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BY BILL WRIGHT
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THE JOURNAL FOR INQUISITIVE READERS



GRAPHICS BY DITMAR

INTERSTELLAR RAMJET SCOOP (THE JOURNAL FOR INQUISITIVE READERS)
 PUBLISHED BY BILL WRIGHT, 4/1 PARK STREET, ST. KILDA, VICTORIA 3182
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"Satire is the homage that ignorance pays to genius."

Oscar Wilde

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This Issue's Cover

There is no story behind the image. It is meant simply as a mood piece – a calm contemplation of a journey over untroubled waters toward the sun. Should you be a *glass-half-empty* personality, the motion is toward a setting sun, and if you are of the *half-full persuasion*, it will be toward the dawn. But there is a third interpretation, and, perhaps because I am now in my crepuscular years, it is the one I favour. The flyer, which is the viewer, ourselves, is indeed moving towards the evening light, but there is the promise that with sustained flight a new dawn will arise, a new day, another journey to be taken.

John Donne¹ said it best:

...all mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated; God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up our scattered leaves again for that library where every book shall lie open to one another.

I find the sentiment, the prose, the images, the argument, to be couched in prose of affecting emotion and quality. Prose seldom reaches such levels of potency because, as Jorge Luis Borges² expressed it:

I have sometimes suspected that the radical distinction between poetry and prose lies in the very different expectations of readers: poetry presupposes an intensity that is not tolerated in prose.

But in his writings, John Donne approaches that intensity.

As an example of the fervency of poetry, Mathew Arnold³, in one of the finest poems I have ever read, begins with the lover motioning to his beloved:

*The sea is calm tonight,
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; - on the French coast, the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night air!*

and then, twenty-five short lines later, in a swift, smooth, seamless transition, this contemplation of beauty, of love, of peace, has become a metaphysical meditation on the human condition:

*...the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither love, not joy, nor light
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain:
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.*

I can think of no piece of prose which moves so succinctly from the certitude of the beauty of the surface to what lies beneath, and which expresses, so compactly, what some writers need entire books to articulate.

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------|--|
| 1 | <i>John Donne:</i> | Devotions – Meditation XVII |
| 2 | <i>Jorge Luis Borges:</i> | Translators of the Thousand and One Nights |
| 3 | <i>Mathew Arnold:</i> | Dover Beach |

Ditmar Jensen

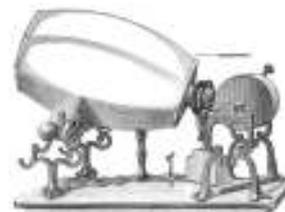
Prose and poetry are one when the right words are in the right order
(a controversial proposition with which Ditmar disagreed).

Ed.

Clerihew corner

Thomas Edison has been considered the father of recorded sound since he captured the spoken words “*Mary had a little lamb*” on a sheet of tinfoil. But researchers say they have unearthed a recording of the human voice made by little-known Parisian typesetter Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville that predates Edison’s invention of the phonograph in 1877 by nearly two decades. De Martinville went to his grave convinced that credit for his breakthrough had been improperly bestowed on Edison.

In March 2008 a ten-second recording of a singer crooning the folk song ‘*Au Clair de la Lune*’ was found in a Paris archive by a group of American audio historians. It was made on 9 Apr 1860 on de Martinville’s *phonautograph* that was designed to record sounds visually, not to play them back - pictured at right.



But the phonautograph recording, or *phonautogram*, was made playable by scientists at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in Berkeley, California, who converted the squiggles on paper to sound.

The above has inspired ‘*The First Sound Recording – the Clerihew*’ (soon to be a major motion picture).

*Edouard-Leon Scott de Martinville
Left a record by which his fans will
Prove how well-screwed his head was on
Years before Thomas Edison.*

I also tried to rhyme the real pronunciation (de-mart-an-vee) but the closest I could find was “*economy*” ...

...et voila!

‘*The First Sound Recording II*’ (watch for it on TV)

*With admirable economy
Edouard-Leon Scott de Martinville
Recorded a faint and thready song
Years before Thomas Edison.*

To play back this, the world’s first sound recording, please click on the ‘Play’ button at Wikipedia location

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Au_Clair_de_la_Lune_%281860%29.ogg .

Josephine Hull played Veta Louise Simmons in one of my very favourite movies, ‘*Harvey*’ (1950).

Hull was a stage success in *Craig's Wife* (1926), and in *Daisy Mayme* (1926), a role which was written especially for her. Through the 1920s, she continued working in the Theatre, and in the 1930s had three Broadway hits in *You Can't Take It With You* (1936), *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944) and *Harvey* (1944).

Hence the clerihew... *Josephine Hull
Considered Shakespeare quite dull
But thought it rather marvie
To play Elwood's sis in 'Harvey'.*

She made five movies, beginning with the 1929 film *The Bishop's Candlesticks*. That was followed by two 1932 Fox features, *After Tomorrow* (recreating her stage role) and *The Careless Lady*.

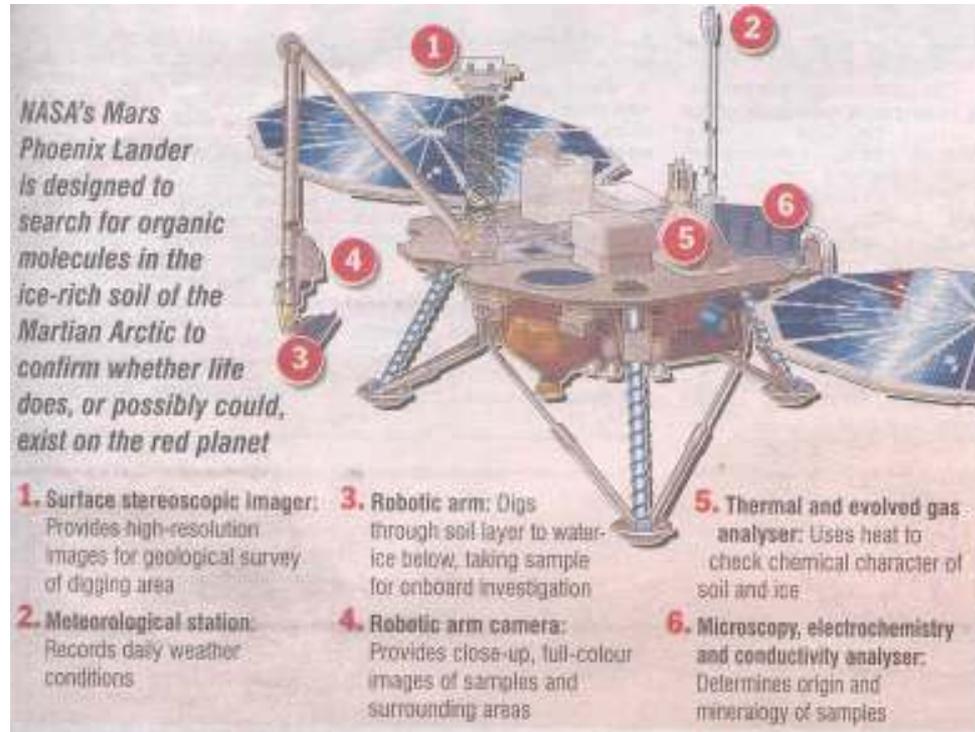
Hull and Canadian-born Jean Adair played the Brewster sisters in *Arsenic and Old Lace* (a gem of a movie starring Carey Grant as the bewildered nephew). Hull was in the screen version of *Harvey* as well, playing Jimmy Stewart’s sister Vita Louise Simmons. For the latter role she won her Best Supporting Actress Oscar. *Variety* magazine said, “*Josephine Hull, as the slightly balmy aunt who wants to have Elwood committed, is immense, socking the comedy for every bit of its worth.*” Her last film was *The Lady from Texas* (1951).

Her most memorable quote: “*Playing Shakespeare is tiring. You never get to sit down unless you're a king.*”

Dennis Callegari

Lending library arrives on Mars

At 7:53 PM on Sunday 25th May 2008, the NASA's Mars Phoenix Lander touched down on the plateau Vastitas Borealis near the Martian polar ice cap.

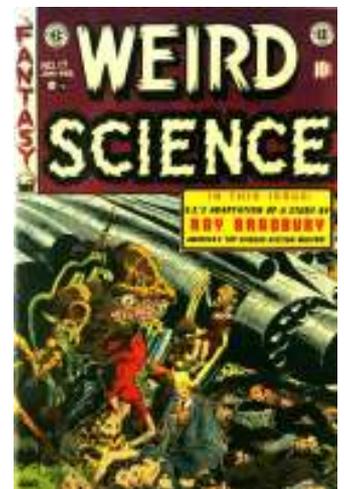


Internet blogger Arthur Lortie's claim to enduring fame is that he posted this news on 26th May 2008...

On board Mars Phoenix Lander is a disc containing about 300,000 names of science fiction fans and a series of images of Mars from US comic strips, pulps, animation and fiction; representing the work of talented earth-bound writers and artists. Included is a Winsor McCay 1910 *Little Nemo* featuring an airship powered by a giant bird ferrying Nemo and friends to Mars, and a poster from the 1936 Flash Gordon serial.

Comic books are represented by the Wally Wood cover to *Weird Science* No 17 Jan-Feb 1953 and an Adam Hughes *Martian Manhunter*. Other artists represented include Chuck Jones [*Marvin Martian*], Allan Anderson [for a Leigh Brackett novel], Ed Emschwiller, Chesley Bonestell, Frank Kelley Freas, Richard Powers, Michael Whelan, Don Dixon, Alex Schomburg, Vincent di Fate and Frank R Paul..

A healthy representation of Martian literature, led by H G Wells's *War of the Worlds*, is included as well.

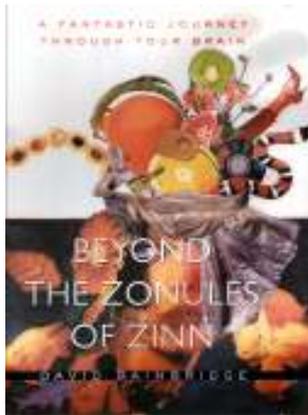


So, if there are real Martians equipped with universal translators, they can revel in the works of Brian Aldiss, Poul Anderson, Edwin Arnold [*Gullivar of Mars*], Isaac Asimov, Greg Bear, J G Ballard, Greg Benford, Otto Binder, Ben Bova, Leigh Brackett, Ray Bradbury, Fredrick Brown, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Arthur C Clarke [*pity he didn't live to see this*], Sam Delaney, August Derleth, Philip Dick, Harry Harrison, Fred Hoyle, Otis Adelbert Kline, Michael Moorcock, C L Moore, Larry Niven, H Beam Piper, Fred Pohl, Kim Stanley Robinson, Carl Sagan, Ted Sturgeon, A E van Vogt, Kurt Vonegut, Jack Williamson, Roger Zelazny and many, many others.

Curiously, Robert Silverberg, author of '*Lost Race of Mars*', is not represented. Perhaps his Majipoor stories have overshadowed his earlier works but, to me, the omission of Silverbob is inexplicable given his almost godlike status as a talespinner and a fan.

Beyond the Zonules of Zinn

In trawling at Amazon.com through the latest science book releases I came across one titled *Beyond The Zonules of Zinn* by David Bainbridge, and being an SF fan, and one with memories of Harlan Ellison's story *Adrift Off the Islets of Langerhans*, I paused, drew in a breath, and searched for more details. Now, as most of you likely know, the Islets of Langerhans are where the hormone producing cells of the pancreas are grouped, and so Ellison's story has promises of a *Fantastic Voyage*. You'll have to read the yarn to discover if the promise is fulfilled. The details of the Bainbridge book indicated that the Zonules, like the Islets, were an anatomical structure, but that the book is, unlike the Islets, fact not fiction, and deals with the central nervous system and the brain. It is structured as a trip, an exceedingly fantastic voyage, up the spinal cord and into the brain, discussing the extraordinary features which occur seemingly at every millimetre along the way.



Now I am not only an SF fan (so the very title of Bainbridge's book made purchasing it inescapable) but I occasionally buy books based on their cover, and this cover pledged a journey into surrealistic realms of Snakes, booze, Odalises (that is, sex), food, flowers, music...all seemingly inevitable companions on the pilgrimage. But, yet again, I find books about the structure and the working of the brain and the mind virtually irresistible, and have done so since my first year at university, when I discovered it 54 years ago (yes, I'm really *that* old a fart) the medical library.

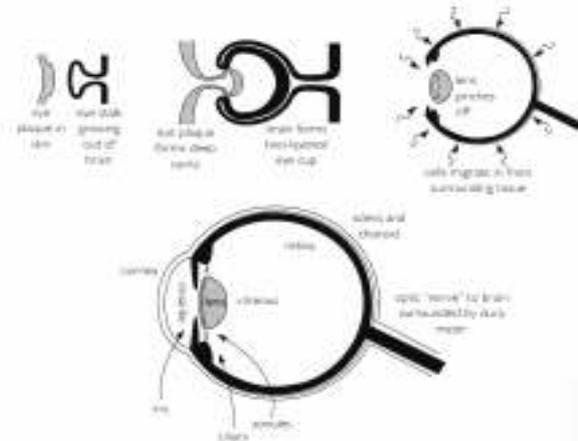
I *had* to buy the book. And I am penning this short article because it not only lived up to expectations, but surpassed them in terms of wit, humour, graceful writing, and, above all, interest and knowledge. I *urge* all *inquisitive readers of IRS* to borrow or buy the book.

For those, who like me on reading the words *Zonules of Zinn*, want to know just what they are (perhaps even preparatory to writing an SF yarn), they are features of the eye. The illustration gives some details, not only of the Zonules, but of the growth of the eye in a developing human. The lens of the eye is focussed by a muscular ciliary which acts to flatten the lens by connections between the muscle and the lens. These connections are the 'many minuscule fibres...tiny tendrils, the most delicate part of the brain' called the Zonules of Zinn. And if you're worried about that last statement – 'the most delicate parts of the brain' being within the eye – well, that's not an error. The figure shows that the eyeball is initially a plaque on the skin of the embryo to which part of the brain is attracted.

This stalk turns into a cup which almost surrounds the eye plaque, and then closes off the sequestration with the cornea.

But the interior of the eye – the retina – and the optic nerve (or tract) are one, and part of the brain. As Bainbridge says: "*So when you gaze lovingly into somebody's eyes, you are actually staring at the perforated front most extension of his or her brain... Yes, the iris is the brain – the window on the soul after all...and it is the only part of the brain which can move itself*".

Which I think is pretty fantastic. But there is much, much more in the book. You will learn about other SF landscape features, such as *The Island of Reil*, *The Islands of Calleja*, *Galen's Bridge*, *Area 51* (which may be an alien site after all!), and "*the Tolkienesque Tract of Goll*". What about the stegosaurus' second brain – is it real? Why do shingles come in stripes? What is the origin of gin, and how is it connected to the central nervous system? Why does the world spin when you lie down after a heavy bout of drinking? Was it just a conceit of Herman Melville to have Ishmael say: "...*whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul...whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me...then I account it high time to get to sea*", or is there some neurological underpinning to Ishmael's 'hypos'? And are vertebrates simply the insect body plan turned upside down? How new are language and colour in the evolution of humans? Was Richard Feynman 'the most convincing creative synesthete'?



Dick Jensen

An editorial interpretation

I read *Beyond the Zonules of Zinn* by David Bainbridge on Ditmar's say so and because I wanted to see whether it could be classified as science fiction. It can't; but, as science fact, it is as close to the spirit of fandom as any work with this tome's density of ideas and information can get.

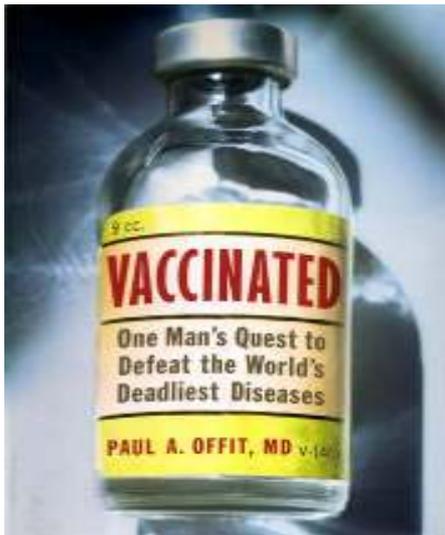
Bainbridge has written a cogent account of Modern Man's understanding of the structure of the brain. He deals playfully with magical names that have been given to parts of the central nervous system since the time of the ancient Roman physician and philosopher Galen; and, in pointing to a number of false conclusions that have been made throughout history, he demonstrates that we know next to nothing of the relationship between structure and function in the brain. Wit and style mark his dissertations on cultural as well as natural history and, in establishing that giving names to things muddies the waters of understanding, he circles the core of oriental philosophy.

Readers must judge for themselves but I think that in scope, readability, narrative power and worthiness of subject matter *Beyond the Zonules of Zinn* is up there with Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*.

Bill Wright

The Un-Christmas Book List

From time to time, as in the December issue of *IRS*, I have a list of books which I recommend as probable gifts for those you love – which is, of course, **you**. It would seem that 2008 is going to produce too many books for that traditional list, and so some mid-year, un-Christmas, books as gifts appear below.



I think it's fair to say, given the population of the world as some six billion, that *at least* 100 million people have heard of Tiger Woods, or Bruce Willis, or Paris Hilton. But how many know of Maurice Hilleman? The answer is in Dr Paul Offit's book 'Vaccinated', about *Maurice Hilleman: His Extraordinary Life and Work*, concerning the idea of, the creation of, the development of, the efficacy of, vaccines and vaccinations. He points out that, due to the vaccines developed in the last fifty years, 'hundreds of millions of children' have been saved from death or serious debilitating illness. The vaccines include those against: measles, mumps, rubella, chickenpox, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, pneumococcus, meningococcus, and haemophilus influenza type B (Hib).

Maurice Hilleman was the creator of ALL these vaccines.

Although Offit's book is about vaccines in general, Hilleman, naturally, figures very prominently, and a major part of the book is devoted to him.

Why he is not more well-known is discussed in the text, but why he was never awarded a Nobel Prize is that when he *was* nominated (for his work in interferon research) 'one member of the committee pointed out that the Nobel Prize in medicine would not be given to anyone who worked for a company', and most of Hilleman's professional life was as a very highly regarded employee - but nonetheless, an employee - of Merck.

This book is recommended almost as strongly as *Beyond the Zonules*... It may not be as well-written nor as witty, but it is probably more important in telling the story of a hero who willingly allowed himself to be part of the background because of his inherent modesty. It is sad to think that sports personalities, film stars and creatures with apparently nothing between their ears except bone and space, live in fame, yet those who are truly deserving of our praise are largely unknown.

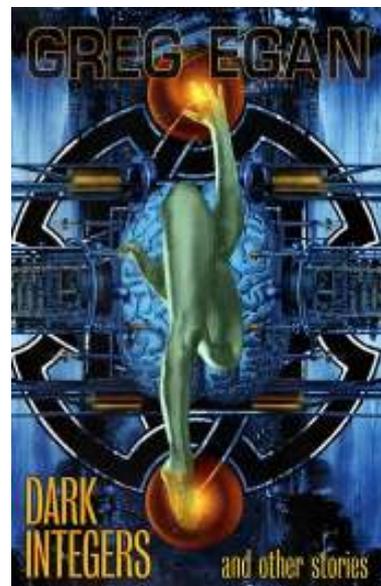
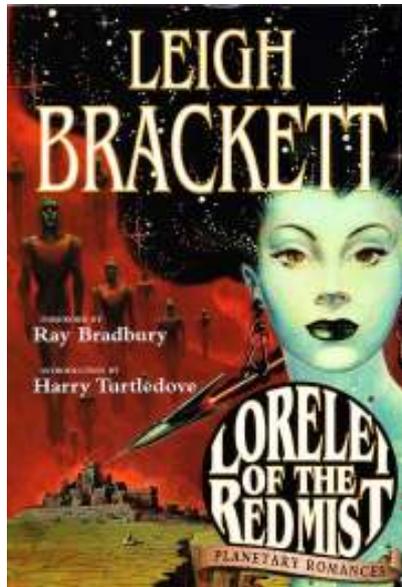
In 1970, the members *Science Fiction Writers of America* voted on the best SF stories up to that time, and Doubleday published, with Robert Silverberg as editor, the top 26 stories. Well, sort of... Silverberg, probably in consultation with some of the committee, decided that each author could be represented by just a single story, so that some lower ranked yarns made it into the book. Three years later two more volumes were

released – this time of novellas, and this time edited by Ben Bova. There have been reprints of these collections, but at least one set that I know of has omitted some of the stories. Now ORB has reprinted the first volume in paperback, and TOR has reprinted the other two in hardback.



If you are old enough to have read these books you will know that they **do** collect some of the finest SF written up to 1970, and if your copies are old and battered, then replacement is necessary. If, on the other hand, you are still young enough to have missed these volumes, then they **must** be acquired. Now, no collection will have every story as a 10/10 rating (and in fact a few, a very few, of the efforts in my opinion *are* clinkers), but the overall quality is probably the highest I have ever come across. At least fifteen of the works would be in my (imagined and never to be reality) one-volume book of the Best SF.

And now two new books which will not be to every SF reader's taste – one old and one new.



The Leigh Brackett is recommended for those who love good old fashioned space opera. Ray-guns which zap, and swords which swish – together, of course, in the same universe, world, and, indeed, paragraph. In my fantasized *Best SF* volume, there would be at least one Brackett – *Sea Kings of Mars* (also known as *The Sword of Rhiannon*) – and perhaps one more (*The Lake of the Gone Forever*). Greg Egan, on the contrary, is for those who like their SF to be crammed full of ideas – in physics, artificial intelligence, mathematics – and which demand careful attention to be paid to the concepts which appear like grains of sand, seemingly on every other page. The ideas are as concentrated as those in Olaf Stapledon's works, but are more demanding in that they are, as I have said, oriented towards the cutting edge of physics and mathematical speculation.

Dick Jensen

Robin Johnson's latest trip report

Chairman of Australia's first worldcon (Ausiecon 1975), Robin Johnson, has a special place in the hearts of Australian fans. At the 2007 worldcon at Yokohama, Japan, he received the Big Heart Award jointly with Atsushi Morioka. Robin has just returned from another overseas trip, including a visit to Japan He writes...

Sunday, May 4th, 2008

Left Hobart on Sunday, May 4th, 2008, for Sydney. I'd intended to visit Susan Batho, but communications failed. Had an early night before leaving for Japan next morning on a Japan Air Lines flight to Tokyo.

Arrived too late for the last flight on to Osaka, so I spent the night at an airport hotel. In the morning I had an easy train ride to Tokyo Central station on a ticket purchased from an automatic machine. Big mistake, as I had taken the Limited Express and got charged a 400% surcharge.

I had been in Tokyo and Yokohama last year's worldcon, so took a Shinkansen (bullet) train to Osaka where I had not been for forty years. I stayed in a hotel in the station, booked by the first travel agent I found, which would only book one night. The cost was about Y12000, at about Y100 to the dollar. I then booked a second night on the Internet for Y7500, and the following night at the departure airport hotel for rather more.

First afternoon I looked around Osaka - including visiting the Genius Bar at the Apple Store, and a techie heaven store for camera, video etc.

The next day I explored Kobe, the Osaka-area equivalent of Yokohama for the Tokyo area, complete to the giant illuminated Ferris wheel in entertainment area where the old port has been renovated and touristified, just like the one outside my window last year at Nippon 2007.

On my last day I checked out of the hotel and put my bags in store, and took an all-day tour to two previous capital cities of Japan, Kyoto and Nara. Despite being chivvied along to keep up with the schedule, it was good value, and the two bus-loads of us (about half US and the other half everything else) on the English-speaking tour saw a lot. Recommended for those on a tight timetable. (JTB Sunrise tour) As I was the only one starting in Osaka, I was assigned a personal shepherd to get me from my hotel to the embussing point in Kyoto, and another from the Nara train station back to Osaka! I then took an airport bus to the new(ish) Kansai airport on a man-made island in the bay and hour's drive from Osaka.

Friday, May 9th. 2008

I had a very long day yesterday, Friday: Starting in Japan - Kansai airport Nikko hotel.

Woken at 6:30am. Hotel breakfast at 7:00. Pack up and check out with some stuff for mailing home and take to Post Office in airport (on foot across bridge) for opening at 8:00. Find out Japanese PO will not send package over 2kg. Thin stuff down and mail.

Check in for flight around 8:30 and go to lounge (going Business Class). Turns out to be the NWA lounge, so yesterday's US paper is available, plus a local English-language one.

Flight (Finnair) closes doors 10 minutes early, but takes off after scheduled time. Route starts due north to somewhere near Khabarovsk (avoiding North Korea) but it was cloudy most of the way. I did see some icy mountains and a coastal ice sheet just starting to break up off the northern coast of Siberia.

Arrived at Helsinki. Got rid of Yen in favour of Euro, and reboarded Finnair to Heathrow for an on time arrival 5:10pm (plus 8 hours!). Phoned my sister who had just landed at Gatwick from Greece and agreed to meet at bus station in Oxford. Finally left Oxford on 9:05pm bus to be met in Buckingham (local town) by my sister's car-sitter to take us to her home.

In bed by 11pm (24.5 hours elapsed) after struggling to remove pressure stockings! ... (to be continued)

Robin Johnson

The cartoon of Robin is by a medico and graphic artist who, for professional reasons, has adopted the pen name **Jenner**. His daily Doc Rat strip can be found on his website... <http://www.docrat.com.au>

Ed.



Stefan Zone

CELEBRITY GOVERNMENT

The Reality TV craze has now reached Federal Government. In a case of Reality Government, the Labor government has opened their open minds to New Labor ideas by holding a 2020 summit. In a move that has upset some unionists, the ideas were provided free of charge.

Let me say this. I'm still waiting for my invite to the talkfest. The invite might be like a postcard you send while on holidays - turning up at your friends place a week after you're back home. Sure, you can say that it's a little late for an invite as the talkfest is over, but it's not too late once I unveil my secret idea for a time machine.

Checklist:	* Is the person a woman? (Um, no)	550
	* Is the person a member of the Labor Party? (Well, no)	300
	* Is the person a member of a Union? (Not anymore)	100
	* Is the person a member of a green organisation / activist group? (<i>he, he, unlikely</i>)	45
	* Is the person an aborigine? (Well, I WAS born in Australia)	3
	* Is the person a token celebrity?	2

Oooh, too bad. You've missed out this time. Try again next time.

Let me say this. I must say they had their priorities right. They did say they wanted the brightest IN Australia, and since most of the brightest have all LEFT Australia, they had to settle with whoever was left.

Let me say this. Why they didn't choose a homeless mother of 10 from Frankston or a deadbeat dad from Heidelberg or a hoon from

I could use it to go back in time to attend the summit. Now if they could only see their way to build it at no cost to me.

Let me say this. Actually, I wouldn't have had any chance for an invite - they were asking for the, ahem, *brightest* of Australians to attend. Oh, and some celebrities, greenies and unionists as well. Modesty forbids me to include myself in the brightest group. That's up to others to agree on.

Let me say this. I managed to lay my virtual hands on the actual checklist they used to determine the 1,000 who could attend:

Broadmeadows or a kid from Lilydale who works for \$2.00 an hour at McDogs, I'll never know. Maybe they were all busy.

Let me say this. Chairman Mao Kruddy will now have to plant over 1,000 trees to cover all the CO2 expended at the summit, not to mention recycling a certain celebrity accessory-baby's nappy.

Stefan

CLEANING THE YARRA

It may seem a hopeless task, but I am determined to clean the Yarra River and make it blue. The '*Upside Down River*' as it is affectionately known has been a source of wonderment for tourists, but an embarrassment for Melbournians. Since the failed attempt in the late 70's to turn it blue by throwing gallons of blue dye into it, governments have been scratching their heads over the issue.

Now, for a small, nominal fee, I'll restore the Yarra. My plan is simple - I'm going to turn the upside down river right way up. There are two main options under consideration:

Option 1

The first option requires the 'blue' water at the bottom of the river to be put on top and the brown water on top to be placed at the bottom. In order to do this, I would require the new big Docklands Ferris wheel to be rolled up and down the Yarra to

churn up the water. Now, I'm a bit undecided on whom or what will do the rolling of the wheel. I have been unable to trap a hamster the size of a three storeyed house, so it may have to be promoted as a 'Work for the Dole' scheme.

Option 2

For the second option, I borrowed from capitalism the idea that you don't have to FIX a problem, but to make it SEEM as if the problem has been fixed. In order to achieve this, an aqueduct system, made of a transparent material, will be built about 2 storeys above the current river bed. When the water flows along the new aqueduct, it will appear blue from underneath. Of course, the top will have to be covered over, else those looking down from above will still see brown water.

If these options fail, I can just keep releasing blue dye until I get paid.

STEFAN IDEAS & INVENTIONS No 2

In the 'ideas' summit a few weeks ago, Kruddy's Labor friends gave him their top ideas for the future. Unfortunately, they were only rehashing ideas that had been heard before or that were already up and running overseas.

If I'd turned up, (I never DID receive my invitation), I would have provided ten new Ideas and inventions. I might cop some flack for these because they're Victorian-centric, but they can equally be used in any other third-world country around the world. The first idea (sent the other week) concerned cleaning the Yarra River.

The second invention I have concerns my home town of Werribee. It has had to put up with being on the 'nose' with other Victorians due to its sewerage treatment plant. The treatment, I might add, is well within the guidelines set out under the Geneva Convention.

With the following invention, I'm hoping that Werribee can once again hold its head up high (and stop blaming the dog).

The de-Smellination plant

This new plant, based on the desalination plant (well, based on the name at least), will be built alongside the existing sewerage treatment plant. A huge blanket will be thrown over the treatment lagoons, trapping the smells. The blanket will be slowly drawn into the desmellination plant, on some rotational thing that someone else can invent (don't rely on me to think of EVERYthing!), where the smells will be extracted and processed.

You may not think there's much demand for sewerage treatment plant smells, but consider how many bottles of eau-de-toilet get sold each year. Werribee can become the top seller of eau-de-toilet products within a year if my plan prevails.

GLOBAL CROWDING

Travelling home from work last week, I wondered why more people aren't crying out for politicians to relieve Global Crowding. It seems nobody cares about us train commuters.

Oh, sure, the usual nuts scream and carry on about Global Warming (so why was it only 1 degree the other morning?) and 'man-made' environmental damage (Shouldn't this now include 'woman-made' damage? I mean, all those young girls these days hooked on alcopops must be causing SOME environmental damage every time they fall over drunk in someone's front garden while staggering home from a nightclub on a school night).

Yet I've seen no-one tie themselves to the railway tracks or chain themselves to a carriage door to raise the Global Crowding issue in the media. To date, there has been not one concert staged nor a single charity set up to benefit victims of Global Crowding, such as myself. The issue couldn't even tempt a single washed-up has-been celebrity to come out of retirement to lend their substantial weight to the cause. We are the forgotten minority, squeezed into a corner to make way for yet another nauseating round of celebrity stories.

Conned, sorry Connex, has finally realised it has been approaching this issue from the wrong way. Instead of trying to reduce the overcrowding on trains, they should be encouraging it. That way they can run less trains, improving the reliability of the system and save themselves some money.

There's even talk of getting commuters used to the overcrowding by trying to get the World Record for the most people crammed into a carriage. Japan holds this record at the moment, but I reckon we can squeeze past them if those people up the front can just move into the carriage a little more. Japan's record was obviously backed by their small army of Train Pushers, whose job it is to push more people onto the train, even those who were just standing on the platform waiting for a different train. Australia's train pushers sell drugs.

There could actually be a few World Records on offer here, eg for a carriage with seats and another for a carriage without seats. The carriage without seats is normally the result of being on the Broady line after a few gangs have been through it.

Connex could even hold a year-long competition whereby different train lines attempt to out-crowd each other. *"This Wednesday sees Werribee line versus Dandenong line, Pakenham line versus Upfield line ..."* There could be a daily ladder (similar to footy) that ranks each line by their performance. At the end of the year, they can hold a finals series.

Each train could have a prize for the most crowded carriage. The Herald Sun can even run a weekly hints page, containing diagrams of different ways of stacking people in and making the most of the available space. We might even set a new record for the longest a person can hold their breath.

THE 7.30 STEFAN TODAY CURRENT TONIGHT AFFAIR TOMORROW REPORT

Welcome to tonight's 7.30 Stefan Today Current Tonight Affair Tomorrow Report. I'm your host Stefan and tonight we've something special for you.

Other current affair programs are quick to promote themselves as being Carbon Neutral. We want to be the first current affair program to be Cost Neutral and this is where YOU can help!

We've become too lazy to send out reporters to do any actual investigative reporting. We're now fully reliant on you, the viewers, to send in the stories you want to see. So if you have any stories, anything at all, PLEASE, send them in! We're desperate! Otherwise there won't be any show tonight.

Here's a quick summary on the stories you gave us last night, the night before, the night before that, last week, last month and last year:

- * Neighbours from hell
- * Celebrity stories
- * Dodgy Salesmen
- * Shonky repairers
- * Tips on saving money
- * Beauty tips
- * Price watch (petrol, junk food, grog, etc)

Oh, and we'll also take your video footage as well, to save us from having to buy our own TV cameras. One of our reporters will do a voice-over to give it the authentic Stefan Report feel.

We don't go in for chequebook journalism. No, we only accept cold, hard cash (Minimum \$200 in used notes, please)

If you want one of our reporters to come out to do a story, please provide taxi fare (if in Victoria) or return plane fare (if interstate).

Donations to cover my extensive costs, though not tax deductible, are always welcome. (If no donations are received, I'm sure our accountants can work some of their magic to make my costs disappear into someone else's show).

Coming up after the break, we talk to one of the stars from last year's blockbuster "Pirates of the Caribbean - At Wits End" about the upcoming release of "Pirates of the Caribbean - Curse o' the Sea Shanties".

Actually, we downloaded this interview from the internet, but don't tell anyone.

THE NEW LAZINESS SHELTER

A bloke at work was showing off the latest gadget the other day - a pop-up tent. Apparently you stand in it and push some gadget and it opens up around you. It has similar workings to the opening of an umbrella. Then all you need to do is to hammer in a few pegs and it's done in less than the time needed to boil a cuppa. I call it the Laziness Shelter (The Tent, not the cuppa).

What ever happened to the old tents that took hours to put up? The ones that by the time you had everything set up, you had to take it down again and go home. Not that we ever went camping in the wild - we only to set our tent up in the back yard near the hills hoist. The closest we got to wild animals were the twenty-odd stray cats that used to call our yard 'home'.

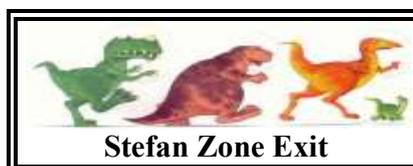
Humans have become much lazier over the years as new fangled gadgets replace much of their

workload. Just look at remote controls - before them you had to throw things at the TV in an attempt to change the channel. If it wasn't for cars, people would have to start walking again. You remember - one foot in front of the other. Sigh! You're lucky if nowadays people can string three words together. You're even luckier if two of those three words aren't swear words.

But back to the Laziness Shelter. It's not the only pop-up invention of late. Let's see ... There's pop-up ads on the internet, Pop tarts (No, not the singers, the 'food'), pop-up toasters, pop songs ... the longer the list grows, the lazier we get.

The only thing not invented yet is a pop-up reality check. I'm overdue for mine, how about you?

Stefan



Jumping the sword

So, what were you doing on Leap Day (29th February) this year?

I did nothing special but a waitress at my favourite coffee lounge hinted that I might like to give her a pair of gloves. Sensing danger, I gracefully declined and just as well. The rules of courtship (dimly remembered from my callow youth) stipulate that men propose to women, not the other way around – except on a Leap Day. That tradition started in 5th century Ireland when St Bridget complained to St Patrick about women having to wait so long for a man to propose. After weighty consideration, St Patrick ruled (patriachially) that desperate women can propose on this one day in a Leap Year.

Then in 1288 Scotland passed a law allowing women to propose marriage to the man of their choice in a Leap Year. Any man who declined such a proposal had to pay a fine ranging from a kiss to payment for a silk dress or a pair of gloves. It seems a similar tradition in the United States is called Sadie Hawkins Day.

On wedding rituals generally, I understand that some African Americans follow the neo-pagan rite of having couples ‘jump the broom and sword’ where the couple jump over a sword and broom holding hands. The sword is a symbol of cutting ties with the old life before starting a new life together and the broom represents the remnants of that old life being swept away.

The leap that the couple takes over the broom and sword is also symbolic, in that starting that new life requires a ‘leap of faith’. By taking the leap, the two individuals make a gesture of dedication to caring for and defending one another through the tough times ahead.



The likely origins of this custom, unsavoury in the extreme, are decently buried in the mists of time. We don't know much about the ordinary life of people in the era of European history called The Age of Faith. The Encyclopaedia Britannica mentions the *Droit de Seigneur*, a feudal custom said to have existed in medieval Europe giving the lord to whom it belonged the right to sleep the first night with the bride of any one of his vassals. Marriage customs of the time were inherited from the pagans and only gradually, it is said, modified by the civilising influence of Christian morality. One is wont to idly speculate on, for example, what went on in *The Ceremony of the Sword* where, in haste to bed the bride, the Lord of the Manor places his sword on the ground and intones...

*Jump, knave
Leap, whore
And married be
Forevermore.*

Mugabe, eat your heart out. His Lordship was in those days, in literal truth, the Father of his People.

The Wombat and the Platypus



A surprising number of people think that the Wombat and the Platypus are cute. The Wombat certainly is, but not the Duck-billed Platypus.

Two centuries ago, a dead Platypus was deemed in England to be so outlandish it had to be a fake. In the Platypus genome both reptile and mammalian features have been identified but the gene sequences for determining sex are more like a bird's than a mammal's.



Yet the Platypus has the same repertoire of milk protein genes as a cow or a human. It also has more (than any other animal) of a class of genes that determine its ability to smell under water. The picture at left shows a platypus sniffing at grass at the edge of a billabong.

And at last we now know where the Platypus, perhaps the oddest of all animals, sits on the evolutionary tree. There is no doubt that it split off the branch that led to Placentals and Marsupials. Placental mammals, as you no doubt recall from High School biology, include rodents, bats, whales, elephants and armadillos.

The IRS take on Artificial Intelligence

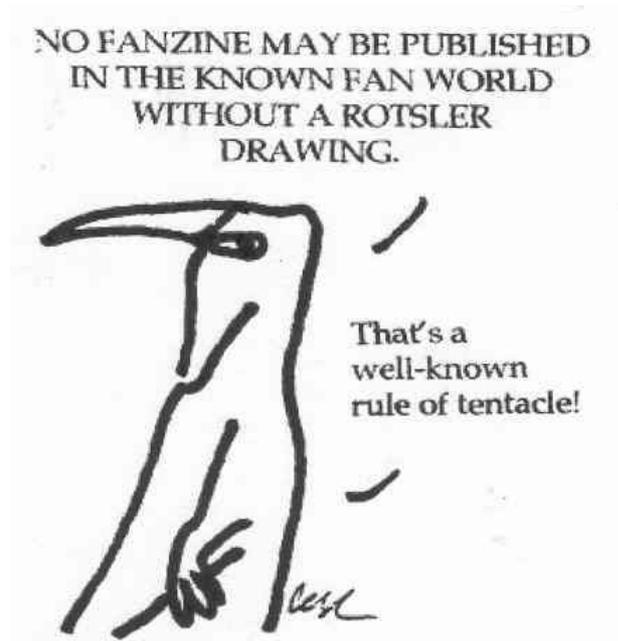
The notion of independent robots with artificial intelligence subject to human restraint has been embedded in human consciousness since Isaac Asimov postulated his Three Laws of Robotics. The IRS take on the matter is that independent artificial intelligence by itself isn't a goer and that some sort of cyborg interface with the human nervous system is where robotics is headed.

Having read *Beyond the Zonules of Zinn* (reviewed in this issue of IRS) and in the light of recent newspaper articles reporting the operation of prosthetics by thought alone, I opine that the more we understand about the brain's functions in relation to its structure, the more we will be able to cause artefacts to respond directly to the human will – or even to hormonal etc. imbalances in the body - resulting in ongoing and self-correcting optimal performance.

Nasty surprises along the way are inevitable, including unimaginable depths of mental and physical distress for some individuals. But the end might be a race of cyborgs who will be, in effect, sane and rational immortal gods with emotions that are subject to automatic correction within monitored parameters. Those parameters could include Intelligence and Comprehension as variables subject to an overriding requirement for emotional stability.

Who knows what such an existence would be like? Would you want it? Would I? How would such creatures interface with ordinary humanity?

Bill Wright



A mid-year reflection

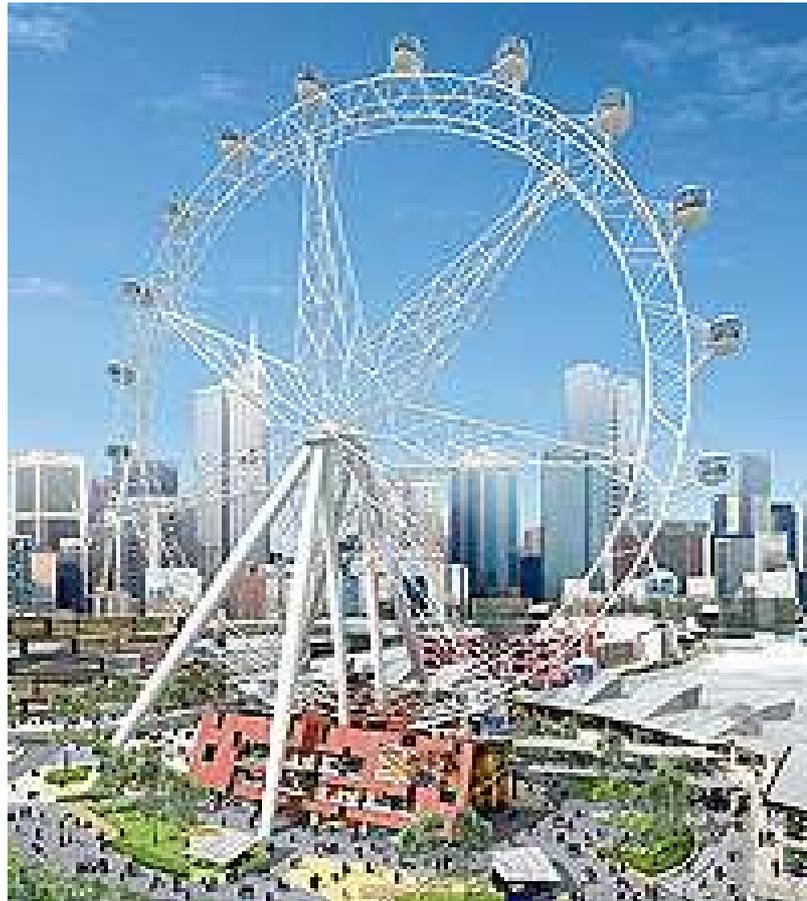
“When I was a child all that was expected of a parent was to feed the kid into the bottom end of the system and in due course it would come out able to read, write and do simple arithmetic, have a rudimentary general knowledge and some idea of responsibility. Since then parents have been required to take an increasing proportion of the load until now it seems that all the boring work sort of stuff is expected to be done under the parents’ supervision at home, while class time is taken up with fun things. How the children of poorly educated parents are expected to get by is a mystery.”

Dan McCarthy (in his Anzapazine, *Panopticon*)

Big Wheel to start turning soon

Melbourne's latest tourist attraction is taking shape at Waterfront City in its redeveloped docklands area.

The Southern Star Observation Wheel is the centerpiece of Waterfront City, which will also house three levels of retail, commercial, office and function spaces. Commissioned by ING Real Estate Developments and designed by Japanese company Sanoyas Hishino Meisho, it is a showcase for Grade 350 steel from BHP spin-off OneSteel. Construction started in Jan 2006 and is expected to be completed by October 2008.



*"It might not be the biggest project Alfasi has done, but it's unique," Alfasi Project Manager Steven Downes said. "It's **different** from the London Eye or The Singapore Flyer because it has a star shape structure at its core, rather than bicycle wheel style spokes of The Eye and The Flyer."*

The complexity of the design, and the installation of the drive and braking system, electrics and twenty-one mechanically rotating cabins, involved much preplanning by Alfasi. *"We spent four months in concept development sessions to meticulously plan exactly how we were going to undertake every single step of the project,"* Mr Downes said. *"A difference of just three millimetres between the elevations of the two towers would throw the wheel out by 20mm at ground level. So, despite the considerable scale of the structure, we really do have to work within tolerances of mere millimetres."*

The cabins sit on the external ring of the wheel. Each cabin seats 20 people and sits inside a special ring that holds it upright as the star rotates. Each cabin on the wheel weighs 14 tonnes and each of the star's seven spokes weighs 22 tonnes. The spokes are fixed to the inner-ring hub which is 60 metres above the ground. The entire structure is expected to weigh 1,600 tonnes.