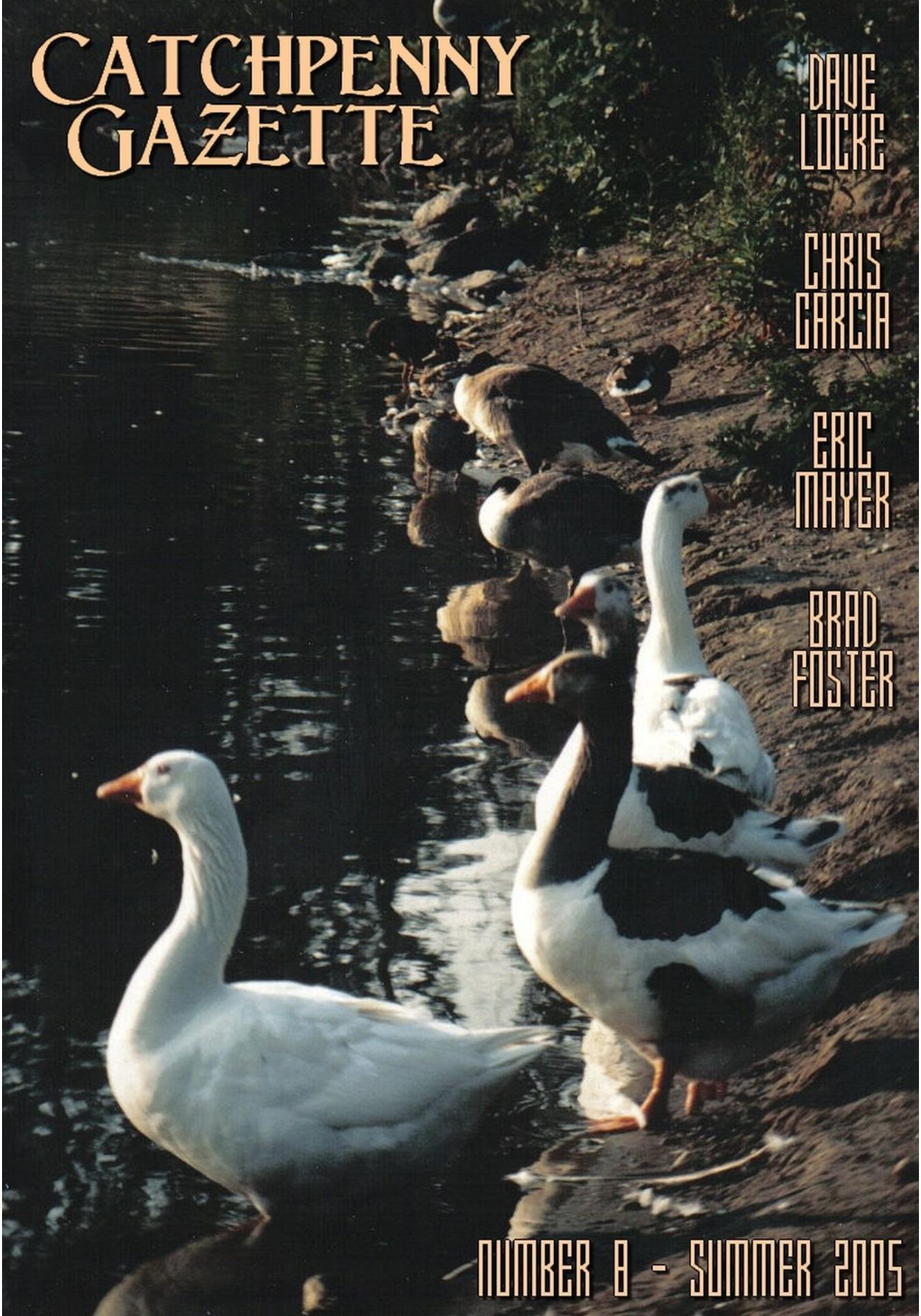


CATCHPENNY GAZETTE



DAVE
LOCKE

CHRIS
GARCIA

ERIC
MAYER

BRAD
FOSTER

NUMBER 8 - SUMMER 2005



Number 8 • Summer 2005

CATCHPENNY GAZETTE

Published quarterly by David Burton at 5227 Emma Drive, Indianapolis IN 46236-2742
E-mail: catchpenny@mw.net Distributed in a PDF version designed for printing.
Available for downloading at efanzines.com or at <http://www.geocities.com/cpgzine>.
A Noah Count Press publication.

It's not rocket science ... it's not brain surgery ... it's ...

ROCKET SURGERY

David Burton

I was pretty imaginative as a teenager (probably came from reading so much science fiction), but I don't think in my wildest dreams I could ever have imagined that in the not too-distant future I'd have my very own personal computer scanning the skies for signs of non-terrestrial intelligence in the universe. (Among other things I couldn't have imagined are being 52 and having grey hair, being in debt up to my butt and working at a menial job that I hate every day, or driving a car made in Korea.) I'd read and seen enough of the "futuristic" movies from the 1920s and 1930s to know that predicting the future, even in the short-term, is not particularly accurate (why don't I have my very own personal gyrocopter whisking me around?), so who could have realistically foreseen everything that the PC has brought about?

And yet every day my computer chugs its way through radio data, trying to help find a signal that will indicate non-terrestrial intelligence in the universe. Using the [SETI@home](http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/) software, my PC is combined with thousands of others, creating a virtual supercomputer that analyzes radio data (the project receives about 35 gigabytes worth a day) from the Arecibo radio telescope in Puerto Rico.

The [SETI@home](http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/) project is run by UC Berkeley, and has been up and running for about 6 years. Off and on I've been participating for almost that long.

You can download the software at <http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/> if you're interested. There's no cost, and the software has minimal system requirements. You can run it as a screen saver, so it's processing data only when you're not using your computer, or you can leave it running in the background all the time (although this uses quite a bit of memory) which is what I do. Your computer processes a "work unit," and when it's done the results are transferred to the SETI@home server and a new work unit is downloaded. The work units are about 340K, so it takes minimal transfer time even if, like me, you're still using a dial-up connection.

The chance of any work unit that my computer processes being the one that "finds" evidence of an extraterrestrial civilization is infinitesimally small, but it seems an interesting way to live out, in a way, those teenage science fictional dreams. •

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Artwork:

Masthead is a detail from a daguerreotype by Lorenzo Chase (ca. 1850). Cover: Photo by David Burton (I jokingly refer to this photo as the last time I had "all my ducks in a row." It'd be funnier if they actually were ducks instead of geese...) Page 3: Brad Foster Page 4: Brad Foster. Page 6: William Rotsler. Page 8: William Rotsler. Uncredited art from various dingbat fonts.

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This issue dedicated to Ellie. RIP, jelly-bean; you were the best. AMDG

NOTES FROM BYZANTIUM

Eric Mayer



MANNED SPACE EXPLORATION. ANCIENT HISTORY?

I've been reading about the troubles with the International Space Station, on top of the Shuttle's woes.

We were supposed to be building bases on Mars by now. That's what I imagined, more than forty years ago, when I watched on TV Alan Shepherd's small hop into space. Today the space program is older than TV was back then and where are we? Still floating around in earth orbit and not even doing that very well.

I used to think manned space exploration was vital but technology has changed my mind. It is grossly expensive, and still unsafe, to put people physically into the hostile environment beyond our planet, and given the advances in computers and robotics, what is the point? Man's genius isn't what he can do with his bare hands, his own meager senses, but with tools. A human being can't scoop up Martian earth in his hand anyway. What is the difference if a man wields a shovel with the stiff glove of a spacesuit or by keying commands into a distant computer? Is it less an accomplishment? Certainly no less is accomplished.

The only real limiting factor in unmanned space exploration would seem to be the time it takes for distant sensors to send their findings back to the human operator and the operator's response to creep back at lightspeed. How often would a catastrophic emergency arise that could not be coped with by computer intelligence, but would be solvable, by human intervention, within a few minutes? I would think in the hostile environment of space, where a spacefarer is utterly dependent on machinery and computers, such a situation would be unlikely to ever occur.

So I'm content for future space explorers to depend on tools. I can't say I'd achieve more if I tried to write without wearing my eyeglasses, let alone trashed my computer, and eschewed a typewriter, or a pencil, and scrapped out words in the mud with a stick. Heck even a stick is a tool. So are words.

OLDER THAN DIRT

While purchasing cat litter, I realized the world had passed me by. Sure, I saw cars before they shed their primordial fins, watched grainy images of men walking on the moon and drank root beer flavored Fizzies. Those kinds of things will date someone. But you really know you're too old when you've outlived cat litter.

Cat litter as we know it has about bit the dust. Now where there should be bags of dirt, you see... crystals. Crystals! Artificial chemical pearls. Is it any wonder our dear, aged cat can't abide the new fangled stuff? Using the box is, after all, a natural function. Who wants to perform a natural function paw deep in decidedly unnatural chemical "crystals?" Dirt is what's wanted. Clay. Certainly not anything transparent.

Cats are notoriously creatures of habit. Sabrina clings to her dusty, clay litter desperately as a geriatric author to an Underwood Manual. We reasoned and remonstrated, but her arguments proved



more pungent. So I continue to search the shelves for her benefit, finding it more and more difficult to locate a bag or two of old fashioned cat comfort. And none of that scented stuff either, please!

I suppose it is what you are used to. There are cats growing up today who never knew the feel of clay under their paws, who probably think the wild woods are filled with expanses of super scent absorbent crystals. It's the old timers like Sabrina, set in their ways, who are keeping the traditional litters in business. When the last of that cat generation goes, I suspect the old ways will go with them and the dirt filled litter box will join the outhouse in the backyard... just another fond memory.

STOCKED UP FOR THE STORM

With a winter storm on the way I searched the Internet for egg replacements in baking. It doesn't look as if this snowfall will rival some of those we had last year, but since, already, we haven't been able to get out to the grocery for a few weeks it looks like our veggie meatballs will have to be stuck together by instant mashed potatoes. (I'm all out of flax seed and whizzed tofu...can you believe it?)

Mary told me that during WWII rationing in England folks were sometimes allotted an egg a week, so I guess we have six weeks worth of eggs, but I'd still rather not use them in the "meatballs." She mentioned there was whale meat. Not in our stocks, in England during the war. I'm pretty sure I would be found dead of starvation beside a whole freezer full of whale meat. Probably some people would starve to death with a freezer full of my veggie meatballs. If you want to know about cooking consult Deborah O'Toole's *Shenanchie's Kitchen*. Provided she survives reading this.

Mary and I eat minimalistically. My cooking philosophy is to remove ingredients from recipes until I can't taste the difference. Thus our recent published recipe for "Justinian's Minimalist Egg Curry" in Robert Weibezahl's *Second Helping of Murder*. Of course Justinian didn't have curry, or tomatoes for the tomato sauce. Or even a can opener to open the tomato sauce. Our mystery books are more historically accurate than our recipes. Possibly just as edible.

I do wonder what people from ancient times would make of modern prepared foods. Would they find an instant frozen pizza a remarkable delicacy or bland beyond endurance?

Now Mary is perusing an Internet site about WWII rationing. She says, someone suggested

"Squirrel Tail Soup." Yet another argument in favor of vegetarianism.

SPIDERS IN WINTER

This afternoon, when I paused at the top of the stairs to look out the window into the snowy woods, the sunlight caught a dark speck, seemingly suspended in air, near the corner of the frame. Bending down, I saw it was a spider, no larger than comma in Courier New 12 pt.

Even up close I couldn't make out the web, but I could see the spider had captured something. The victim was at least five times the spider's size, its exact identity obscured by gray mummy wrappings. It looked to me like the spider was victualed until spring.

From time to time, I've spotted spiders in the house and wondered how they survived during the dead of winter. What could be inside to blunder into their webs or cross their paths? I haven't noticed so much as a gnat since late November. Yet, some unfortunate insect had found the spider's trap in the corner of the window.

It's amazing what goes on that we never know about. Even in our own homes, other creatures live out existences which have nothing to do with the human world. They don't give the slightest thought to the mankind's aspirations and failings, our past or our future, or the news headlines on the computer monitor a few feet away. Somehow, I find the idea comforting. •



Eric's column is extracted from his blog, located at:
<http://journalscape.com/ericmayer/>

Found In Collection

Chris Garcia

If *Found in Collection* were a movie, the discovery of this edition's item would be the scene before the credits began. In the day, the museum was housed in a World War Two era warehouse right at the foot of the second largest hanger in the United States, on Moffett Federal Airfield. In those days, we had three bays of the warehouse and the middle bay was full of documents. I was given the task of relocating a section of the document boxes to another warehouse we acquired, a warehouse that was once the field's paint shop. I pulled off the bottom set of boxes without incident, but as I pulled the top box off the shelf, a book slid off and landed spine first on the bridge of my nose. If you've ever been smacked on the nose while half-holding a box of documents relating to the building of the first American Computer Network, you know that the next step in the comedy is you falling to the floor and the box landing on your chest.

If I wasn't laughing so hard, I doubt I would have managed to retain a shred of dignity. Then again, I was alone, so there was no one that could have possibly seen my humiliation. I picked up the box and set it on a cart for the trip. Before I left, I picked up the book that had so cinematically landed on my nose. Now this could have been the start of *Found in Collection*, but instead I simply filed it away and kinda forgot about it until I started thinking of doing this column.

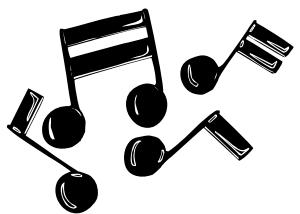
John Brunner has always been important to the history of computing since he coined the term and concept of the computer worm. Every computer museum I've ever been to all have at least one copy of *Shockwave Rider*. Actually, The

Computer History Museum has three copies, one of which is signed to us by the author. But the book that nearly kilt me was not a piece of Brunner's regular work, it was a book of folksongs he compiled for the 1983 WorldCon. The book was *A Settlement of Old Scores*.

I'm not a huge filk fan, but I've been known to throw down in a filk circle once in a while. I have heard a couple of these songs over the years, most notably "Obscenesleaves," but I honestly had no idea this book existed. It was another year or two before I actually pulled out the book and gave it a read. At that point, I really sat around trying to figure out what exactly led to it being donated to the museum.

Don't get me wrong, it's a good book, but why in the hell had it been given to us? I couldn't figure it out at all. There are a couple of robot songs in it, including an excellent tune called "Only a Robot" which featured a fine piece of art from Cecelia Cosentini. I thought that it might have been given to us because of the song "Don't Confuse Me With The Facts" that dealt with the Department of Defense buying a computer that tells the generals that they must fight. It's a great little song, with a fun little illo by Alexis Gilliland, and it's almost enough to justify the donation of the book to us. Still, I decided to do a little detective work.

The first piece of the puzzle I had to find was what most of these songs actually sounded like. They were based on songs like "Come All Ye Tramps and Hawking Men" which no one in my generation has any idea what



they sound like. So I took the book to a song circle I knew of and had them perform as many of them as they knew. When fifteen folks who are 50+ and have been filking for decades don't know the tunes, you might wanna say that Brunner was going into the deepest part of his tune barrel. Performed by the folks at the circle, I really enjoyed "The H-Bomb's Thunder" and "The Ballad of Teddy Hart," which is a delightful little tune based on the song "Jesse James" that I know I've heard in a Western or two. The song is Brunner's attempt to create a future folk hero. In fact, Teddy Hart is the name of a wrestler from a famous Canadian wrestling family and he's a wild and reckless high flyer and a wrestlin' cult hero, so maybe there's a strange coincidence that was meant for me alone.

I looked into the actual donation and I didn't find anything that seemed to fit. Anything, that is, until I got to a single sheet of paper signed by an old curator saying "Books from Mr. B, Dec. 1985" and it was signed below. I had to search through about 10 years worth of files and all I came up with was a scrap of paper with a signature, and a very brief description. I looked over the signature and remembered that he had signed one of our copies of *Shockwave Rider* and I went and compared them.

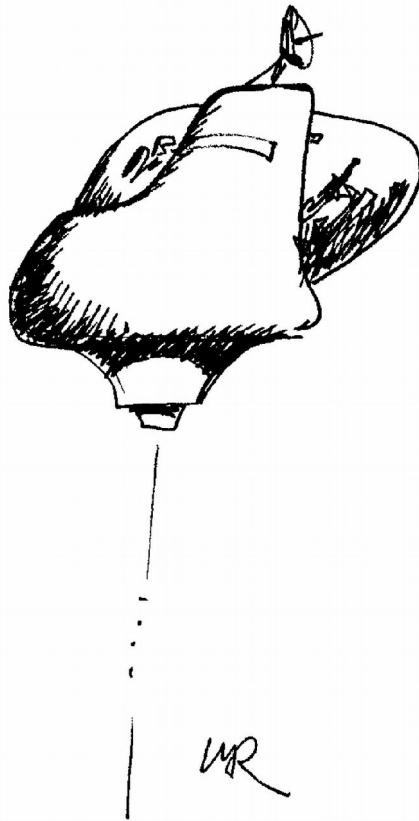
There was no way that it was the same person signing the items.

So I had no idea. For a few months I had no clue, until I came across a piece of paper in another book. "Dear Oliver (our former curator), John sent this and a few other pieces with me to give to the museum. I don't think you'll want the song book, but he signed *Shockwave Rider*, so you may as well keep the both of them." It was signed with the same very difficult to decipher signature. I could settle it at last. John Brunner himself had donated it through someone who had come to the museum. Nice; I could prove that the book that had fallen off the shelf, decked me on the bridge of the nose, knocked me to the floor and caused the box of incredibly old and rare documents to land on my chest had, in fact, come from the hand of John Brunner himself.

It almost made it all the pain and self-felt humiliation worth it.

The book itself is a nice piece of work. The songs are pretty good, but it's the art that caught my eye. Kelly Freas, Michael Whelen, Gilliland, Stu Shiffman, Bob Eggleton, Eddie Jones, and Phil Foglio all had pieces. I was most impressed with Eddie Jones' cover, and his interior art work was my fave in the book.

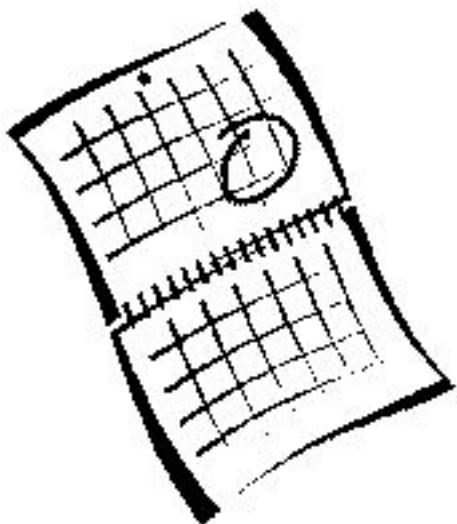
I gotta say that this was a good find, and of all the things that have found their way into *Found in Collection*, this one may be the one that has the most physically painful memory. •



From the **Ain't Fonetics Grate** Dept.
Printed sign on the door of a national chain of
"payday loan" outlets:
"No cash kept on premises."

the **CURIOUS** **CASE** *of the* **COCKEYED** **CHRONOLOGY**

DAVE LOCKE



What happened in France, Luxembourg, Italy, Spain, and Portugal from October 5th through 14th in 1582? What happened in this country, in England and in its other colonies, from September 3rd through 13th in 1752?

Absolutely nothing happened. Those dates don't exist.

Today the Gregorian calendar is in civil use throughout much of the world but, of course, Britain and her colonies didn't adopt it until 1752. Russia didn't change to it until 1918, so the entire Eastern Front of WW I was fought with different dates for each battle. Greece adopted it in 1923. The Muslims weren't too wild about the Julian calendar, let alone the Gregorian, so they've gone their own way and it's already past the new millennium for them. The folks in Botswana, of course, didn't care.

What was the problem here? The problem was in coming up with a system for reckoning the passing of time. Not as easy as you might think. Natural time units like the solar day, the lunar month, and the tropical year aren't simple multiples of each other. In practice a system would be based on the lunar calendar, with its phases of the moon, or on the solar calendar with its changes in seasons, and then as the days would gradually get out of step with the moon or the seasons one or more days or months would be added to the calendar at regular intervals to bring it back in step.

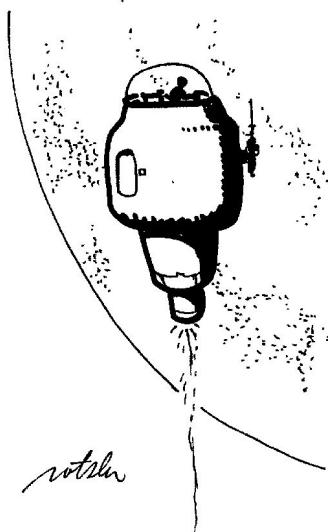
Meton, an early astronomer, discovered around 432 BC (Gregorian...) that 235 lunar months fit perfectly into 19 years, and thus the Metonic Cycle became the basis of the modern Jewish and ecclesiastical calendars. The Julian calendar established a year at 365 days but added one day every fourth year, and this was used from 46 BC until the 16th century. Then, because the average year is not $365\frac{1}{4}$ days but rather a little less, we found ourselves about 10 days out of whack

with the seasons of the tropical year. What a mess for gardeners, groundhogs, and people with day-planners. So, in 1582, ten days were omitted from the year, and under the Gregorian calendar century years would no longer be leap years unless divisible by 400 so that we wouldn't get into this kind of a pickle again for an entire 4000 years (after which we would need to dump one more day but, hey, let's not worry right now).

By the time England and its colonies, including this one, adopted this calendar in 1752, 11 days had to be dropped from the calendar and we moved directly from September 2nd to September 14th, totally missing Labor Day which fortunately wasn't invented until 1894. If your family was in one of these countries at that time, this explains the big gap in your multiple-great grandmother's diary.

Wait, there's more. In Western societies we number our years from the birth of Christ, as determined by the calculations of a 6th century monk. Years since are AD, years before are BC and, surprise, there is no year 0. 1 AD came right after 1 BC. Got that? The new millennium, for us, begins with the balloons and the kissing frenzy when January 1st, 2001 rolls around. Not January 1st, 2000. There was no year 0, remember? Of

course, millions of the educationally unenhanced will insist on a big party to usher in 1/1/2000, and then be surprised when the rest of us do it a year later. But then, the rest of us will have been there the year



before also because, after all, any excuse for a party.

Nope, we're not done yet. Astronomers number their years differently than we do. Oh yes. For them, there is a year 0. They figure the BC years as negative numbers one less than the date BC, with 0 equaling 1 BC, 1 BC equaling -1 BC, and so on. The astronomer's year -50, therefore, is what we consider to be 51 BC. Astronomers, of course, like to be different.

In general scientific use events are often given in terms of BP, which stands for Before Present. This makes dating a moving target, so be sure to check the copyright date on what you're reading. Of course, if you're dipping into archaeology or geology, what's a few thousand years between friends? Don't worry about it. Sometimes things aren't all that precise. This might be illustrated by the story a friend of mine told me concerning a museum worker. When asked if he knew the age of a particular exhibit, he divulged that it was 20,003 years old. My friend inquired about the preciseness of the dating. The worker explained that during his new employee training he had been informed that the exhibit was 20,000 years old, and he had now worked at the museum for three years.

For several years now I've been kicking around a particular idea for a fantasy novel. If I ever get around to writing it, which I won't, I intend to have it set in the period from October 5th through 14th in 1582 or September 3rd through 13th in 1752, depending on the locale. If you're writing fiction, what could be more appropriate than to have it take place during a time which didn't exist? What happened during that time, anyway? Absolutely nothing? Well... •

Originally published in 1994



EPISTLES

Chris Garcia

I'm always amazed by good design. I've no sense for it (as is visible in all of my fannish attempts at publishing) and *Catchpenny* just looks like a masterpiece. The masthead alone is worth comment, as it sets a tone, certainly following the moody cover photo.

I know what you're saying about print vs. screen. I don't make any distinction in my work. I printed a copy of *Catchpenny* for lunch reading (I can't wolf down fast food without some mental stimulation) and it looked great. It looked great as I read it on the screen. I don't think you have much to worry about.

*Thanks for the kind comments, Chris. What I enjoy most about publishing a zine is actually designing it and putting it together. When I was younger I spent about 12 years working in the graphic arts field (for an ad agency, a typesetter, and lastly for a flexographic plate maker) but have been out of that area for a long time. Working with the zine gives me a creative outlet **without** the deadline pressures that seem to inevitably go with that line of work.*

*One of the things I **don't** like about PDFs is that they can distort some graphics when displayed just onscreen, especially when viewed at a smaller size.*

Jim Sullivan's look at pants reminds me that I've been wearing the same style of pants (black, cotton-poly-blend slacks) since high school. My tee-shirts may be wild, and the collection of outer shirts has grown, but the pants have always remained the same.

Eric Mayer has been kind enough to send a couple of LoCs to my fanzine and I'm so happy to see a piece of his in CPG. He's funny and interesting all at the same time and I loved his finishing with four, count 'em **four**, Yngvi's. Brilliant! I like reading Eric's take on things, as he's been "away" for a while and getting his take on the state of things always brings good thoughts to my mind. I think fandom in general, and fanneds in particular, need that sort of view now and again. I've been very grateful for the comments of the

elder statesmen that have dropped lines.

And it's nice to see Lloyd Penney writing in and saying that he's doing his best to send notes to every on-line zine he comes across. That's good of old Lloyd, though I was hoping to make that my bit so I'd have a shot at the Harry Warner FAAN Award myself someday! Always lagging one step behind, I am. •

Eric Mayer

Sorry I'm so slow responding. There's been a lot going on, not the least my trying to get a new big job underway. This is my eleventh year freelancing and I veer between a few slow weeks and then weeks or months of frantically trying to meet some deadline or other. What really discombobulates me is switching mental gears. Mostly I write articles for legal encyclopedias and the law is truly soul destroying. (The editor I'm doing some work for now has a long quote from *Bleak House* for his signature line.) When I have a few spare moments, in slow times, I'll do some creative writing. So there's always a big transition during which little gets done. (I've even let the blog lapse temporarily.) At least I can console myself that I made the right decision in not actually attempting to practice law as that would've been a real disaster.

However reading *Catchpenny Gazette* has been quite cheering. I like Lloyd Penney's idea of loccing ezines. I was kind of thinking along the same lines. I don't feel like I can involve myself very deeply in fandom these days but writing a few locs to ezines is little enough and yet something that's needed.

Excellent cover photo. Reminded me a bit of Monet's gardens with the bridge. I thought it was an old Victorian photo.

Thanks. Both the cover photo from the last issue and the one for this issue were taken 15+ years ago, when I had some hopes (or more accurately, pretensions) of becoming a professional photographer.

Dave Locke on squirrels was very amusing. So nicely done, it stuck in my mind from the first time

I read it in *OW*. If I recall rightly, back then it inspired me to write my own squirrel piece, which subsequently made its way to my website: home.epix.net/~maywrite/essays.htm#squirl. My grandmother used to train squirrels. She'd sit on the porch with peanuts and they'd come up to her. We took a baby squirrel into the house once, raised it and released it, and he returned occasionally, for a few years, looking for handouts. I once spent a good hour watching four young squirrels getting their first taste of tree climbing in the bare branches of late winter. They leapt and chased, and hid, and chattered at each other, like kids. I know it was probably just instinctive behavior but it sure seemed they were having fun.

I never glimpsed Christopher Garcia's odd fanzine. I remember when flexi-disks seemed amazing. Wow - a record on a piece of plastic! Neat. But I'm trying to think exactly where I saw them used. Once I had a promotional one of some Carl Oglethorpe song. Didn't they put them on cereal boxes? (Not Carl's songs – flexi-disks.) I know I had a book about birds that had a flexi-disk of bird songs. The best use had to be the stamp from Tonga (I think) which was a flexi-disk which played the national anthem.

Great bit about pants by Jim Sullivan too. For a while (maybe still) there was a style mostly for teenagers which called for the crotch to be below the knees. I used to wait at the bus stop and observe the trouble the kids had stepping up into the bus, just as described. In their case it was even worse because of the fashionably untied and dragging shoelaces. I'm not dissing faddish teen fashions by the way -- my hair is still down to my shoulders half the time which is really not practical either. •

Lloyd Penney

It has taken a little time management, but I can finally get to loccing *Catchpenny Gazette* 7. I've been holding two jobs these days, and there's not enough time for me, let alone working on fanzines. But, the weekend becomes a welcome respite from the grind, and I can at least attempt to catch up.

Toronto is infested with black squirrels who have mostly eradicated their smaller cousins, the red squirrels. If you were to go to some parks, especially Queen's Park, where the provincial legislature buildings are, you could see at one point more than 20 squirrels in your field of vision. I've

done that several times. Those little black beggars are just that, begging lunch from workers who sit in the park at lunch hour, and they are fat and sassy. I grew up in a part of Toronto where the nearby riverbank had a colony of chipmunks, and I remember being spooked every time one of those little critters would jump and scoot away. Cute as a button, just wish they'd stand still for a second!

Ever since hearing about it, the Ackermansion was a place I wanted to go. I had an inside connection... John Deall, an old friend from Toronto who left to go to Hollywood to make his fortune, is a part-time special effects and prop man, and was the Ackermansion's handyman and fixer-upper, offered us a tour of Forry's place if we could ever get ourselves down there, and we haven't been in LA since the 1984 Worldcon.

I look forward to more from Chris Garcia on his findings in his museum's archives. Chris, has anyone identified the origins of *Myrrdin*, or does anyone else have a copy? I remember some years being at some friends' home in the east end of the city, and while looking at their bookshelves, found the programme book of MidAmerican, the 1976 Worldcon in Kansas City. They had picked it up at a garage sale some years earlier, and held onto it as a curiosity. They couldn't tell me who'd sold it to them, or anything else regarding its original owner.

An article about why I can't write articles... you've got this thing sussed, Eric. Keep writing articles about why you can't write articles, and you'll get on that Hugo ballot by the end of the decade. And a regular column about how you can't write regular columns?

Chris Garcia's loc... my own entry into fandom was in late 1977 when I moved to the west coast of Canada and found a *Star Trek* club starting up. We all went to that new movie called *Star Wars*, and found a measure of gosh-wow with that movie. Yet, the greatest thing about that club was that we discovered that even the geekiest of us could have some friends, which was a revelation in itself. The fact that all this came with joining a Trek club didn't have a lot to do with it. The club provided the activities and opportunities to get together, but the fact we could make friends and even date here and there was what actually brought us together. •