

Ray Nelson

# A Propos de Rien

For the February 2006 mailing of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association by Jim Caughran, 43 Dingwall Ave, Toronto Ontario M4J 1C4, Canada; email caughranJim at gmail dot com. The cover by Ray Nelson (c. 1961) shows how the perception of computers has changed since then. Other illos by Rotsler or the Internet. Dingbats are Monotype Sorts, chosen randomly.

Just remember—if the world didn't suck, we would all fall off.

Arthur Unknown



## A weird election, with perhaps good results

Canadian elections  
23 January

**The personae:** The **Liberals**, led by Paul Martin, have always campaigned left and governed right. They had a minority government for 18 months, 135 seats of 308. They have been in

power for 13 years, and were involved in a couple of bad financial scandals that indicated a sense of entitlement. They needed kicking.

The **Conservatives**, led by Stephen Harper. Harper has successfully recast himself, looking like a moderate rather than the right-wing neoconservative he was in the 2004 election. But the coverup is shallow; he stands for less federal power (Canada's federal government is already weaker than any other in the west), and tax cuts, particularly to the wealthy. He would have sent troops to Iraq and said so at the time. He wants to reopen ballistic missile defense with the US. His advisers are further right.

Neither of the other two parties with representation in Parliament could possibly form a government.

The **NDP**, led by Jack Layton, are a perennial source of ideas but rarely have much representation in Parliament. They had 18 seats before the election, but more power than that would indicate. For example, the Liberals made a deal with the NDP last year to stay in power a little longer; the NDP exacted a turnaround on corporate tax cuts and more progress toward a federal day-care program.

The **Bloc Québécois** is a separatist party. They have taken a bit less than 50% of the votes and a majority of the seats from Québec. They run no candidates outside Québec. Their leader, Gilles Duceppe, wanted this election to be a referendum on separation (or sovereignty-

association, they would prefer to call it). Since Québeckers were especially angry about the Liberal scandals, they hoped to gain.

And Beetlebomb... The **Greens** ran candidates in all ridings, but their Big Hope is to get a seat. They poll about 5%.

So what can we make of all that? The Liberals are bad, the Conservatives radical, the NDP too unlikely, and the Bloc threatens to break Canada apart.

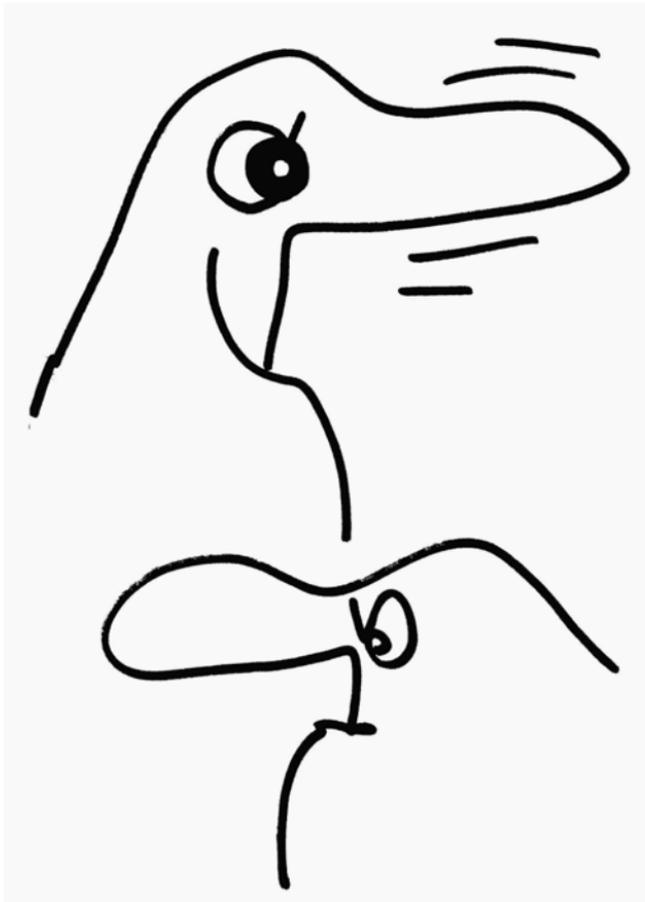
What we got may be the best we could have managed in that mess. The Conservatives have a weak minority government—124 seats of 308, with the Liberals picking up 103 (much more than expected, in fact). The NDP increased their representation to 29 seats, and the Bloc lost seats and votes, to Conservative candidates. Québeckers couldn't vote Liberal, so when the Conservatives seemed to be a real possibility, they voted for them rather than for the separatists, indicating they'd rather stay in Canada. As expected, the Greens got no seats.

The Conservatives' biggest problem will be keeping shut the mouths of their members on topics like abortion. They can't do anything radical without losing a vote of confidence. I suspect their hope will be to catch the Libs voting against a tax cut and take it to another election, hoping for a majority.

They've promised a free vote (no party discipline) on gay marriage—which is not really Parliament's purview; the issue came from the courts (less political in Canada than in the US) as an issue of human rights, and without invoking a weird clause of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms ("notwithstanding"), Parliament can't change that. They promised a cut in the federal sales tax, which I will welcome. They want to replace the Lib day-care program with handouts to parents of young children (essentially reviving the "Mothers Allowance" which I received when I was a single parent), which ignores the scarceness of day-care space. I guess mothers are supposed to take their \$100 a month and stay home rather than go to work, thus preserving Traditional Family Values.

Whom did I vote for? Well, I live in Jack Layton's riding, definitely safe for the NDP. Given that Layton wouldn't lose, I voted for political diversity, the Green Party. I'm very glad the NDP increased their representation.

I predict this government will not last as long as the Liberal government  
(18 months).



## Comments on comments on ...

I'm behind on mailing comments—hope I can straighten out which zine belongs to which mailing. I have an envelope which appears to contain the November mailing; I'll assume that anything else is in the

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## August Mailing

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### **BEN'S BEAT 81— Indick**

I've been walking with a cane as well. I have hip replacement surgery scheduled next August, 11 months after seeing the specialist, which was 5 months after scheduling an appointment. This is Canada, after all. BUT, my taxes pay for it. This is Canada, after all, though it may be unrecognizable after the regressive Conservatives take over.

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## COMMENTS COMMENCE— Vick

If Hussain's Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, remember who sold them to him. ↗ Bush and the Repubs want to do away with Social Security. Since they can't say that, they try to privatise it. It would then join such American successes as its third-rate medical care. At least Bush was stopped on Social Security. ✍ "I spend around an hour a day just deleting bulk, spam...." I spend maybe 30 seconds. My email program, Thunderbird (free), has a junk filter that largely works. I spend a few seconds reclassifying and deleting the junk that escapes it, and a few more seconds scanning the "Probable Junk" folder to make sure nothing is there that shouldn't be (rare). It *is* true that there are about 50–80 new items in the spam folder each day. ✨ "Marriage is for producing children." Are you saying that people over 50 shouldn't be allowed to marry? → While Democrats, Republicans and others have always helped

their followers, the cronyism in the Bush administration seems particularly blatant. Katrina cleanup is an example; rather than trying to help people, the administration helped Republican firms (including Cheney's) make a big profit out of the disaster.

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## ARIMONIITTI—Halme

Enjoyed it, but the type size made me want to do something other than read it. Larger type would help us old geezers.

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## YHOS 62—Twidner

More small type, and you're an old geezer yourself! ✨ Damn fallapart single-stapled zines! Clearly any decent magazine needs two staples to hold it together! ✨ Herr Rove did something potentially much more divisive than displacing anger toward the "liberal elite". By deciding that the repubs could win if they got the religious right plus the people who always vote Republican and largely ignoring the rest of the nation, Rove set up something that could create a lot of trouble later. Will national par-

ties ignore all but their special blocks? Already the parties ignore the poor because most of them don't vote. ★ p. 15 is mostly illegible—and it refers to me!

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## PASSING SCENE—Sabella

Did your plaintiffs receive nothing for “pain and suffering”? Only the chiropractors' care was compensated for? ♦ Your back (a year ago!) sounds like mine before the xray showed the hip arthritis, but more severe. Hope you're in good shape now.

**LIGHTNING:** There seem to be many Roman things in Britain which are still unstudied. Canterbury's Roman Museum has a section which was excavated only a few years ago. The Roman ruins must underlay the entire Medieval city. People didn't abandon the cities when the Romans gave up, they just kept on rebuilding their houses in whatever style was then current. ★ I may make the dingbats larger if the font requires it, but I keep the line height at 12 pt for 10 pt type.

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## TARGET: FAPA—Eney

“Isn't anyone crediting Bush with a personal Lust for Power?” After the recent report of a meeting with Congressional leaders in which Bush was reported to have said, “I'm the commander in chief. I don't care about the Constitution; it's only a piece of paper!” it can be assumed that Bush personally has a Lust for Power. ([http://www.capitolhill-blue.com/artman/publish/article\\_7779.shtml](http://www.capitolhill-blue.com/artman/publish/article_7779.shtml)) \* “A story could include sexual tension...without having physical sex scenes” Come now, you're old enough to remember 1950s titillating novels. Even men's magazines of that time had somewhat unclad women rather than gynaecological explorations. The eroticity of teasing has been lost. ⇒ I can't find it now, but you said something about the US being in trouble when someone who dissents is shot. The government insists it has the right to snoop on anyone at any time. Thousands, many just critics of the Bushies, are refused the right to fly on commer-

cial airplanes, without process of law. Many are held in prison offshore for indefinite periods, with no process of law. The CIA regularly transports people to jails in countries where they can be tortured. A photographer from India who has many awards and is well-regarded, was taking pictures in New York. The police saw a dark-faced man doing something unusual. They roughed him up, called him an asshole, etc. (He cancelled the project he was working on.) When do you start to call it a police state?

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## **SNICKERSNEE— Silverberg**

It's not only California where people say "Enjoy," or an insincere "Have a nice day", or use familiar forms beyond the level of acquaintance. If it occurs in staid old Toronto, it must be happening everywhere.

I seem to be missing some zines. Someone asked for details on my statement that most Muslims live in democracies. I

discovered that, as always, it depends on what you mean by "democracy". There are 1.5 billion Muslims on the planet; a google on Muslim populations yielded these, in false precision:

|             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| Indonesia   | 201,025,326 |
| India       | 144,198,760 |
| Pakistan    | 140,278,140 |
| Bangladesh  | 115,517,477 |
| Nigeria     | 94,976,720  |
| Turkey      | 66,254,592  |
| Iran        | 65,433,321  |
| Egypt       | 65,364,445  |
| China       | 38,193,339  |
| Ethiopia    | 37,161,580  |
| Algeria     | 30,483,090  |
| Morocco     | 29,392,027  |
| Sudan       | 26,815,412  |
| Afghanistan | 26,544,926  |

This is almost a billion Muslims. Decide for yourself which countries are democracies, but I would include India and Indonesia. Afghanistan and Iraq (21

mega-Muslims) are now democracies if you believe George Bush.

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## November Mailing

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### **BEN'S BEAT—Indick**

"...Buddhist gods, Ganesha in particular." Oy. > Enjoyed your theatre reviews, as always.

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### **OPUNTIAS—Speirs**

"[Fans still feud,] but now they do it online." I suspect local feuds persist as always, and other feuds may or may not break into fanzines. Things are cyclic. ▲ Interesting collection of notes on various journals; you do read widely. I read the petroleum reserve notes with interest, and will forward them to a friend who worked for Texaco. I'm impressed with your research.

"The Tories still fight the future, and the Liberals still deny the past." Right on! ♪ I sometimes see families of mice in the Toronto subway. I expect that litter

makes them a good living. I wonder why so many women have an exaggerated fear of mice. ✕ Raccoons are the main wildlife of Toronto (after pigeons, seagulls squirrels and so forth); they're a damned nuisance. ■ A news item 2006 01 27 said a raccoon from Calgary blundered onto a boxcar and arrived in Toronto in good shape. It will be returned to Calgary by air, if the wildlife group holding it can get an airline to donate space. → There is heightened fear over something new, such as avian flu, and more common and deadly plagues like automobile deaths are ignored. ♪ I'm hoping you're getting enough exercise that half-lowering flags is easy. > As population rises, so will numbers of people living on flood plains. During our drive through southern India after an extended monsoon, there were a lot of people living in makeshift tents on the road shoulders, the highest nearby ground. ❁ I bought a Prius just in time for Katrina.

If we were to believe SCA, people were all nobles in the bygone years. Most

people were serfs or slaves and led anything but glamorous lives. ➡ Why did Scandinavians develop skis, while North Americans developed snowshoes? ➡ Junk mail preceded junk phone calls, which preceded email spam. All of which are now extant.

Offprints were very useful when I was in the academic business, but preprints were more current; to keep up with an area of research, you had to know the other people in the area and send each other stuff.

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## ALPHABET SOUP— Stevens

Since retiring, there is no need to create a means of “killing time during the day”; I’m busier than before. → You might get more hassle going back into the US than entering Canada, where Customs and Immigration is more interested in whether you’re carrying something it can tax. ✖ The news this week has surplus cargo containers as houses for homeless people. Your speculations

aren’t far off. ✦ Am I sure that “Certainty kills the quest for truth”? Absolutely.

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## TWILIGHT OLYMPUS— Davin

This is something like those “educational” science fiction stories from the early years. ▶ “...that she was alive at all indicated there were no immediately fatal injuries.” Say what?

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## FAPALEMENT—Davis

Hope your eye and other problems are less visible. Enjoyed.

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## CANDY REVISITED— Stenfors

I like the semi-naked ladies. ✖ A lot of the things from 1950s science fiction have arrived, and a lot won’t be soon. Where are the flying cars? ✦ Sturgeon cited a different Sturgeon’s law than fans do. ✓ While Pohl was wrong about the human need to couple, marriages



Adam, Lilith, and Eve  
relief sculpture,  
c. 1210 CE

Base of trumeau, left portal,  
West Façade, Notre Dame, Paris

are optional now. Sounds like Pohl may have just come from an unsuccessful marriage. ✓ Budrys: “concept of a social norm would become nearly meaningless.” Norms change, but there are always limits on behaviour.

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## FOR FAPA—Walker

I’m glad I haven’t incurred Milt’s wrath.

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## NICE DISTINCTIONS—Hlavaty

I was not aware of Lilith, but found some interesting stuff at <http://witcombe.sbc.edu/eve-women/7evelilith.html>, including a picture. In the picture, she has the torso of a snake, thus identifying her with the Serpent. → Have there been indictments for the outing of the CIA agent? □ I liked your line, “Sweets for the sweet—pass the crudités.”

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## KING BISCUIT—Lichtman

All computer systems are unintuitive. (For that matter, so were typewriters; why should a letter appear when you strike a key?) Habit, thus familiarity,

defines what you think is good. I used WP5.1, and aside from the lack of gui interface, it was okay, as was Word 6 at that time. ☆ I don't remember Mary Jane and Sniffles per se, but the magic words of poof-poof piffles struck a resonance in my memory.

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## REVELATIONS—Parker

Welcome back. I enjoy your writing style. → What's wrong—6 dwarves? One with a hat floating in space? ♠ If the stores make Christmas shopping a year-round thing, there might be time for it. I'm not sure I can stand that much Rudolph, however.

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## CLAIMS DEPT—Garcia

Is the cover (robots producing fanzines) to suggest that we do all this stuff mechanically? \* Was there something or someone at home that you wanted to avoid by staying in a motel two blocks away?

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## SWEET JANE—Eklund

Reading during commercial breaks... So all I have to do to read more is to watch TV? ☆

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## ROAD WARRIOR—Feller

A lot of companies figure their old systems are good enough and get bit when they fail. The Royal Bank, one of Canada's big 5 banks (there are few small ones) nearly brought down the country's finances a year or two ago. Blame the executives; the IT departments would love to have a new project.

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## RIDE LIGHTNING—Sabella

I went to a large college (University of California) in a city containing a lot of fans, where I spent my social hours. ♦ *Quicksilver*—Unfortunately for the time spent reading the other two, the first volume of the trilogy was by far the best.

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## CONFUSION—Vick

Enjoyed, even its nonlinear paging.

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## EDGAR'S JOURNAL— Ogdens

Vincent Price did an amazing number of things I knew nothing of. But therefore his biography should be topical, not temporal; it skips around a lot. Did he ever act in a movie written by Robert Bloch?

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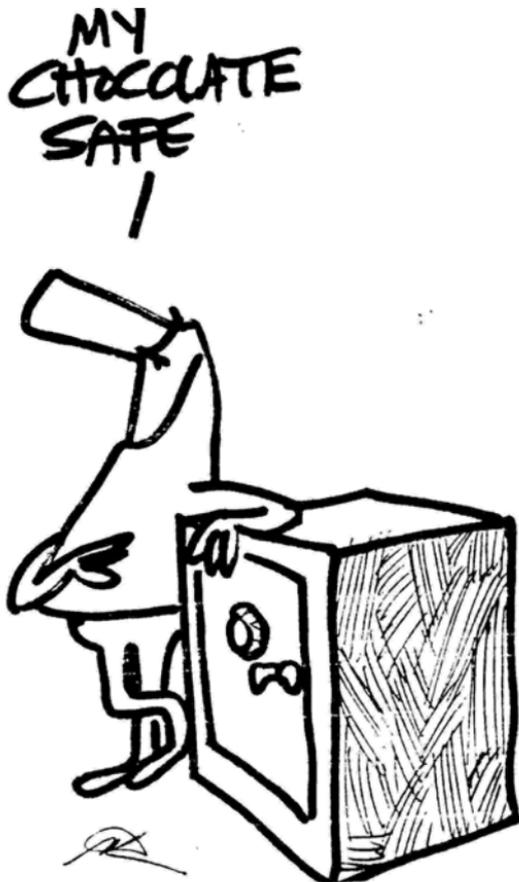
## OPUNTIAS—Speirs

It was common practice at Cal to give professors postal cards to let you know your grades before the official notification. Are bad grades a libel?

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## LOFGEORNOST—Lerner

Enjoyed as always, but I wasn't in a conversational mood when I read it.



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## FELINE MEWSINGS— Tutihasi

I got a call from Visa that my card had been compromised, but there were no charges I hadn't made. Curious. ✂ Yes, the Prius is great. Except for the price, everyone should have one. Toyota expects to make their whole fleet hybrid by 2010, while the Europeans are pushing their efficient diesels and calling hybrids a fad, and the Americans expect hydrogen fuel cells Real Soon Now. \* Sherwood says a plug-in hybrid gets much better mileage. It damned well should, since it's taking energy from the electric grid. And some people are going the other way, making their Prius an emergency generator.

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## TARGET: FAPA—Eney

Flat tax—read what I said again. There are flat taxes, and there are flat taxes.

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## TRIAL AND AIR—Waite

Which version, *Outpost Mars* or *Sin in Space*, sold better?

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## FOR FAPA—Lindsay

Being killed by disease or old age is usual; famine or war is less desirable. ♦ Air Canada is some kind of partner with United so they might honour United's points. They fly Sydney to Vancouver or Toronto. See you at Corflu. ☆ Wind power can be saved by compressing air and using it later to generate.