Melbourne. What a surprise! I think these other fans found all the books I wanted, except for some Justin had on order from us. Certainly I had little luck on my second look, but perhaps I am totally losing any former ability to find decent books.

The convention badge was double sided, plastic coated, preprinted, so when hung on a string, you could read the (large) name no matter which side was showing. I commend that idea to other cons, although perhaps having a different badge design on each side (with different meanings, or even different conventions ...) could be interesting. Only minor fault with the badge was there was no way to write room party numbers on the back of it, in the traditional manner, however fans usually have some paper with them to provide an aide memoir.

The Cato convention facilities at the Hotel Y appeared reasonable, with a large foyer leading to the function rooms. On the ground floor, this consisted of a single large room, used for opening and closing ceremonies, major events and the disco style event. It was almost insufficient for the numbers. On the first floor, there were a number of smaller rooms grouped around the large foyer. This provided a convenient area for sitting around socialising, although a little distant from the major room for those who needed to use the very small elevator rather than the stairs. The two panel rooms on the first floor shared an inadequate corridor as was noted when the panels ended. I'm not sure there are many affordable places that would do much better however. Personally I thought it worked fine, but I admit to low taste.

Garry Dalrymple from Sydney was busy handing out copies of his detailed survey of tastes in popular media, as he has at several conventions (and presumably at the Freecons he organises in Sydney). He tells me the Futurian meetings in Sydney are sparsely attended, and others from Sydney confirm that. I do believe some other groups in Sydney are still more active however.

One of the stronger streams at the convention was the fan history, specifically drawing upon Melbourne and Australian fan history, and I was looking forward to hearing many of them. It is measure of how much else was happening that I missed all of them. I was very impressed by everything the Convergence committee managed to organise, and thought they did an excellent job. While there were doubtless some behind the scenes disasters, they mostly didn't show in the running of the con, and I congratulate the entire con committee for that.

Missed Race Matthew's panel, which mentioned the scarcity of USA SF after WWII in Sterling currency areas. Although my early SF reading was much later than that, I do recall strange patterns of magazines arriving in Australia, and appearing in the second hand stores. Even reprints in Australia of various magazines.

There was an excellent convention cocktail party that evening, astonishingly with catering Jean and I could eat. It seems almost a pity we had already had a small meal before attending.

Continuing a theme of missing fan historical events, I missed Merv Binns' panel. Luckily the historical material was being recorded, and some (including Merv) were putting their material in fanzines.

I saw a vast number of people I didn't expect, often ones not seen since Aussiecon Three, or even longer ago. My former co-worker Gordon Lingard (who hadn't been to a con in a decade), bookseller Ron Serduik from Brisbane. I also saw many people I did expect. Gerald Smith and Womble from Sydney. Lawrie Brown from Canberra. I failed to really catch up with Robbie and Dea Matthews from Canberra, but was impressed by the Andromeda Spaceways Inflight magazine launch in which they were involved. Roman Orszanski was there from Adelaide. Ran into Richard Hryckiewicz late in the con, and had an enjoyable conversation with him. Lots of old Melbourne fans. Merv and Helene Binns, Dick Jenssen, Race Matthews. I also saw lots of *newer* Melbourne fans, like toastmaster Jack Dann, who seemed to lead half the panels and introductions, and did a fine job on all of them.

Jack Herman and Cath McDonnell from Sydney were there, although they are not exactly usually heavy con goers these days. I've been impressed with their efforts to become sailors, so much more effectively than mine. It was good to catch up also with other ANZAPA members, like David Grigg, Karen and her mother Heather Johnson, Marc and Cath Ortlieb. The longest distance attendees were probably Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer from Britain.

I tried not to spend much of my time with people who would be attending our Relaxacon, as I figured I'd get plenty of chance to talk with them at that - should have recalled con organisers (even at Relaxacons) never get as much time as they hope. I've done this before. Why do I never learn?

Stephen Boucher moved to a new apartment. Visiting fan Janice Gelb gets to baptise the never used stove, since Stephen doesn't believe in cooking (unless done by others.) We use the same method while travelling. We heard Nick Stathopoulos moved. Also Merv Binns and Helena move. David Bofinger moves to the UK for a year. For all I know, half the convention attendees moved. I felt like an barnacle, since I absolutely hate the concept of moving.

One of the major linking and melding features of Australian fandom used to be the Bullsheet newsletter that Marc Ortlieb produced for so many years. I was delighted to see New Bullsheet editors Ted Scrivner and Edwina Harvey at the con. Ted gave me a paper copy, and I signed up for the email version.

I have a note saying *bourbon for Joe and merlot for Rose Mitchell*. I sort of assume this was at the convention cash bar. On the other hand, I also have a note saying *back at 1:30 a.m.*, which may even refer to the previous night. Mind you, the concept of a former YWCA serving alcohol is a bit of a shock, and shows how far such groups have moved with the times. Doubtless the Temperance Society is rotating rapidly in the graves.

I also have a note saying Slow Glass was perhaps to move, in the manner of many bookshops, all under siege by landlords selling properties. This was unfortunately confirmed by Justin's catalog for October, confirming a move to mail order rather than a street presence.

Saturday 8 June 2002

Did I mention the pocket program? One of the most innovative single page versions I've ever encountered. I hope other cons make use of the same origami idea, as it worked well. Most important, it did fit in a pocket.

David Grigg's ANZAPA Collation on Sunday 2 p.m. was a wonderful chance to see many of the ANZAPA members in person, for the first time in several years in many cases. Some, like Michael Green, I didn't recall meeting previously. This collation was held in a large chair filled fifth floor room that was also used for parties on several evenings. One of the parties there was less than comfortable, due to a drunk. At least we managed to unobtrusively move the drinks away from him, and keep him away from other people just in case (not that there was any indication he might get aggressive) until he went to sleep.

I rejoined the Australian Science Fiction Foundation, at their meeting in the same room straight after the collation. They do good works for fandom, especially conventions, and are perhaps neither as well known nor as well supported as they deserve. I guess to some extent some fans see them as a Melbourne cabal, but I've never thought that a particularly fair view. www.vicnet.net.au/~asff/

Sunday 9 June 2002

Getting food was sometimes interesting, as the hotel cafe tended to close rather early. Despite what Jack Herman says, it wasn't nearly as bad as the Ascot, in West Australia, which was totally isolated. I got the making of several light meals (or maybe heavy snacks) at the markets when they opened, but as Jack correctly points out, bratwurst on a bun isn't a full meal. There were three fast food places in the same block, but I managed to avoid them except once very late at night when very desperate for something carbonated to drink. On the last night I went out with Joe and Gay and we eventually found a satisfactory sushi joint within (fairly lengthy) walking distance, but I didn't consider many of the places I noted around that end of Melbourne within a reasonable distance. However, I'm not very much of a restaurant person, so I can understand serious restaurant enthusiasts having more of a problem.

Jack Herman ran the business meeting, and proved once again that he is one of the few fans who can consistently do so in an thoroughly entertaining manner. Although I pick on Jack every chance I get (he is a much more active responder than Joseph Nichols), I remain impressed.

I've also been impressed by some of the books I've been able to download in electronic form, especially those from the Baen library. That note in response to a panel on eBooks. I must sometime write more on ebooks, as I've been deliberately using them to replace paper books for reference.

My interview with Gay Haldeman seemed to go over well. This was something of a reprise of a successful one we had done a fair while ago, with a bunch of leading questions. Gay and I got together at brunch that morning, to plot which particular topics we would include, and make sure the panel timing would work. I rewrote the questions to make them a little more amusing before the panel. Gay grabbed a copy of the questions, for future use, when it turned out that set of topics worked well for her.

I also managed to have dinner with Joe and Gay on the Monday, after the con. Mind you, we wandered a fair way into Melbourne before finding a venue for a meal. Stopped at the pub opposite the con hotel to continue our talk afterwards. Jean was unfortunately not feeling up to wandering over, and on this trip, the Haldemans didn't have time to visit us in Airlie Beach (well, it isn't like they have never been here before, as our first visit was around 1980, and their most recent in 1999).

Awards

There seemed to be a lot of them, and not being a news zine, I didn't take notes. The very handy news sheet, the New Bullsheet listed them all. A well deserved Ditmar for Ditmar, whose stunning computer art has long graced Bill Wright's fanzine, and often others these days. I saw a bunch of his art on display at the U.K. Eastercon, for example. It was also good to see the first Peter McNamara award go to Paul Collins, who did so much for science fiction publishing in this country, with Void and elsewhere.

I was pleased to see The Australian Science Fiction Foundation's *A Bertram Chandler Memorial award* went to John Foyster. Julian Warner's notes on the award cite John's work on both versions of the Australian Science Fiction Review, eFNAC, numerous fanzines, hosting discussion groups, the Nova Mob in Melbourne and Critical Mass in Adelaide, chairing conventions, etc. A most deserved award.

Conventions

I noted the following Australian and New Zealand conventions.

ConTour 2004, 25th Nat NZ Con, Princes Gate Hotel, Rotorua Convention Centre, Easter Friday 9 April Monday 12 April 2004. Harry Turtledove NZ\$60 before 2003.

ConFlux, the 2004 NatCon (the 43rd) will be in Canberra, on 23 to 26 April. GoH Greg Benford and Sean McMullen, FGoH Karen Herkes.

I am now pondering about an Airlie Beach Relaxacon in April 2004. That early in the year, it may be still a bit warm for some visitors.

Other Addresses

Altair V Journal of Speculative Fiction (1998) ISSN 1382-3340 ISBN 0 9577238 9 X www.sfsite.com/altair

Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine, launch issue (launched at Convergence - Canberra based). www.andromedaspaceways.com Great fun at the launch on 9 June 2002. Triangular transparent space food capsules (containing gourmet jelly beans). Transparent wrist strap boarding passes. Fun approach as captain and crew stayed in their roles. I'm boosting this for a Ditmar for best book or magazine launch of the year. As at October I've had three issues of the magazine, and it is doing a fine job.

Aurealis #29, ConVergence 2002 Special (I thought this had folded, and was pleased to realise I was wrong). 03 9504 1516 Chimaera Publications say four for A\$38/50 www.sf.org.au/aurealis

Frontier SF magazine Katherine Shade and Jeremy Sadler. www.frontiermagazine.net

Orb speculative fiction, double issue 3 and 4, edited by Sarah Endacott. home.vicnet.net.au/~kendacot/Orb

Vision, Brisbane sf magazine. Scott Robinson 5 Lavarack Road, Bray Park 4500. welcome.to/vision-writers/

Airlie Beach Relaxacon report

What we should have done was to have recorded the convention, for posterity, or at least for the Science Fiction Oral History Association. Then if we ran a deficit, and could get a microphone into the parties, we could always try using the recordings for blackmail.

We returned to Airlie Beach on Qantas via Brisbane and Proserpine on Tuesday 11 June, accompanied by New Zealand author and old friend Lyn McConchie. A taxi was competitive with the bus for three, so we reached the Whitsunday Terraces resort very comfortably soon after our middayish arrival. Given we had arisen at 4:30 a.m. we were a bit tired.

Lyn had vast quantities of books in her suitcase. After lifting it ... or attempting to ... I asked her what was in it, and then realised that was a really silly question. Despite this, Lyn collected another box or so of books from us the following day, in several hunts through our surplus boxes.

We didn't feel up to hunting up much in the way of food supplies, so we had dinner at the Whitsunday Sailing Club. Lyn even found they would cook her steak the way she wanted (burnt!)

I failed to mention Lyn gave us Hamilcar BaaBaa (well, it couldn't be Barca, could it, despite that being the Carthaginian general's name), or more accurately, the beautifully coloured tanned hide that sheep no longer required. While not a hunting trophy in the tiger skin class, it makes a wonderful ornament on the tiled floor, as well as being a much warmer item to stand on during the two weeks of our winter.

Wednesday was a book hunting day for Lyn (what a surprise), with a drive to Proserpine. I think we shipped a bunch of books to New Zealand today. While Lyn was hunting op shops, I collected UK fan Jane Killick from the airport.

Peter and Mariann MacNamara arrived, visiting his brother at Cannonvale, for I think the first time. We didn't see them until a few days later. Peter was a bit slow on his feet, but was doing a lot better than expected, and went to several events with us.

Thursday 13 June

John August arrived via Mackay and a bus. He quickly grabbed details from Chris Peat's Heavens-Above site of what satellites might be visible from Airlie Beach, being interested in seeing Iridium flares. While at the sailing club for an evening meal, he noted a sighting of the Hubble Space Telescope, but older eyes could not make it out. I collected Michael Green from Proserpine airport in the afternoon.

We again dined at the Whitsunday Sailing Club, on their cheap and cheerful (and filling) meals.

Friday 14 June

Friday arrivals were Robin and Alicia Johnson, and Lucy Schmeidler at Hamilton, Bill Wright, plus LynC, Clive Newley, Roger and Estelle at Proserpine (given the size of our car, I left them for a taxi). Leanne and Kerry Frahm drove up from Mackay.

Some people went swimming in the lagoon, which is a pretty relaxed spot almost in the middle of Airlie. I'm not used to fans doing anything active.

Friday evening we set out at six to Rob Bredl's Barefoot Bushmans Wildlife Park. I had organised a lot of it with Joe and Francis at the Wildlife Park by phone. Lync, Clive, Roger and Estelle in one taxi from Whitehaven Units. John, Michael, Bill, Robin, Alicia, me in another taxi from Terraces. Peter and Mariann MacNamara arrived by car

later. Entry was \$59, and included all transport, meal, etc. That event only occurs on Wednesday and Friday, which meant some people (like Lucy) missed it, and would not be around for the next one.

It started with a screening of the Amazing Killer Instinct TV documentaries that Rob did as the Barefoot Bushman, so that people could gather ready for the main events. The first was the crocodile show, with Rob doing his usual hands on event. Given it was to show the tourists live action, there was a little less on crocodile habits, and a few more wrestling with the crocodile things, like on the Steve Irwin. Rob demonstrated how to jump on a large crocodile, and kick it into spectacular TV style action. He made it look like sitting on an armchair. Rob pointed out that the croc leapt into action only when responding to certain stimulus (a kick on the rear legs). For example, you could use the back of one to step over the safety fence without provoking any spectacular reaction.

Small native Australian animals, and letting people pat koalas and that sort of traditional thing was next. That seemed to go down well with most people, as many wildlife parks are not able to let you actually hold a wide variety of the animals. Lync's children seemed to like holding the baby animals. Which ones you get to handle depends entirely on which babies have been handed in and need raising by hand at the time. With so much national park around here, there are always some coming in.

Handling snakes wasn't precisely as popular, although most tried it with the python. Rob didn't do much with the poisonous snakes this time, probably because they wouldn't be all that active in the cool of the night. Then it was time for the BBQ dinner, which was not gourmet style, but had a lot of variety and was plenty filling. It is the sort of food I enjoy a lot more than restaurant meals.

Munda Goala cultural performers did their traditional aboriginal corroboree and didgeridoo show. The performers are each from a different tribe, so you really aren't getting a genuine original cultural experience. However the choreography was well done. The show had a lot of interaction with the audience. A bit too much, I thought, while I was trying to imitate the dance steps. At least Michael and John looked just as silly doing it as I did. The didgeridoo playing was really well done, with the choreographer (who also runs one of the local shops) being a master of the instrument.

Stay at homes were Lyn, Leanne and Kerry, Jean, who went out together for dinner, I believe. Lucy was incommunicado after dark, and had lost her pocket diary, possibly on the bus. She said it happens a lot. That would drive me insane. Lucy is obviously a saint (or whatever the Jewish equivalent may be).

Saturday 15 June

The beachfront markets was the early morning event, with lots of fruit and handcrafts available.

The Video Room was John's idea, and Michael co-operated. Lyn McConchie supplied *Dune* on three videos, picked up locally at good prices. I loaned my vastly underused VCR, and what tapes I had, and John fixed my (mostly unused) VCR with a cleanup tape.

Saturday evening. Mexican Restaurant at The Esplanade, with Bill, John, Jane, Leanne, Lyn, Alicia, Robin, Michael. My creation (a bit of everything) was a bit overcooked, and service was slow, due to crowding. Lync etc came along later. If doing another Relaxacon, I'd organise the restaurant ahead of time with bookings several days ahead (despite the problems doing this with fans). Several restaurants I wanted to use had closed in the two months prior to the con, and

others are available only on prior bookings at that time of year.

Sunday 16 June

We took the FantaSea Reef World day cruise to the Outer Barrier Reef. This is one of a very few one day (as distinct from multiple day) trips that actually goes all the way to the outer reef, rather than to the fringing reefs around drowned hill peaks of the offshore islands.

Travellers were Lucy, LynC, Clive, Roger, Estelle, Leanne, Robin and Alicia, John, Michael, Bill, Peter and Mariann, Eric and Jean. The only one to stay behind was Lyn.

The boat leaves Shute Harbour, passes nearby Shute, Tancred and Repair Islands before crossing Molle Passage and then Whitsunday Passage (named by Cook on 3 June 1770, as was Pentacost Island) into Dent Passage and Hamilton Island (formerly Passage Island) marina. Hamilton Island is the largest offshore resort in Australia. It is a high speed catamaran ferry, although not one from Tasmania as Robin wondered, and can take about 150 passengers.

Cruise north along the western side of Whitsunday island (the largest in the group), and through the smooth and narrow waters of Hook Island Passage past the underwater observatory and wilderness lodge. I suspect that in less windy conditions, they would have used the Solway passage between Hamilton and Whitsunday.

Once further out toward the reef, the sea became glassy smooth. The misted sky was a remarkable shade I've seen only a few times before here, and never while out at sea. You couldn't tell where the horizon was, as the pearly mist merged into the sea. Someone said that was how *The Poseidon Adventure* began. It was properly eerie.

The three level Reefworld platform is anchored on the edge of Hardy Reef, 39 nautical miles from the coast, just past Hook Reef. There is a second platform nearby for visitors from the luxury train. Reefworld provides rides on a semi submersible, plus viewing ports in the underwater chamber on the platform.

A remarkable number of fans actually went in the water snorkelling amongst the coral. They mostly seemed to have a good time, although youngster Roger quickly became cold.

Monday was a relaxed day after our return. Various people braved the long flights of steps, visited our unit and bought up books for GUFF.

There were a number of informal meals taken at the restaurant at the Whitsunday Terraces, it being fairly convenient, and I failed to note exactly who turned up when. We did try filling the spa and tested the pool. During winter, the spa was more popular than the pool.

Leanne and Lyn left for home Monday, Jane went off on her first SCUBA course with Oceania Dive for the rest of the week.

After the Con was Over

Lots of people left on Wednesday 19 June. Robin and Alicia Johnson, and Lucy Schmeidler via Hamilton Island. John August via Mackay, Michael Green via Proserpine.

We had an island and beach cruise planned on Thursday however winds and waves were too high, and it was cancelled. I believe Peter and Mariann Macnamara made their way home today also, having said their goodbyes previously. Bill Wright, LynC, Clive and the children were still here on holidays.

Friday was a busy day, due to the previous trip being rebooked.

We took the Mantaray, an 18 knot boat trip via Hook Island Passage (still too rough for the Solway Passage past Hamilton), then south to Whitehaven Beach on the eastern side of Whitsunday island. Scones with jam and cream for morning tea. There was a certain amount of beach activities, with Bill chasing an errant beach ball through the water along the beach, until both were collected by the Mantaray tender. I was pleased to see that the goanas eventually turned up, and believe I managed some decent photos of them.

Lunch on board as we went to Mantaray Bay on west side of Hook Island for snorkelling and diving. I find that area interesting, as the reefs are different to the actual barrier reef further to sea. Fair number of people on board as we had to put off trip for a day, so there were a lot of people in the water. It turned out Bill had forgotten his tablets, and got a little tired in the water, so LynC and I towed him back to the boat in case of side effects. When we got back to the mainland, I made sure he got to his room as quickly as possible so he could take the missing tablets, just in case.

It was a busy day for the visitors. Proserpine Show, with Lync, Clive, children and Bill, with Clive driving our car, which at that stage was full.

On Saturday, Bill, Jane and I also went to Proserpine showground for the show. Bill had found some neat stuff there, and the Queensland Rail Silver Spike competition finals were on. Of course, rail ballast, sleepers and track is now mostly laid by semi-automated machines, but the speed of the manual track building is still impressive in these competitions. I'm sure glad I'm not doing it. Local state Labor MP Jan Jarrett was there. I liked the chook house, with some feathered hens looking more like they had fur. I have no idea what farming use they have, but it was an interesting view of what selective breeding can do. I did however avoid taking any of the carnival rides.

Like Bill, I visited Annunzio, The Wire King, to get some Brooches of Class. These are made of gold plated brass wire, which he twists into alphabetical shape with pliers. I got an Eric badge, and also one for Jean. I asked him how his hands were surviving his work, and as I expected, he said he was now having problems with joint pain. He had been doing these badges at carnivals for over 20 years.

Somehow managed to see Lync and company off from the Proserpine airport.

I'm not sure what we all did in the following days. I did see Bill and Jane from time to time. We all (even Jean) went to the Sailing Club for lunch on Tuesday, probably again on the very handy *two meals for the price of one* coupons. Bill left on Wednesday, and Jane set off again for the rest of the week getting her advanced SCUBA certificate.

Jane ended up staying looking after our apartment for a while, when we finally managed to set off at the end of the week in our motorhome for our much delayed trip to Darwin and perhaps a bit further (see next issue for details).

Diary Notes

Former farmer John Alderson, whom some may recall as an iconoclastic fan and amateur historian, turned up in Airlie Beach in late August. I'd last seen him many years ago in Victoria, and generally no longer spotted him at conventions. Despite his age, he appeared almost unchanged from twenty years ago, and his attitudes seemed likewise interestingly fixed.

John had reached me by phone, being probably the first person to manage that in the four years I've lived here. It has only been in the past year that the second phone had been in my name, and thus in the official phone book (it still isn't in any of the other local phone books). Anyone who, like John, didn't recall I've been with Jean these past twenty years, would have failed to find the phone numbers under Jean Weber's name. Given that my phone line was normally connected to a fax for many years, or if not a fax, then a computer, I'm not sure that helps much in any case. Nor can you just look us up in the phone book and visit. For reasons known only to their internal records, Telstra insist that we live at an address that does not exist, rather than at the Terraces. Were the buildings actually numbered, which they are not, the number 17 Telstra insist is us (along with 24 other units) would be the vacant block next door.

I wandered down to the nearby YHA, where John was staying. Since he seemed to be moving somewhat more fluidly than Jean, I took him to the Whitsunday Sailing Club, where we demolished a rather nice bottle of red wine (for our respective heart conditions), and later had a meal. It was interesting catching up on old times. I was actually wondering how a small scale farmer and wine maker could get away from his holding, but John pointed out he was no longer an impoverished farmer. He was now an old age pensioner, and thus could actually afford the odd overseas holiday in various cheap countries. He mentioned visits to Nepal, India and elsewhere.

Our British visitor Jane Killick was here, so with our small apartment, I didn't have crash space for John. I did however manage to get out late the next morning, and drive him to a few op-shops for book searches. Despite Lyn McConchie having done the shops with Jean a few months before, John seemed happy enough with his book finds when I left him around lunchtime. I didn't get a further chance to see him.

That afternoon, Jane found a great gush of hot water streaming out under the bathroom sink. It threatened to soak into various things, although as Jane had tidied the room, there was little on the floor. While Jean and Jane brushed the water out the door, I removed the side of the vanity unit, and shut off the water supply to the hot water unit. With the flow off, it was obvious that the flexible pipe from hot water to the washbasin had broken. That was fairly new, being installed about four years ago when we had the unit renovated. When Jerry the plumber came an hour later (luckily he was working at the Terraces that day), he made nasty comments about flexible pipes for hot water, and replaced it and the equivalent in the second bathroom with copper pipes.

Oh yes, and I managed to catch a cold (John said he had one), and spent much of the next week hiding out and feeling miserable, which was a good reason to work on some rants.

Rants

I regret that it is getting too hard to arrange alphabetical rants, with one per letter of the alphabet.

Air Travel Taxes

According to Flight Centre figures, in the three months prior to 11 Sept 2001, the average Australian traveller paid \$51.87 in taxes. In the three months after, they paid \$81.40, an increase in Government charges of around 60%. Of course, our government isn't into increasing taxes these days. Instead they have levies.

The Building Game

There have been about a dozen or so apartment and resort projects built here in town in the past four or so years, five of them on the hill behind us. In fact, last quarter, the value of building approvals in town (total district population under 20,000) was higher than in the city of Mackay (population over 100,000). All these projects sell off the plan, in advance of construction, so the builders know where and when the money is coming in, and can use that to finance the project.

However it appears there is a glut on investment housing. Certainly the figures on rental returns in this area don't justify the asking prices on the new properties.

The Reserve Bank note that Australian homes are now the most expensive in the world relative to income. Who is running a book on a housing price crash?

Government

Budget surpluses (it is our money after all, not the government's money) should be put into limited spending options such as tax cuts, and funding government superannuation and pension commitments, and thus locked up where future generations of politicians can not as easily get at the money to waste it on pork barrelling.

Cabinet confidential documents must not include incentives to industry. Incentives must be revealed. Why shouldn't we all know what subsidies we are paying industry? After all, we know what old age pensions and politicians salaries are costing us, so why should business be any different? How can you have open government when the bribes are always hidden?

Elections should always provide a *None of the above* option, as an alternative to the almost totally useless informal vote.

Commercial in confidence secrecy is unacceptable when public money is involved. Taxpayers have a right to transparency in government spending, and a right to know how their money is being spent. If companies don't like that, they shouldn't bid for government contracts.

Public ownership or control of scarce distribution systems where it doesn't make sense to duplicate infrastructure, such as phone lines, radio waves, power lines, roads. Either rent to any and all users or suppliers, or if the resource is scarce and individual payment a problem, lease for fixed periods with a public auction for renewal.

Taxes must be like fees, on a dollar basis, not on a percentage basis, especially income taxes and excise. Politicians use bracket creep to keep increasing taxes covertly. All tax rises must be explicit, not just installed by being sneaky about inflation.

No new taxes, say the government, however they make do with brand new levies. \$503M from the 1996 Gun levy (to get guns out of the community via a buyback). \$802M per year from the 1996 tax increase on superannuation contributions by high income tax payers, up from 15% to 30%, but phasing down to 10.5%. \$250M from the 1998 Stevedoring levy, of \$12 a container and \$6 per motorvehicle, to cover stevedoring redundancies. \$218M

per year from the 11c per litre 2000 Dairy levy, to compensate dairy farmers for deregulation. \$110M in the first year, at \$10 per air ticket, for the Ansett levy, to cover workers entitlements from the Ansett airlines crash. \$150M for at least 5 years at 3 cents a kilo of sugar, to support the sugar industry. I don't say these were all bad decisions, but it all sure sounds like new taxes to me.

Monty Python say *Strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government!* However I can't help but wonder whether we are doing all that much better with such unrepresentative parties as make up both our government and opposition.

Income Tax

Income tax is now higher under the Liberals than it was under the Keating Labor government, despite the additional "tax cuts" promised when the 10% GST came in. As a percentage of GDP, the income tax has risen from around 12% in 1970, through the 16% of Keating in the early 1990's, dropped to 15% for a short while, but under Costello has been closer to 17% and 18%. Income taxes should be indexed, to prevent bracket creep. The whole thing is just another con job by governments of all persuasions. Labour is now providing 72.9% of all income taxes, and this will rise to 73.4% in 2004-5.

Internet Connections Drop

The number of internet connections in Australia fell for the first time this year. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show connections dropped by 1% (43,000) from September 2001 to September 2002. While the drop to 4.23 million can attributed to a decline in free access and pay by the hour accounts, it does show that connection expansion is all but over. Many people will simply never connect to the internet, as it has insufficient utility for them to do so.

Do I need to point out that where Telstra is the only ADSL supplier, the per magabyte cost (you only get 300 MB of download per month on the lowest fee account) makes changing to ADSL very marginal for low usage customers? There may be some point to it for those who plan to embrace large scale audio (MP3 file sharing) or video (porn or movie) downloads, but it will raise costs seriously for those just doing a little email, newsgroup and web access. Text files just don't need a lot of bandwidth.

Investment Returns

Historically, stocks have offered about 2.5% more investment return than low risk, inflation indexed government bonds. In the USA bonds were returning about 3%, so the stock market needed to return 5.5%, however it has actually returned about 1.75% recently. That says it is overvalued, and a DOW of about 5000 would be more appropriate in the long term (Standards and Poor went down well towards that sort of ratio). This ties in with comments I've made about the P/E ratios being stupid in recent years. However US indexed bonds have dropped to about 2.2% from the 3.5% in 2000. So the DOW (and similar) might only need to drop about 15-20%.

Libel and Slander

Why do we have these tall poppy laws in Australia? Not one case in fifty is brought by the average person in the street. The people doing the suing are politicians and celebrities, where I'd have thought strong comments should be considered an occupational hazard. In several cases involving politicians, the cases appeared to outsiders as more a way to delivery a tax free payoff than anything else.

Risk takers to pay

Voluntary risk takers are likely to lose the right to sue if injured. Insurance rises are pushing legislation to force people to take responsibility for their own dangerous actions.

That certainly seems about time, given the idiocies of some court decisions.

Terrorism - should we do it?

I know, these days we are all supposed to be politically correct, and be really tolerant. However, if I'd been in charge of the USA in the dark days after Sept 11, by now Baghdad, Jerusalem, Mecca and half a dozen other places would all be 5 km wide green glass craters, and real estate with 50 km of them would be glowing in in the dark. But aren't some of them on our side, I hear you ask. Collateral damage. Let the equally non-existent Allah, God or Goddess, or whatever faineant diety you believe in sort them out. Isn't it lucky that someone moderate like George Bush was in charge?

Of course, no sensible person would allow an unstable personality to have access to weapons, especially really destructive weapons like nuclear bombs, biological warfare and chemical agents. Isn't it lucky that every country in the world has statesmanlike leaders and loyal oppositions who would obviously be statesmanlike were the responsibility theirs? I feel so secure about leaders like Gadhafi, Hussain, Amin, Pol Pot and so on attempting to take on this great responsibility during past decades.

Moving from the grand sweep of international politics and sarcasm to more personal material, has anyone else been annoyed at the persistence of spam email? Well, anyone can get a virus (especially if they don't remove Microsoft's virus Petri dishes) and accidentally send spam, and I don't mean these victims. I mean the slime who use these CD's full of 300 million valid email addresses to spam by the million. Laws don't seem to stop them, as they just change to a different server. ISPs generally don't do enough. I would think at a minimum, no new ISP account should be permitted to send more than 100 emails an hour in their first year. However technical methods don't help all that much when many email relays (especially in some Asian and middle European countries) are so badly configured (mostly due to ignorance, and a lack of technical material in anything other than English) that they can easily be subverted. I know some of my friends at ISPs simply block all of China and several other countries, which is not helping the openness of the Internet.

I have a modest proposal. Bring back the custom of dueling, with bulk spamming considered the valid reason for issuing a challenge and demanding satisfaction. I predict that would solve the problem rather quickly.

Zero Volts

6:05am 26 Sept 2002 Power out for a half second
10:05pm 30 Sept 2002 Power out for a half second
6:41pm 11 Oct 2002 Power out for a half second
9:05pm 14 Oct 2002 Power out for a half second
4:40 am 29 Oct 2002 Power out until 11:40, then back for a few minutes, then out for another hour. That was a pole just below the apartment going out in high wind, and starting a grass fire. Lack of rain blamed. The dirt that accumulated from the dust storms is slightly conductive, and it arced between 11,000 volt phases when there was some condensation. Usually rain cleans the insulators, and we don't usually have dust storms. This happened again about a week later, with power out from 1:30 a.m. until about 9 a.m.
5:40pm 16 Nov 2002 Power out for a half second

Books

I do believe in future I may make mention of a bunch of non-fiction books, as the quantity of readable SF seems to continually drop and be displaced by media novels (SF lite) and fantasy. I don't know why I'm bothering to even try to find SF anymore from most of the commercial publishers. I think the cost accountants have finally stuffed them up entirely (I'm pretty sure the editors would do better if they were only allowed to do so). No wonder there are a whole bunch of new Australian magazines just launched and recently relaunched. They at least are trying to published decent SF.

New York Nights by Eric Brown

Gollancz, 2000, 327pp, A\$17.99 ISBN 1857987829
A crowded New York of 2040, and a detective story with SF overtones, chasing a homicidal AI. Good character development, but it went very slow. First in a series, however the story appears complete.

In The Shadow of Omen by Steven Burgauer

Zero-G, 1997, 364pp, US\$14.95 ISBN 076100775X
Set in 2433, with a capitalist with a space ship. I couldn't finish it. Awkward writing. Self published, I suspect.

Nothing Burns in Hell by Philip Jose Farmer

Forge, 1998, 287pp, US\$22.95 ISBN 0312864701
The dark underside and rich upperside of Peoria, revealed in a tale of a Private eye, full of pulp level violence. Lots of literary in jokes as well. Not SF.

Men in Black II by Esther Friesner

Arrow (Random House), 2002, 249pp, A\$19.95 ISBN 0099445239
The book of the picture of the screenplay by Robert Gordon and Barry Fanard of the story by Robert Gordon. Whatever. I'm unlikely to manage to see the movie (not that I probably wouldn't enjoy it as much as the original) but the book is pretty funny. I can see having a few more special effects to play with would help, but there does appear to be a suitable story underneath. More for movie fans than sf fans, I suspect.

Expendable by James Alan Gardner

Eos, Sept 2000, 337pp, US\$6.99 ISBN 038079439X
League of well adjusted perfect looking people, except for the Explorers, who have visible flaws. The well trained Expendable Crew members explore new planets, and often die on them, however they don't have friends among the normal population. Sounds sort of like the red shirts in Star Trek, and doesn't read much better.

Year's Best SF 7 edited by David G Hartwell

Eos, June 2002, 945pp, A\$20.95 US\$7.99 ISBN 0061061433
Inside the cover, this also lists Kathryn Cramer as editor. As good as usual. Stories by Kress, Bisson, Swanwick, Aldiss, Baxter, Terry Dowling, Disch, Wolfe, Benford and others. About the only annoyance with this volume is the difference between the USA price (about A\$16 allowing for tax) and the 30% overpriced Australian retail price.

Hal Spacejock by Simon Haynes

Bowman, 2001, 259pp, A\$15.95 ISBN 1877034002
Broke pilot, with an even more broken spaceship, the mortgage company has a nasty robot called Brutus to collect the payments. Hal is in trouble, until he takes a simple freight job. Then he is in big trouble! Pretty much a straight humour piece, with some fine (albeit mostly obvious) lines. Since I like slapstick, I enjoyed it. We got this as a giveaway at Convergence. www.spacejock.com

Borrowed Tides by Paul Levinson

Tor, Jan 2002, 258pp, US\$6.99 ISBN 0812561511
Described by quoted reviews as *jumping with ideas* and *reminiscent of the philosophical space fiction of James Blish or Philip K Dick*, this struck me as a typical science fiction work by someone who has not the slightest clue as to how any part of science (especially physics) works. I have no idea why Tor bought it. Shortcut to the stars novel, with unlikely

funding, weird crew, impossible physics, and dull story. Levinson's previous novel was *The Silk Code*.

Cloak of Deception by Paul Luceno

Lucas Books Arrow, 2002, 344pp, ISBN 0099439972
A Star Wars novel set just before the events of the Trade Federation attack. It has Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn seeking the forces that appear to be attempting to assassinate Supreme Chancellor Valorum, and disrupt the Trade Federation leadership. Mostly a political thriller, and reasonably done. For Star Wars enthusiasts.

Cosmonaut Keep by Ken MacLeod

Orbit, 2001, 395pp, %17.95 ISBN 1841490679
First of a series, *Engines of Light*. Does a two viewpoint approach. One is the humans on an alien world, a considerable time in the future, living in peace with other aliens, but unable to access the starship technology except as passengers due to lack of navigators and computers. There are human colonies on other worlds, expanded from their arrival in the local interstellar area, with human traders riding the alien ships. The other viewpoint is fifty or so years in our future, with a communist Europe devoted to a steady state economy, and a USA which has lost a war with it, but insists on expansion. The politics are interesting, the cyber technologies even more so, and it is these people who use a message from the stars to go there. Looks like being an interesting series, with a bunch of well depicted characters and an imaginative future. One to follow, I believe, although it isn't killer quality.

Deepsix by Jack McDevitt

Voyager, 2001, 432pp, A\$17.95 ISBN 0007108796
Three weeks before it is scheduled to collide with a gas giant, a scientific team visit a world to record what they can of a recently discovered set of ruins. They are joined by a troublesome commentator. Naturally things go wrong, and they have to set off across the planet seeking another way off. Lots of thrills thrown in, but this just didn't seem to me to match McDevitt's usual style.

The Centurion's Empire by Sean McMullen

Tor, May 1999, 363pp, US\$6.99 ISBN 0812564758
Roman centurion Vitellan set out for the future in a time machine, using techniques from an even older group of secret masters of Rome. Freezing works, if you have the right chemicals, and the right constitution. Three stories of his adventures in different ages follow, with the 21st century being a sweeping tale of intrigue and suspicion. Very nicely done.

The Octagonal Raven by L E Modesitt Jr

Tor, 2001, 474pp, US\$7.95 ISBN 0812570081
I note this is edited by David Hartwell, almost always a good sign. Fast paced SF adventure, in a technically realistic world, with smart, interesting protagonist, and lots of plot twists. Some nice social asides as well, none of which slow the action. Good one.

The Fifth Sorceress by Robert Newcomb

Bantam (Transworld), Oct 2002, 591pp, A\$32.95 ISBN 0593049616
Usual tedious fantasy. Four immortal evil exiled sorceresses (why weren't they killed?) plot revenge on the fair land protected by wizards. The King's son is predicted to be the Chosen One, and escapes the bloody massacre, with one faithful powerful wizard, and a horse, etc.

The Fandom of the Operator by Robert Rankin

Corgi (Random House), May 2002, 366pp, \$17.95 ISBN 0552148970
Reading this is like trying to reanimate the dead. Must have readers somewhere, but I hope I don't know them.

Ship of Fools by Richard Paul Russo

Ace, Jan 2002, 370pp, US\$6.50 ISBN 0441008933
Argonos is a lost generation ship, its past mostly forgotten, and recent decades of decisions poor. Even their return to Earth

failed, when it turned out to be a desolate abandoned world. Religion still lives on, pitted against the captain for control of the ship. They come across a transmission which leads them to a world where humans can live, but the colonists are all dead, in charnel houses of horrible torture. They follow another transmission, and come across a gigantic but equally dead alien ship. Very atmospheric, with much description that reminds me of the original *Aliens* film. More a horror story, about evil, than science fiction as such, but it follows the conventions of SF very well. The only character we really get to know is the viewpoint character, who is crippled in both body and soul.

Interface by Neil Stephenson and Frederick Goerge

Arrow (Random House), August 2002, 641pp, \$21.95 ISBN 0099427753

Original copyright date 1994, under the pen name Stephen Bury. In many ways a superior rewrite of *The Manchurian Candidate*, but with an even higher tech takeover of the man who would be President. The motives are better done too; the existing President is bad for long term business. This has some wonderfully cynical scenes, and is a great thriller.

Zeitgeist by Bruce Sterling

Bantam, August 2001, 280pp, US\$6.99 ISBN 0553576410

Leggy Starlitz is storming the third world with cultural imperialism, in the form of the no-talent G-7 band. They can't sing, they can't dance, and the girls can all be replaced any time with someone from off the street. However they are making a fortune from the merchandising anyway. Leggy did it mostly as a bet, as he goes with the flow of the waning year of the 20th century. It all folds in Y2K. However he is dealing with dangerous people, who see the band as perfect cover for their own products. Then Leggy finds responsibility, in the form of his long lost daughter. All the conversations have the intensity and clarity of a drunken pub talk. Some wonderful writing, although by the end, Sterling has gone right off the rails. Buy it for the dialogue anyway. The global politics are right up to date, including Osama Bin Laden way before the fall of the towers.

The Chronoliths by Robert Charles Wilson

Tor, 2001, 315pp, US\$6.99 ISBN 0812545249

An exceedingly well written book with a well defined protagonist, and a believable family situation. A gigantic invulnerable monument arrives from 20 years in the future, commemorating a battle victory by Kuin. More arrive over the years, disrupting all society as they attempt to learn who Kuin is, and how he started conquering the world. Time future affects time past, if you can send such messages. I couldn't stand the book, but thought it would have been great in a shorter length. (I thought less of the book length versions of *Flowers for Algernon* and *Tau Zero*.)

Kingdom of Cages by Sarah Zettel

Aspect, June 2002, 588pp, US\$7.50 A\$20.95 ISBN 0446611069

All the extra-solar colonies are failing, as their environments collapse under the impact of human activities. Only Pandora stands untouched, however its fanatical controllers will never allow uncontrolled human colonies on a world they have maintained in total balance. Under threat from the warships of the collapsing colonies, Pandora agrees to produce an ecological solution that will save the worlds. However, Pandora plan to make the solution a totally changed humanity. Fleeing an overcrowded space station, children Chena and Teal Trust are brought to Pandora by their mother as part of the Eden project, because Pandora wants their genetic structure. Every person, and every group, lives in a kingdom of cages, constraining their actions and lives. An excellent and original writer, whose every book is both different, and I believe getting better and better on multiple levels.

LoCs

Bounced email this time: Jack Herman with a misconfigured labrynthos, Alexander James, GasBooks (still over quota), Sean McMullen (over quota), Ken Ozanne (Dingo Blue no longer an ISP), Justin Semmel, Roger Wells (misconfigured), Merv Binns, Christine Callahan (mail refused). (And I got alternatives for Ozanne and Wells.)

I'm deliberately supressing email addresses of readers these days, due to all the spammers harvesting web sites for addresses.

Ned Brooks Jr.

4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn GA 30047-4720 July 8, 2002

Thanks for the *Gegenschein* 91 and 92. *Consulting* seems to be the big scam at all levels of government. I don't know what the answer is - some of these consulting contracts are probably legitimate.

I remember hearing of kids learning electronics when I was a kid, but I never did it myself. I had an older cousin in Birmingham who made a crystal set, that was about it. Whether children here now do it much I don't know - I do get the American Science and Surplus and other catalogs that offer kits. Some of the pizzazz must have gone out of the hobby when vacuum tubes were replaced with solid state gizmos. *{{ I sort of hope to get back into playing with electronics sometime. I still have some tools and instruments, and collections of components. EL}}*

I guess my browser (Netscape 4.77) is obsolete - John Guidry sent me a URL and while the site loaded fine, some of the graphics were missing (replaced by the *broken graphic* icon), even though John said he could see them all. I looked at the *Page Info* and was told that I had an *Improper Request* for these graphics.

I have had only a couple of long (40 minutes or so) power outages in the last year. The last one was during a thunderstorm. I still get a lot of short glitches that would crash the PC if I didn't have a UPS in place. Just a small one - it's supposed to give me 10 minutes to shut down.

I'm not surprised at the inefficiency of the automated telephone systems maintained by the big companies and government bureaus and avoid them as much as possible - what bugs me is that many of these same outfits do not provide an e-mail contact list. If any name or number data has to be provided, it is a lot more likely to be correct by e-mail!

A large percentage of the *criminals* boosting the prison population here were convicted of drug-related crimes, but I don't know what percentage were just convicted of possession. I suppose some of these people would be involved in criminal enterprises even if there were no drug laws - they would look for somewhere else to make money illegally. And then there are the other victimless crimes - gambling, pornography, prostitution - I have no idea what they contribute to the prison population. Locally the county jail runs at about 200% capacity - and about half these people are awaiting trial! This is, in fact, a sort of low grade state terrorism against those who cannot afford bail.

I get a lot of spam from people who claim it isn't spam because I have *registered at their site* - utterly false of course. The *delete* button works well! Some of these things are unbelievably bad technically - overlaid text and images, HTML so bad it displays as plain text with imbedded tags, etc. And I generally get several e-mails every day that have klez-contaminated attachments.

Good book reviews - I couldn't argue with you, I haven't read one of those books.

Many of the people listed on your missing and bounced e-mail lists seem to show up regularly on lists I get. Some seem to change their e-mail addresses often, so I won't try to put anything in a letter, but by all means e-mail me if you want current data.

Lloyd Penney

1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON CANADA M9C 2B2 July 3, 2002

I know you probably won't see this letter for a while, but I thought I'd like to get it done, so here is a loc on issue 92 of *Gegenschein*. In fact, it might be the second loc on this issue; what happened? I thought I responded to this issue this past March. No matter, here it goes again. *{{You did respond then. It was just a pity that the issue hadn't actually been published at that date - just a rough draft on the web. EL}}*

Marvelous sounding trip - I must check it all out on the Avalook site. The truck still working out and comfortable?

I haven't done any real shortwave listening in a long time, but has Radio Australia been shut down? Radio Canada International almost met that fate a couple of years ago before getting an infusion of cash from the Heritage Ministry. I didn't know they'd be responsible for it, but bless 'em for doing it.

The government here is doing something similar to the Internet Assistance Program. It was an election promise to make high-speed internet service available in all rural areas of Canada. It'll be expensive, but it will make even the most remote areas of the north available to all, and vice versa.

Autonomous regions just won't work in Australia, as it won't work here. There aren't enough people with their heads on straight to run their areas with diligence and money smarts. Too many treaty reservations have had to be rescued by the government because the chiefs simply can't run their affairs without letting bankruptcy and alcohol interfere. I gather it's different in the United States, but they also have numbers and money on their side.

I remember a programme on the railroads of Australia, and how some of them are fairly remote, and didn't connect up with other railroads. It'd good to see this changing; is a railroad that could allow you to run the entire perimeter of the country in the works here? *{{ Not likely. It is hard enough just crossing the country. Probably not economically viable to do the across Australia line, but I believe it is worth it for the economic impact on inland areas, and for the defence and oil saving implications. EL}}*

The over-valuation of the American stock markets is over, and how. After hitting highs of around 10,500, the Dow Jones index has sunk below 9,000, and is dropping lower. This correction is long overdue, and as a result, the US dollar is now cheaper to buy. Predictions are that the Canadian dollar will return to the 70-cent level by next year. It now stands at about 65.5 cents, and should start climbing again soon.

The loc section - do I really have four letters in this section? We didn't get the Olympics, as we all know, and with some hindsight, perhaps it's for the best. We would have been spending a lot of money we didn't have, and even without the Olympics, this city still doesn't have a lot of money. We're in the midst of a city worker strike, which means mountains of ripe garbage are building up.

Provincial politics - the Conservatives in this province are still in power, but the health and education-hostile Mike Harris has been replaced with the much more easy-to-get-along-with Ernie Eves. Still this party shall not get my vote come election day, which can't come soon enough.

The CD I spoke of - it is done, and it will be coming out, but its producer has decided to hold off on releasing it until the Hallowe'en season. I wish it was out now, but waiting until the fall is smart.

I guess I already attacked what was labeled issue 92 before - interesting to see what opinions have changed since then, albeit slight. Right now, I am sweltering in the heat of a 35-degree Celsius evening. And Voltaire said this was but a few acres of ice and snow. I wouldn't mind a little of either right now. *{{ Interesting. In the tropics where I am, we rarely go above 30-32 Celsius, thanks to the influence of sea breezes. EL}}*

That's it for now. I hope you're enjoying your current travels, and whatever the road brings to your eye. Take care, and see you next issue.

Erika Maria Lacey

Thanks for letting me know about *Gegenschein* being up on the web. I'll bear your notes about no physical mail in mind, although to be truthful the day I send out physical mail that is not a package of some sort is the day that the sun doesn't rise and the moon is all cheesy and crumbling from the skies. *{{ Physical mail is now fine. EL}}*

Exercise is a wonderful thing. I think that far too many people see it as tedious or as a chore ... I just go out for a walk for an hour or so around the place; half the time I go off to visit a friend and they live that far away so there's my "exercise" for the day doubled. Since I do love to eat I figure that the price is going for walks (without straining myself, of course). My brother, when deciding to keep fit, went for runs but in my opinion my knees would not thank me for that sort of behaviour.

Actually, I find myself kind of annoyed when using public transport and sitting in a seat by myself up against a window and someone large enough to take up two seats sits next to me. I've had it done a few times and the seats are small enough that even a large man can have me squished up against the window gasping for breath. It's only ever trouble during peak time, though, and since I avoid taking transport then anyway it doesn't happen all too often.

I agree with you that postage prices are rather steep -- actually, that's one of the reasons for why I've not done another paper fanzine. I've got all the stuff sitting on my computer to do but the thought of printing out all the stuff and then finding the money to send it off is daunting. I could -- and should -- do an e-zine instead since it's a hell of a lot cheaper. *{{ I'm not happy about physical zines pricing themselves out of reach, but at least there is an alternative these days. EL}}*

There are a lot of problems with the Australian Aboriginal population, one of which is the alcohol ... health problems and death rates are incredibly different when compared to that of the rest of Australia. It's sad that people don't want to see that they're such a disadvantaged group and that any aids going to the communities are being slowly cut because people /don't/ want to see it. I remember as a youngster thinking annoyedly of ABSTUDY and wondering why the hell they needed such a thing; were they too good to have AUSTUDY like the rest of Australia? I've become a bit more educated since then, but that very thought was the same amongst a lot of my peers.

Speaking of multiculturalism, I was thinking about that today. It's funny when I come across an Asian child in a store where their parents work -- who have strong accents -- and the child opens their mouth and speaks with a purely Australian one. It's unexpected and gives a moment of surprise. I agree with you that immigrants are assimilated, at least to a degree. I found a paper not long ago

faculty.web.waseda.ac.jp/buda/texts/langshift.html that looks at languages of immigrants in Australia (and Canada) and who tends to keep it and who not.

In the local areas we have a strong number of Samoans, and they have all sorts of cultural events for themselves. They have their own churches and their own parties and hire out halls for concerts and all that sort of thing. The Laos people do it, too, and a lot of the Asian community tend to pile in and do things even though they're from all over the place -- Cambodia, Thailand, etc. They're more likely to have things from their culture stick than others.

Using myself as an example -- I'm part Welsh and part Peruvian. I have not been part of either "community" groups, although there is a fairly health Peruvian group in the area. I gather that very few first generation children socialise at all with them, mostly the immigrants going to the events. My mother has been known to go to them from time to time although even as a teenager I balked at it.

Just noticing your reading list ... I think I was the only person on the face of the earth who didn't enjoy Williams and Dix's *Echoes Of Earth*. Certainly all the reviews praise it glowingly, where I had trouble with the first part though liked the last part of it a fair bit. I think most of my nitpicking came through on the android part of things (and my being naturally crabby that day).

I should point out to you at this point that my middle name really is Maria and not Marie. No major quibble, though it /is/ the first time I've seen someone get my middle name wrong and my first name right. Always a novelty!

Michael Ward

So I did read it, and it was really quite interesting.

Our peregrinations are small potatoes compared to yours and yet I am still trying to remove the extra pounds I put on eating my way across northern France. Clearly it is all trying to tell me something, and fortunately for my sense of self the message is not getting through.

Thank you for the note earlier about www.MagazineArt.org. We now have a pretty good file of Gernsback titles up there, with some obscurities like *Modern Marriage* and *Motor Camper And Tourist* coming up. I imagine the latter will be of particular interest to you -- the mid 1920's no less. Also some covers from *French Humor*, with one set to arrive from another eBay customer while we're at Readercon.

I found the Rant about web site design quite illuminating. I read my stocks (all sadly diminished, and, as *The Economist* (and you) would tell me, set to diminish yet more. We'll just simply make do. We bought an expensive Weber gas grill and now we save money every day by using propane instead of electricity. It does indeed help us plan meals that help me reverse the deleterious effects of the trip mentioned in Para. 1.

Oh, yes, the web rant. Besides Yahoo stocks, I get the fictionmags list served up by yahoogroups -- digested one to three times a day. And Moshe Feder's electric railroad list. And several on e-books; but those are professional.

And without eBay, there would be almost nothing on magazineart.org -- someone will someday write a book about the effect eBay has had in returning to us our cultural heritages (in bits and pieces, one bid after another). I'm quite serious about this; without eBay I would not have found the Burton Holmes ephemera put on the BurtonHolmes.org website, or numerous books about Siberia, trains, or the history of publishing. There's a guy in Czech who sells postcards showing the Czech expeditionary force in Russia 1918-20, when they garrisoned the stations of the Trans-Siberian RR; without eBay, no postcards. What a

resource! And you don't even have to buy anything; the trick is learning how to set queries for their search engine so that you can find a picture of things you are interested in. *{{ I hadn't really appreciated the various unintended side effects of eBay on the collection of images of material. It makes a real mockery of copyright laws on art, doesn't it? On the other hand, there isn't a real publishers market in lossy images of art, unlike say copies of movies. EL}}*

So, yeah, most of my websites have white background, with text in Verdana and/or Times New Roman. Minimal spiffy features to minimize load times; they're so heavy with graphics and images that I have to do what I can to help. Will go to CSS and other funk in the near future, though. *{{ I note with interest that some people are now saying not to use Verdana (at least with other fonts) as it is visually so much larger than the same font size in most other fonts. EL}}*

Sorry we couldn't make it Airlie -- or OZ or NZ at all -- we didn't even make it to Wiscon this year. But we'll be at Westercon, Readercon, and, of course, ConJose.

Ken Ozanne

Thanks for the info, I have read a good deal of the Geg, I think. (Have read reviews of books and rants; not sure that is most.)

We have purchased a property between Capertee and Glen Davis, new address for snail mail is 272 Crown Station Road, Capertee, 2846. This should give you my new email address. I have no idea why the dingoblue one continues to work some of the time.

We have 36 acres according to the title, but it is more like 43 by my calculations. I doubt that it matters.

We haven't really moved in yet - probably not for another month or so when Marea moves. I am about to buy a panel van for moving. The house is about 20 squares, there are some existing sheds amounting to about 5 squares enclosed and I am building a new shed of about 13 squares. Should be enough space for the foreseeable future. I expect to add shelving for at least another 10,000 books just to start with. I can go back to buying books without worrying about the space they will occupy!

The house is at about 410 metres, a little lower than here. Rainfall is about half, but much more variable.

We continue to spend about half our time travelling since I retired 2 1/2 years back. We had expected to increase the proportion spent in travel, but I like the place well enough to think we may continue to spend about half our time at home. We have 360 degree views, most notably of Pantoney's Crown, about six kilometres away. *{{ Good luck with your move. If you still have as many books as before (as I expect) it will certainly be a major effort. EL}}*

KRin

{{Our problem is the (less common in cities, I'm sure) one of not being able to find a phone line at all! EL}}

Good god! You are going off the beaten track. My idea of roughing it is going somewhere you have to take your own towels. You can have the bush, it's city life only for me.

If I can't read my email every second day I get twitchy...KRin

Jack Heneghan

Glad to see you are getting around the world. I hope you and Jean have a nice trip this time around.

I thought your comments on the hybrid cars were spot on. I was thinking about them for my next car, but where are the real gains or efficiencies. What I would like to get is a totally electric car with solar panels for battery backup. We get

300+ days of sun in Colorado. Something like that would work well in your outback. *{{ Maybe not. 8 square metres of solar panels would only produce 8kW if 100% efficient, at right angles to bright sun, at midday. At a more typical 10%-20%, you only have a maximum of a little over one horsepower to play with, and for at most six hours a day. Solar alone won't cut it. And batteries are lousy energy stores compared with almost anything else, and will never be substantially better. Hybrid isn't a bad idea, for city driving, once the cost drops. EL}}*

Actually, why don't you all just cover the outback with solar panels and wind machines and generate all the power for the world? That's a lot of wide-open dry empty space there. Which I hope to see on my next visit. *{{ Wind machines maybe, but solar is only active six hours a day, and costs \$10M a megawatt for the cells alone. It isn't economically viable unless you don't have any other options. Even if you did pay the cost, how do you store the power, since it is useless for base load. EL}}*

We used to be at the very end of a long power line run, until a neighbor built across the street and they extended line to the new house. And while we had very good power most of the time, only two extended outages in ten years, we would often get those 1 second brownouts in heavy winds. The clocks would all reset and the computers would reboot and it was extremely annoying. So I went out and got some Belkin power strips with UPS outlets. I have them on all the computers and the audio-video gear and haven't had a problem with them since. (Except when the cleaners turned off the strip and I didn't get home until the battery had expired.) We still have to reset the microwave clock two or three times a month but everything else is in sync.

As you may have heard, WorldCom, the company Elaine and I work for, has been causing some havoc in the financial markets over here. We both survived a recent layoff, which I am not sure is a 'good' thing. When they finally make us all redundant, there might not be any money left for a severance package. Anyway, it is an interesting time to be alive. *{{ Certainly sounds as if it is. Hope things are still OK. EL}}*

We just got back from a Caribbean cruise with my family, celebrating my parent's 50th anniversary. Seven days sailing out of Miami and around the western Caribbean, with 50+ members of my immediate family. We may try it again for the 75th anniversary. And we came back to the largest forest fire in Colorado history 10 miles from our house. We heard about a fire threatening the Denver suburbs while on the cruise and we didn't pay it any mind because we live 70 miles south of Denver. Those CNN folks need to work on their geography. The fire was a lot closer to us than Denver.

We evacuated the horses to a friends place and prepacked some important items that we didn't want burned. It was surprising how little I thought we HAD to take with us. I FTPed some important files to the ISP (who was also in the fire zone) and we were pretty well covered. Fortunately, the weather broke that week and the firefighters had a chance to contain the fire in our direction. There was nothing between us and that fire but tinder. I still don't think our house would be actually be burnt because we don't have a lot of tall trees around or anywhere near the house and the grass would burn quickly. But, the smoke and ash were a nuisance even when the fire was ten miles way.

I use My Yahoo! as my portal to the web, and Google is about my sole search engine. Unfortunately, Yahoo! is getting much more intrusive with the ads and marketing profile requests so I may drop it and create my own. But it is nice that Yahoo maintains all the links to news reports, etc. It is also nice to own your own domain, and to have a flexible ISP that allows you to set things up the way you want.

Have Fun and Hope to see you again in Airlie Beach.

R Laurraine Tutihasi

I just got a new computer, a G4 PowerBook. I've had my G3 iBook for only a couple of years. I didn't have any real problems with it until I upgraded to Mac OS X. It and the upgraded applications took up so much hard disk space that I actually had to move some stuff off my computer and onto the server. There was not enough space to install any more software. The reason I upgraded to OS X was to avoid having to restart the computer every time some Microsoft application blew up. Despite all its problems, Word is still better than other word processors I've used. We almost bought a newer iBook, but we decided that the PowerBook probably had a longer life expectancy. Mike bought his G4 desktop about three years ago and won't be upgrading until next year at the soonest. He's waiting for the G5.

Mike needs the fastest computer available because he handles a lot of graphics. He edits the videos I take. His web site is also very heavily graphical.

A lot of decisions about replacing computer equipment depend on the usage. If you're just one person doing simple word processing and e-mail, you probably don't need the state of the art equipment. However, if you're doing more Internet and graphics stuff, you're constantly upgrading software and the latest software will run best on the latest hardware.

According to the business news, a lot of companies will start upgrading their information infrastructure in the next year or so since they last did this in preparation for Y2K. *{{ Luckily I can get away with using exceedingly old computers, as I virtually never use graphics for anything. Unless I changed from a phone connection to an (uneconomical here) ADSL line, I can't see any point in graphics. Over the last four years, Jean has discarded perfectly good, albeit old, computers (which I've bought) well before my even older one needed replacement. I expect sea air to kill my computers before I consider them obsolete. EL}}*

Have you heard that one or two airlines here are making obese people buy two seats? It makes sense to me, since they usually end up taking more than one seat. Two regular seats cost a lot less than first class also.

You certainly have a lot of power outages. My parents' area in Bellingham, WA, also has a high incidence of power outages. They have an emergency backup generator. We only get the occasional blip and even less frequent actual outage. We had one fairly recently, about a week ago. There were two blips that lasted long enough that the TV, which I was watching, turned off. Later, we learned that a small fire in the area had interrupted cable service. It was out for about eight hours. It took longer for us to get back our cable modem, because the power blip apparently caused a problem that had to be cleared by unplugging the unit for a few minutes.

We are using Mozilla now as our preferred web browser. It allows you to keep those annoying pop-up ad windows from opening. We still keep Internet Explorer and Netscape around, as some things don't run on Mozilla. One place I shopped at recently only worked in Netscape.

I really hate having to hold when I call to complain or even just to find out what's happening. The worst is when I call our cable company. Once I held for over an hour without anyone coming to the phone. Recently I've had better experience, so maybe they have cleaned up their act.

Most of the web sites I shop at belong to companies I have shopped at through their catalogues for years. If the web site doesn't work properly, I can always go back to shopping by

phone. Generally the web sites seem to be getting better with time. Whenever I have problems with the web sites and I end up calling, I always mention my web site problems to the person who takes my order.

Yesterday was Canada Day, and our public radio station (in Pasadena, CA) devoted quite a bit of time to it, including a quiz about Canada where people called in to compete.

Public TV and radio seems to be doing okay in the US. About thirty percent or less of their budgets comes from the government. The rest come from listeners/viewers and corporate sponsors.

When did Lloyd Penney write the LoC that purports to respond to this current issue? The US stock market dropped drastically two years ago. Since then it has dithered. I don't think it will drop much further, but I don't know exactly when it will start a steady rise again. I usually notice that most stock markets around the world are doing about the same. The world is one market now and anything that happens anywhere has an effect everywhere else.

Gregory Benford

Most interesting Gegen. I like your rants!--esp. against multiculti, etc. The US has hit the wall on immigration, with Calif getting 50% of it. Our state has eroded infrastructure, gangs, strife, and with the rise of the Latins, a political structure like that of Mexico--a kickback and payoff paradise. LA in the 50s-60s was the best run city in the country. Now it's as bad as Chicago, ever since the Bradley machine in the 1970s ran it like Boss Tweed... sigh!

Hope to see you next year, as we'll try to get down there. Certainly will in 2004 for your national con! *{{ Gregory is GoH at the 2004 NatCon in Canberra. EL}}*

Pamela Boal

Thank you for Geg 91 and 92 and your e-mail. All waiting for me when we popped back from the river. Rather indifferent weather so far this year but as always a joy to be out.

Happy news I have at last been able to afford a monitor with a larger screen which makes life more comfortable when dealing with the web or e-mail. Of course I still prefer paper mail, apart from my eyes, I can take paper on to the boat with me and read it at leisure. *{{ Did you keep changing your email and web font sizes to make viewing more comfortable, even on your smaller display? Everyone needs to learn how to do that (and make sure you complain to anyone who makes it hard to change font sizes. EL}}*

I know you will have a wonderful trip, Jean and yourself have the knack of grasping the day. I shall be thinking of you and looking forward to hearing something about your latest adventures.

John Douglas

I note that you'll be traveling for a while so I don't expect that you'll necessarily be compulsively taking care of record-keeping but I should mention that I've switched over to a new email address for most of my correspondence. The AOL address won't go away but I expect to use it only when I'm away from home since I haven't figured out how to retrieve the email from the cable connection except when I'm at home.

Hope you have a great journey of exploration. I very much enjoyed the description of the camper trip you took last year and I'll hope for another extended journal at some not too distant date.

Rose Mitchell

Thanks for sending me the notices about *Gegenschein*. I enjoy reading *Gegenschein* but never seem to get around to sending you a LoC. Now that I don't have very much to do anymore, I shall be more diligent with my correspondence.

I am always amazed to read about your's and Jean's adventures travelling around Australia in *The Motorhome* as I am not the least bit outdoorsy I hate camping with a passion (if I can't plug my hairdryer in or order room service, I am lost and confused). I suspect my aversion to *roughing it* is a result of my childhood. My family always spent every school holidays at Torquay on the west coast of Victoria, now known as *The Surf Coast*, where my parents kept a holiday site. The family would pack up and depart for the Bellarine Peninsula as soon as school broke or at Christmas, on Boxing Day. I hated it; isolated from my friends and the city for weeks on end. In those days there was no mobile phones or internet, albeit the camp site did have a prefab building with carpeting and air-conditioning, which was more than the family home had at the time!

I did learn to surf though, and climb a rope ladder ever so elegantly. In the late sixties, the only way down the cliff at Bell's Beach was the rope ladder or scaling the cliff wall. Girls went down to the beach to flirt with the boys, so one needed to look competent, and at the same time alluring, while shinning up and down the ropes. Thirty years later my exercise regime is consists of walking to the tram morning and night on my to and from work. Deplorable I know, so I must agree with you on your views about exercise. I kick back with a decent red and feel really, really guilty. However, I will make sure I keep up my private health insurance because eventually I will *pay the piper*.

WAHF

Damien Broderick, Cary Lenehan, Suzi Stefl, Ned Brooks on doing IGOTS once a year, Sandra Bond wondering is Quasiquote reached us (it did), Gerald Smith with physical mail for us, John Tipper, Rose Mitchell, Gay and Joe Haldeman, KRin, Tom Feller, Lyn McConchie, Bill Bowers with plans for MidWestCon in 2003, Jerry Kaufman with news of a physical fanzine due soon, Mike Resnick, Craig Macbride provides James Allen's new email, Susan Batho says her Convergence report is at www.fandom.net/~susan/Converge.html, David Levine says he has made more sf sales. Linnette Horne mentions a second in the NZ NatCon short story competition. Lloyd Penney who confusingly loeced 92 before it was complete. Lucy Huntzinger says she hasn't written a physical letter in five years. Bill Wright says he enjoyed Relaxacon. Edwina Harvey helps with addresses. Ned Brooks says "and you do that for fun?"

Dave Rowe writes: Sorry but there's never enough time here to sit in front of a monitor to read a complete fnz. If it can't be carried around to open at anytime then it just isn't going to be read. *{{That is what portable computers were invented for, so you can carry them. You may note that Microsoft's great white hope next is the Tablet computer (Moses beat them to it). EL}}*