

# Taste Not The Pierian Spring #2

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## Free Furniture Exploits

Having little in the way of furnishings now that I live alone, I kept an eye out for things. One day I noticed a place with a bunch of empty milk crates out the back and remembered to pick one up. I'd been needing some kind of sturdy footstool so I can reach the top bookshelves.

I enjoyed myself up the street later that night until I noticed a car drove up slowly beside me. The silver spiffy thing pulled into the back of the store I was going to filch the crate from. Oh well, I thought. Some guy working there. There's always another night.

Not so. It turned out he was following me, despite an attempt at subterfuge by going into the railway station to hide; he merely got out of his car and pretended to make a phone call.

I unconcernedly walked off while he was there, and when down at the place to filch a crate looked back. He was gone from the phone booth, so he wouldn't see me. I ran to the nearest crate, grabbed it, and zipped back out.

I was jubilant too early. The guy was slowly driving past me again and parked his car further down the street on the way home. I saw a guy on a bicycle and tried to make my way to him so I could pretend I knew him, but he took off too quickly.

I didn't want that guy knowing where I lived, and the way home was a lot darker than the railway.

Luck was in sight. I noticed the phone by the grocery store was being used by a guy. I quickly made my way to him, swinging the crate like I was completely blithe and fancy-free.

"scuse me?"

The guy looked at me.

"Do you mind if I pretend I know you and sit here for a bit? There's a guy in a silver car who's been following me."

The guy looked behind me. "Oh, yeah, yeah! I see him. What a creep. No worries."

I sat on my crate, and soon heard the silver car start up and take off. The guy was talking in the phone again, so I twiddled my fingers and stared at where the silver car had disappeared.

"Where do you have to go? I can drive you home, if you like," offered my knight in shining armour. Well, shining white spiffy sports car, anyway.

"Just down the road," I waved my arm in the vague direction. "That would be really nice of you."

He nodded and went back to talking. A few minutes later and no silver car.

"I think I'll chance it and walk. Thanks for the offer of a ride."

"You sure?"

"Yep. Just down there." I waved my hand homewards.

"If I see him, I'll get off the phone and drive down, all right?"

I nodded and beamed at the fellow, turned, grabbed my crate, and ran all of the way home, taking quick stares behind me to make there was no the silver car

Ran down the hill, up the stairs, gasping for air, unlocked the front door, slammed it shut, locked it up tight and drank down a litre of water.

Daylight proved easier. I zoomed around a corner on the bicycle another day and spotted a pile of goods next to some clothing charity bins. The bins have signs saying that if you leave stuff outside the bins, it's considered littering. Littering! I must do my thing for the community.

Up I rode to the couches and white goods and poked amongst it all. An Indian guy was waiting at the bus stop nearby and he stared at me all the while. I must have been an amusing sight.

I poked at the toaster, wondering if it would work, then decided no, I didn't want a toaster that badly (it was wee bit rusted) and then eyed the electric frypan. It was still covered in grease, and I didn't feel like braving the herculean task of cleaning it to see if the thing still worked. I left it there, then turned to the big mound of cushions. How to get them on the bike?

The guy at the bus stop was still looking at me, and was witness to my picking up the cushions, attempting to balance them on the bike, watching them fall over, then stomping around in frustration before BING! it came to my attention that there was ample rotted fabric lying around. Off it came in strips and served to lash them all together, then onto my back.

A guy on a bicycle rolled on up, swigging what I hope was Coke down, and I hailed him.

"Hi!" I struggled to get the mound of cushions on myself.

"Interesting way of carrying something on a pushbike," said the guy.

"Well, one must improvise," I huffed, tying the last knot. He laughed and rode away.

I beamed and waved at the bus guy, who smiled at me, and set off on my not inconsiderable journey home.

It must have looked tremendously amusing. People in cars stared at me while I wobbled my way down the main streets. Children yelled out of their cars and I saw passengers poke unaware people and point.

I could do nothing but steer carefully, for the cushions were a wide load and served as admirable windbreaks. If I hadn't pedalled forwards I would have inexorably been driven back to my starting point by sheer force of wind.

I prevailed! I am stronger than an ox! A little bit of wind won't beat me. Hard waste collection is not far around the corner; people in the neighbourhood will be unable to believe their eyes. I await to see what further adventures furniture scavenging will bring.

# Salve oh Patria, Mil Veces oh Patria

I only ever went to primary school in Spanish-speaking countries. The first was in Spain, where I learnt Spanish, and the second was in Ecuador. To say they were different would be something of an understatement.

The one in Spain was fairly large, with well-stocked rooms and a clear play area. We students had different teachers for different things and they spent a lot more time than they needed in teaching my brother and myself Spanish—something I'm sure wasn't in their curriculum, for I believe my mother still keeps the sheets of paper with diagrams which we had to name. It wasn't a bad school, although the most I can remember were the *bolicao*, buns with soft chocolate filling.

Ecuador was nothing like Spain. When my mother found that we had to stay in the country a lot longer than anticipated—the yacht was rotting and had to be fixed—she decided to enroll us children into school.

We'd been in Ecuador for a while at that point. Damien and I were most familiar with the long, straight road with the tall steel fence running along one side and a flat, arid area on the other. We were a bit wary of venturing into that part, since we'd heard tales of a woman who'd been carted off in there and got raped and had her breasts chopped off. Since I was in the process of developing my own breasts at the time ... oh, all right, breast singular. I was lopsided for years. I have this feeling it was an urban myth of sorts. The woman, not my breast.

The school was at the end of this road, and we had to walk it every day. It's funny that I don't remember walking it except with the parents once, when there was a tremor and my father staggered all over the road like a drunken sot. I just remember the other side of the fence was military. Which wasn't at all reassuring.

There were two schools we could have gone to in Ecuador—the upmarket one for the well-to-do, or the state-run. My mother chose the state. The months I spent there I'd leave the school grounds and watch children in clean, starched uniforms heading off to their private school almost around the corner and get out of their way. I picked up state-school habits quick.

I don't remember the name of my school. Once a week we had to sing the national hymn. I remember it still.

Salve oh Patria, mil veces, oh Patria

Gloria a tí, gloria a tí, gloria a tí, gloria a tí  
ya tu pecho, tu pecho, rebosa  
gozo y paz, ya tu frente radiosa  
más que el sol contemplamos lucir

The real classic of the whole thing was the school. We found out how unexemplary it was the first day. We were ushered into rooms with only partial windows, bare wooden desks and chairs, and were set to learn. Learning involved writing down everything the teacher wrote on the blackboard into rough copybooks and then copying them back out later into clean, tidy notebooks. I couldn't see the point of it all back then.

This wasn't so bad in the long run. The worst of it was when we broke for the midday meal. As soon as that happened all of the children scampered off. Home, I understood, to get food. I had never before come across somewhere you left the school to eat. I soon realised that wasn't the only reason. There were no school toilets.

My brother and I were *desperate*. It wasn't quite so bad for him, a boy; he could just whip it out and have a whizz in any old corner. Myself, well, I was a little more bashful, and I was still too mindful of the incident in Sudan to want to experience it all over again. The only thing we could think of was to ask the houses nearby to see if they'd let us use their facilities. Luckily enough we stumbled onto one and made our way to the back of the house, envisioning one of the little stone floors with a hole in it where we'd have to carefully balance ourselves while squatting.

We had the squatting part right. The rest was just fancy. The toilet we were to use consisted of a plank with a hole in it, easily going to the muddy ground below. I didn't find this too bad, although I wasn't too impressed. The worst, I found later, was the realisation that you could *see what the people were doing from the school grounds!* You could see what appeared below the plank. I don't remember what I did for toilet after that; I fancy I didn't drink any water all day and raced home at the end of it.

Despite how rough a school it was, Damien and I made friends—and one of my schoolmates was the irrepressible José. It's rather amusing to remember how he befriended us both and was extra nice to Damien, which we came the realisation was due to his little crush on me.

Everyone was poor. Not the poor we think of when I look around where I live now, but poor. One of my friends, Nancy, went to school with me, but after hours she lived with a family for whom she served as a maid. I visited her there and watched as she ran around to clean, cook, and otherwise do things for them. When I saw them hit her legs with the flat of a knife I grew so angry I wanted to take it off them and hit them back with it, but my mother told me it was their custom and to leave them alone. I do wonder what became of Nancy.

A poor neighbourhood. To get out of there we'd pass a dump on the side of the road. It looked like one of those escalating heaps; someone probably threw a banana peel down one day, and someone else came along half an hour later and thought hey, may as well add my piece there. A year down the track a pile of rubbish metres high and wide lay rotting there, with the neighbourhood pig rooting around in amongst it and children defaecating in the sides. All in a day's scenery to get to school.

We left that school in the end, my brother and I. I decided this. We turned up to school one day without our homework, secure in our knowledge that we wouldn't get into trouble. We knew that if you didn't do it, you'd get caned. We saw enough children have that happen to them, after all. As the *gringos*, though, we'd never been touched—until that morning. *Gringos* or not, our teacher made us put out our hands and caned our palms for not doing what we ought to.

That was it. Fascist bastards! I waited until lunchtime, grabbed my brother, and returned home. I told my mother we weren't going back to school, and that was it—we didn't, instead playing and doing the lackadaisical studies we were so used to.

That didn't herald the end of all things Ecuadorian—there was the time we started a fire, or when my father nearly died, or when we created watercraft ... but it *was* the end of school until we returned to Australia.

## Mailing Comments on Anzapa 214-216

What **Sally Yeoland** needs is a good stash of 2-minute noodles. Or couscous. Both which cook in about five minutes, upon which you can stick pre-made sauce and then eat far less than an hour after you've gotten home. I am far too lazy to cook, I am finding—probably because my cooking is terrible and secondly it's easy just to make a sandwich or throw something real easy into the pot instead of thinking about these things beforehand (and say, pre-soaking beans). Popcorn's good, too. I am queen of quick foodifying. None of this hour-cooking business, not for just one person. It just doesn't seem worthwhile cooking a full-on meal for one.

It's at this point that I will say, **Sally Yeoland** was in Beenleigh, 15 minutes away by car, and did not ring me to say hello and ask to catch up for a coffee? For shame! Actually, come to think of it, chances are I would not have been around ... I'm hard to get by phone.

There's always the convenient food outlets, although I don't think anybody could be quite the Sizzlers spotter that **Eric Lindsay** and **Jean Weber** seem to be. They even managed to spot one when I was at a local shopping centre with them! They did have passable orange juice, must say that for them.

**Eric Lindsay's** mention of ice-cream makes me realise I had it for the first time in a year just this week. It was so damned hot—we were in the middle of a heat wave—I braved the hot sunlight to make a trip on the bicycle to buy myself a litre of soy ice-cream to last me the next couple of days. Hah! It was so hot my fridge wasn't working properly, so I ate it all that day. I don't see why so many people run around with disgusted faces at the thought of soy. It tasted fine to me, but then again I only ever ate the no-name brand stuff my mother was so fond of.

When I was eating biscuits, I noticed differences in qualities very easily; these days I merely make myself sweet stuff ... like oat doofies. A few weeks ago I made a batch of supposed 'oat muffins' but there seemed to be more oats than muffin and when I'd finished with them looked like Anzac biscuits. Nobody else cared for their look so I had a nice munch all of the way through them. Not very diabetic-friendly, but it was sure fun to make.

**Kim Huett's** suggestion of talking chickens for advice upon how to cook the carcass makes me think he's flown the coop. People would drop the chicken in startlement, then run for the nearest exit. Cheaper to just print random recipes on the plastic thing which encases the chicken. Everything else has recommended recipes and serving suggestions; why not that?

There were storms around here in Logan for a while, but nowhere near **Sally Yeoland** or **Sue Grigg's** kind. That's some serious kind of storming, with floods! When there was some heavy rain a while back the waste water stream behind my unit block got so high it looked like a creek. During it I ran down and grabbed water to scrub both my balcony—while it was raining—and then the stairwell, which was sticky with all kinds of residue I would rather not know about.

If I had myself a mini garden on the balcony that sort of rain would be great to water the plants without my active participation, but then I wonder if it all wouldn't just flood away under the fierceness of the rains we've been getting. It would be nice to have some kind of scented flowers around

here, like jasmine—although I'd have to be careful to keep the **Johnsons** away from it if I did and they visited!

Just as I was going to comment upon **David Grigg's** daughter having moved out and as such have been rid of a pile of furniture, she moves back in! House-sitting is lovely; I did so for a month last year and had a blast away from the family. A taste of independence, almost, although I did dislike that the people normally living there were non-readers since there was no, absolutely *no*, comfortable reading spot to be had. So I read a lot on the internet instead.

I rather fancy people without books are odd, all the odder when they look at people strangely for mentioning books, as with **David Grigg**. I don't think I have any friends who don't have at least one bookcase filled with books—none go quite to my extent, with an entire wall of them and another wall of (empty so far) of bookcases, and another (which was my only bit of furniture for a while) dividing the lounge. While I do believe I could get rid of most of my fiction if needs be, I think I would put up a fight if someone tried to take my most of my non-fiction. Craft and survivalist books are so hard to find second-hand.

Having seen **Eric Lindsay's** Gegeschein on the web, (which reminds me: gegeschein?) I am glad I did not comment there so I may do so here. Not like WinXP? So very many people are next to composing odes to it, after having experienced the aberration against nature that was Windows 2000. I'm biased against all of its fancy bells and whistles when Win98 suits me just fine.

One good way, I've found, of keeping one's primary use e-mail free of spam is to have a primary which you use *only* for correspondence, then to have another (possibly web-bound) for signing up to reminder lists, etc, and then *another* to put on the web, where it may be harvested for spammers. This has worked very well for me, and I receive hardly any spam with my primary e-mail address.

I'm rather amused by **Dan McCarthy's** statement that Tolkien slash had to happen—if people had a cursory look on the net ... well. Of all the 'media' fandom followings at the moment it is certainly the biggest *and* most fanatic. I have a few friends who are most devoted to *Lord of the Rings* slash—both the fictional and real person aspect. I don't think I can possibly demonstrate just how *tired* I am hearing about the actors Dominic Monaghan and Elijah Wood (or Billy Boyd, take your pick) are *so doing it!* It's everywhere. I can't get away. I normally don't tell people to put a cork in it about something they're interested but by george I'm getting close!

Faanfiction is still written, I'd say; maybe not in the scale it used to be, but there are fans I know who write it, though probably not those in **Roger Sims'** acquaintance.. Last year something there was a 'livejournal slash challenge', where people would sign up and get slash fiction written about them and some other fan. I didn't read any but it was a source of amusement for people for a while. I have to wonder sometimes whether con reports couldn't also be considered faanish fiction from time to time. They're quite ... fabulous.

**Terry Morris** says that the *Lord of the Rings* is widely read, but I am curious about the numbers of people who buy it as opposed to who actually reads it. Is it really as

widely read as people assume, or is it something that people give to others as gifts and then those don't actually read it and leave it to moulder on their shelves? I know a fair few people who have copies but when I ask them if they've read it they lament 'no'.

I have this theory that people crack the book(s) open, starting with book one if in multi-volume format, and then have a heart attack and die at the thought of going past the introductory chapters. The first book is *so boring*. I tried to read it recently but just couldn't. Then again, another friend was reading me aloud the last couple of chapters of the last book and I enjoyed them fine. I'm getting this idea of borrowing it out in audiobook format so I have something to do while doing craftwork and 'enjoy' it further that way.

The only of the filmed versions I found a let-down was the last—because I disliked how choppy it was. Everyone kept telling me 'it'll be in the Extended Edition, don't worry' but that was my *point*—the film ought to have stood on its own as a theatrical release, not have been so hacked that people would have to watch the EE to see that no, the Éowyn and Faramir plotlines, for example, did not suddenly come to a standstill and make no particular sense in Faramir's case.

I read the first Telzey Amberdon book a couple of years ago but couldn't make myself like the character. In fact, I quite roundly disliked how Schmidt wrote her—she was too perfect. The classic Mary Sue of media fandom, where a character is perfect in every way and everyone loves her ... except the evil people, natch. **Dan McCarthy** is right. She is a superwoman, and a damnably annoying one at that.

From what **John Newman** says about John Foyster's comments: once an ANZAPAn, always an ANZAPAn? Swell. I'll note that years from now should I hie off overseas somewhere (I have every intention of buying myself a yacht and going seafaring) and find myself without a steady location at which to receive mail. It'll be interesting to continue with fanzine fandom doing that!

Seeing that my parents are about a week from packing—as I write—and moving to their catamaran, I took the cat off their hands a couple of months ago. Unfortunately after having her indoors two weeks I let her out and about and she subsequently disappeared. If not for that, **Gerald Smith's** notice about Oral Care would have come in handy. A neighbour offered me a kitten since one of his cats had just had a litter, but I thought about the money involved in cat care and then how I would be severely limited in moving later on, and turned him down. The idea of cute fluffy kitten had a stranglehold on me for a while, but I came to my senses. I like the idea of *opportunity* to pick up and go at any moment, although I know not about nicking off down to Melbourne by bicycle to give the Griggs my contribution as **Lucy Schmeidler** suggested! That had me in tears of laughter.

I think I am driving everyone I know to sound like their mother, so **LynC** need not worry. Just about everyone is pulling their hair in frustration at my *laissez faire* approach to things; I figure I'm pretty much fine as long as I have enough money to head off into the city area on the weekend to meet up with my friends, then cycle the way home after. I have this slight problem with fitting in with whom I deem boring people for long hours, and I never realised just how many there are about until I started setting my foot out in the real world—as opposed to my comfy worlds of students and

fandom. *Qué será, será*. I am to be a trial to my more sober-minded friends.

I found myself amused by **Jeanne Mealy's** comment that one should wear shoes indoors so as to save the carpet—the carpet? I know very few who wear any kind of footwear for their *carpet*. It's the lot of floor coverings to get worn down by grease and dirt. There's a bookstore guy nearby who exclaims over my unshod state and always seems to end with 'I am never barefoot; I wear shoes even in the house!' but I'm too polite to tell him that I got the idea the first time.

One would think that being vegan would cause iron troubles, right? Not so. For the first time in years I managed to donate blood of late. I was completely taken aback when they ushered me on into the bus, for I'd been expecting to be turned away. So not only do I feel more alert during the day, have no more period pain, and no more mucous troubles, but my iron count is well above what is needed for donating blood and one would assume my cholesterol level's taken a dive. I can't say I can complain. I'm doing something right. **Jeanne Mealy**, however, does not know any vegans if they are partaking of milk or rennet-free cheese. She knows vegetarians. Milk has got a lot of casein in it, which produces a lot of mucous ... something I had troubles with ever since having a steady diet of milk upon returning to Australia. I never did when on the yacht (and now, either). Protein can be gotten from many different places, including the all-mythical 'full' protein which people believe can only be gotten from animals. Not so. They're available from soy, hemp, amaranth, and quinoa—the ones available to memory off-hand. Not that it matters, for everything has some modicum of protein, and if one eats beans and soy products then there's nothing to worry about.

Much like **Bill Wright**, I get rather wheezy around smokers or those who have recently been smoking and still have the odour around them. How I dislike when smokers decide to sit next to me on trains!

**Bill Wright** mentions push bikes; I wonder where it is that this particular moniker was first applied to bicycles? I don't see much pushing of bikes going on. Unless up a steep hill and you really are too fagged to ride it up...

The topic of apocalypses and end of the world SF books which **Garry Dalrymple** mentions sounds most interesting. It's one of my favoured types of reading material, that 'subgenre' of SF. I can only claim to have read the McMullen's *The Miocene Arrow* out of those listed, but I can think of others which are worthwhile reading:

*The Stone War*, by Madeleine E. Robins

*Warday*, by Whitley Streiber & James Kunetka

*Z for Zachariah*, by Robert C. O'Brien

*The Stone that Never Came Down*, by John Brunner

*I Am Legend*, by Richard Matheson

*Greybeard*, by Brian Aldiss

*The Family Tree*, by Sheri S. Tepper

*On the Beach*, by Nevil Shute

*Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*, by Kate Wilhelm.

I might suggest a bit of editing to tighten up **Dalrymple's** reports on the Futurian meetings; while I am definitely interested in some of the subjects, a lot of superfluous information which is probably only of interest to members makes it a bit difficult to plough through.

**Diane Fox** mentions *Zippy the Pinhead*, at about the time that I find myself most fascinated by comics. I'd not really been tempted before late last year to delve in and see what's

available. Now that I have I can't believe I never did before—such stuff out there, and such talent! At the very least I now get some of the references people make, and have been going from the larger Marvel and DC comics to the lesser known, independently created stuff. I'm ever so glad the local library has a good, wide, and varied selection.

The *Harry Potter* craze ... at one point they kept having ads on cable telly from "Australia's own Harry Potter". So, despite **Kim Huett's** commentary on people not realising that the Harry they were getting excited over was a royal and not a Potter, he may rest assured that they already got excited over a little boy with that name.

A teacher ripped up **LynC's** child's work? That's a bit rough. Sometimes people are so terribly uncaring of others' feelings; even if it wasn't up to par there is no justification to make anyone feel like crap because of it.

Just recently I was reading *How to Make Friends and Influence People*, by Dale Carnegie, and although I think that to take everything he says to heart is a bit extreme, perhaps becoming something of a doormat, I also realise that it does have a lot worthwhile. Some of it I had picked up from doing psychology and had implemented in my behaviour, too. Just recently someone was saying that when she first met me I was terribly obnoxious, only to become less so with time. Behavioural modification to one's reactions to others works a long way.

**Karen Johnson's** predicament with computers is all too familiar—a friend had a spare motherboard and processor lying around much more powerful than my existing one, and so I cobbled a couple of boxes together. It took me better part of a week because of problems, and so I can now say that I am quite proficient and computer hardware. I could probably build my own box now—if I could afford it.

Since moving out I've had my own television, but haven't used it much. In fact, it's been on so few times I could count them on the one hand and not break out the other—which is not to say I haven't been watching anything. A friend lent me every season of *Farscape* in digital form and I also got my hands on *Firefly*. Both were excellent. I was very surprised to see how consistent the episode quality were for both shows; while they weren't all excellent, the worst were still very good.

The tale of the tiger **Karen Johnson** mentions makes me shiver. Glad that the tiger wasn't out to hurt his handler, Roy, and instead was only wanting to save him—funny how well-intentioned things can go wrong. It rather reminds me of the pets I've had, when in their play broke skin. The latest cat with her paws, and the dogs with their teeth.

Reading people's convention reports are interesting, not only for the content but for the style. It seems like the usual thing from Australians these days (at least on mailing lists) goes along the lines of: "went boozing the first night, yep, and met up with x y z and then went boozing some more". As such it is good to hear of panels and convention of Torcon itself from **Roger Sims**. There is only so much mention of boozing one can take before convention reports begin to sound alike. From the amount of booze consumed at Australian cons I would put forth the suggestion that they resemble those of British reputation. Or perhaps near it, for one wouldn't want to tumble the English repute of heavy drinking!

Conservationism is a good thing, and people in Australia do forget, as **Cath Ortlieb** says, that we live in one of the

driest countries in the world. I keep seeing people waste water like there's no tomorrow, even in the middle of drought warning. I wonder at their stupidity. Even people who say they're conservationist minded think nothing of half-hour showers, running the tap while brushing their teeth, small loads of washing, and other non-thrifty ways. Attempts to educate don't really get very far, unfortunately. People are too used to doing whatever they want without thought to public well-being or future effects.

I hadn't even given thought to the TAB or how it had been set up; there seems to be one around every corner, tucked away in the most odd of spaces. I do believe there is one up the road, sandwiched between a employment agency and a dry foods store. Despite there being a legal way to bet upon a variety of things, I do wonder how other bookies manage; if I wanted to make a bet the chances are high I'd troop to the local TAB. If the average Jo(e) Bloggs wanted to do so they'd do the same ... finding some illegal guy surely would not be so easy? Perhaps I'm mistaken; while the black market seemed terribly easy to find overseas—matter of standing around for a few minutes and it'd come to *you*, here it appears to be all the more above board. Enough to make one live the life of the straight and narrow.

There's this rule in the universe, as **Garry Dalrymple** has found out. I don't know how it happens, but when you get a bunch of people—I'm not certain of the minimum numbers, but it escalates with more—at a table to eat a meal, lots of conversation going around. When the bill arrives people carefully count out how much they've to pay, put it on a plate ... and then someone counts. It's always, *always*, more than what the bill states. Usually those I know redistribute monies amongst themselves rather than tip, but it's a great way of collecting funds for fannish events!

I hadn't realised that there were a great number of people who identified as skeptics and even had *conventions* to discuss their ideas. How amazing. I do think that far too much is based upon what happens in the northern hemisphere, so think Steve Symond's suggestion of paying a bit more attention to Australian flora and fauna in regards to weather would be a worthwhile idea. I found the skeptics' website and there were some interesting articles there. As with anything I couldn't find myself agreeing with it all, but there was some cause for thought.

I rather fancy that ergonomics is an area where people should pay more attention—not only in office furniture, as **David Grigg** mentioned, but in many different areas. Properly fitting bras for women (which annoy me so I tend to go without unless I must these days), less restrictive clothing and footwear, properly adjusted desks, computers, and chairs. I had real troubles with my hands around a year ago because I kept having to reach up to about chest height to type, and the next thing I knew there was terrible pain. Wouldn't wish that on anyone, and wasn't helped by the doctor—I loved the useful advice of 'stop using the computer' instead of information on how to rearrange my situation, which I had to do myself by following up on reading. If you want anything done, do it yourself and all that.

Charity begins at home, says **Bill Wright**. I'm rather taken aback time and again by those in my social stratosphere: when someone found out I had no fridge, I was given one on permanent loan. Another found I had no

television, so I got yet something else. A computer came my way. Another had occasion to visit recently and found my lack of furniture and kitchen supplies deplorable, so shall be with a kitchen table and a microwave before long. This is without mentioning the bits of clothing, hardware, books, and other bits and pieces people give me when they don't want them anymore, or when people pay for me to do any number of things. Not that I don't try to do what I can in return favour, but it seems just slightly out of kilter and, well, very kind.

**Eric Lindsay's** comment on the Health Department list of safety precautions regarding food in hot climates and a suggestion of overlap with Jewish customs puts me to mind of a book I read earlier last year, one *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture*, by Marvin Harris. In it he suggested that the reason for why cows and pigs were taboo in a couple of cultures were to do with a symbiotic relationship with these creatures, and that had they eaten those animals they would have ultimately expended more energy than they were getting from their flesh. Cattle in India are used to plough fields and their milk used for a variety of foodstuffs, and pigs in the Middle East would have consumed about as much food and water as would have been needed for a human daily—not worthwhile somewhere with water shortages. There was a lot more along those lines, with more examples, which were thought provoking.

I'm sorry to hear of the hardships **David Grigg** went through with his parents—both going down at the same time and the same thing! One wonders how that managed to come about.

It was great to meet a few ANZAPA folk when down in Melbourne. I hadn't realised that **Karen Johnson** had gotten more than the one photograph of me—it was a surprise to see the one in her fanzine! I'd been wondering who I'd be able to see while down there, so that was good, and also good to meet her mother, Heather, who's been part of another APA I once contributed to.

I am amused by **Bruce Gillespie's** mention of my rescue from a backpacker's hotel when at Continuum. I'd always wondered what staying at one was like, and found it fine—it had a bed and shower and kitchen, which were good—so would have been happy remaining. Of course, an overly amorous guy staying there who helped himself to my bunk (while I was in it) did change matters. People keep telling me not to talk to strange men. I opine that you don't know that they're strange until you talk to them, and by then it's too late...

**Michael F. Green** was kind enough to put me up a couple of nights, especially after a that little fiasco; let's just say it was a misunderstanding. As he says, there was more to read at his place and as per my biblioholic tendencies I attacked his collection. Missing my little ol' self? I feel honoured. I was pleased to be able to get together with Michael and gabble his ear off most of the time I was down there. (I can, at times, talk a *lot*.)

Moving, moving. Brisbane is so large, as **Nick Shears** has found out, and with that annoying river in the middle of it all it makes places which would have been close to one another all the more apart. I pinpointed the perfect suburb for me to live in: Yeerongpilly. (Or thereabouts.) On the train line, and I could easily cycle to the other side of the river to visit friends, places which would take me around 90 minutes to get to at the moment. A move is coming up

within the next couple of years, I daresay. I wonder where the Shears family will be moving to? There *are* acreages on the side of the river I assume they want to move to, but the prices are accordingly high too.

In regards to the censorship of the TARGET puzzle **Alan Stewart** mentions, it occurs to me there's another version of 'clitoris' which could have appeared: clit. It's in the dictionary, anyway. I checked.

I'm actually of the opinion that if you're speeding and you get caught, revenue raising or not, then the person being fined has nothing to complain about. If you know the law and you break it then it's all your own fault. My mother has gone to complain a hundred times about my brother's fines and licence losses (he's in the middle getting it back yet *again*) but the truth of the matter is that if he drove lawfully he wouldn't be in this problem. The police can only get money if people haven't fixed their cars to get their speedometers showing proper speed or if they're not speeding.

**Sally Yeoland** asked about my name; Lacey is my father's last name, Barrantes one of my mother's. I was all geared up to use both, but then my mother made it expressly known that she didn't want me doing it. Ah, well. I guess my full name's a bit of a handful as is. Lacey Barrantes, Lacey ... all same in the end. Except for the Erika. The forever all-powerful, or something like that (in Old Norse)—I prefer that over the Erica, which is the Latinate form of heather. It panders to my vanity.

For a while I've been saying that there's no need of a gay & lesbian SF club in Brisbane; one already exists, in a way. Most of the SF fans I hang around with (slash fans, so media and books and everything else in between) are either gay, bi, or lesbian. It makes things hard for those few straight ones trying to get themselves a fannish S.O., amusingly enough. I was reminded of this by **David Charles Cummer's** comment ... although I've no doubt that this is merely a skewed perception on my behalf, considering I don't tend to frolick in *all* of the fan groups. Only so many hours in a day.

Maybe **Eric Lindsay** needs to move to say, the UK; I get the impression that one could walk half an hour in any direction and stomp all over a small piece of countryside before trudging through yet another city area. (Are there such things as suburbia there?) I guess I'll find out what it's like one day; my brother and I are in the process of applying for British citizenship. Him because he could use a European passport to work in Europe, me just because I can. Plus it would be handy if I wanted to backpack through Europe, which I will do as soon as the parents are in the area (a few years away) and have the excuse to go to the Mediterranean and enjoy myself appropriately.

Travelling in Thailand sounds rather decadent—at least, from **Bill Wright's** point of view. Massages, top quality hotels, lounging on beaches, casual drinking ... next thing you know there'll be stories of people laying carpets down in front of tourists and carefully applying a fan to air them with on their travels—all for a couple of dollars a day!

I must be fairly odd to think of travelling entirely on the hardship side; travelling for me is not luxurious, but long and generally not at all comfortable but at the end of the day I'm tired and want sleep. I think if I ever got pampered in any way I would likely die of shock.

Travelling cheaply and being able to get oneself pampered is one thing, and then travelling ultra expensively like **David Grigg** was in Japan—an exercise in comparisons!

People always do tell me that Japan is pricey, that it just about isn't worth going there to get paid large amounts of money to teach or hostess (as a couple of people I know have done) for it disappears in a flash just to live there. I can very well believe it.

**David Grigg's** travel report of his trip in England makes me want to do the same sort of thing, only on a much, *much* tighter budget. Having a British passport would be fabulous for that sort of thing. Sightseeing's a lovely way to spend time; I do that enough in Brisbane ... and I'm very entertained that the Griggs headed off into galleries and parks when in London. I go to any other city, and where do I head? The same. So now I wonder how many more episodes there'll be of "80 Days Around the World"—and if David intends to put previous ones online or something the like. I've got a few from the previous time I was in ANZAPA, but I never did get all of them. The trip is fascinating enough that I'd like to read the rest.

Back to **Eric Lindsay**, I do think that people live well beyond their means all over—housing space is just one of them. Who spends a lot of time where they live, really? Do they use all of that space? Most of the people I know don't spend all that much time at home unless they're unemployed, and when they do they're sitting at their computer. Or television. You don't exactly need huge amounts of space to do these things. My 'bedroom' is my library, office, workroom, sleeping space, reading room, all that rolled into one. Having a lot of space seems to merely promote getting more stuff to fill it all up with. I'm struggling against the urge to fill what bookshelves I have. Having one room dedicated to sleeping seems wasteful. I once read a recommendation that the largest rooms in the house go to children, who *do* use their bedrooms for play. It seemed sensible to me. Adults snooze in there, then go to the lounge, and rarely go back to the bedroom for anything else.

**Cath Ortlieb** amuses me when she says 'turning 50 ... when I was younger that sounded so old'; no doubt every age sounds very old to everyone else. I used to think that 20 sounded old when I was a teenager, and as a child I used to think, hey, teenagerhood was old. At the moment it gives me a startle when a child says to me 'miss' or they say to their friends 'ask the lady' something. It doesn't feel too far away when it was *me* in those uniforms walking around saying those very things.

Just recently, from having used the laptop when I was still at home, I have come to the conclusion that my next computer ought to be something small. Laptop-like. A PDA like **John Newman** got Jan's son would be great, but I think I'll just go with the laptop idea. I was looking at the energy usage of these things, and found that laptops generally consume 10kW p.a. whereas a monitor would take 50kW, the case itself 60kW, not to mention the speakers ... not only would it be good as for taking up space, but energy-wise—two good things at once! I'm sold. Nothing fancy, just something a bit upmarket from my current computer, which wouldn't be at all hard.

I don't know that I have *contempt* for people who don't know how to use computers, but I don't know that I have any patience for people who've owned one for ages and then ring me 'because I'm having an emergency!' The emergency? An icon disappears off their desktop and I'm supposed to go over and give them aid. Or they close some window normally open and they don't know how to get it

back ... and give me a ring. It's all I can do not to tell them to stop being such wankers and go learn something for a change. No, I don't think I'd do well at any kind of computer support.

*New Scientist* is weekly? I'm taken aback. 52 issues a year. That's an awful lot of magazine. Perhaps **John Newman** can get the magazine from the library, or if there's someone else around who likes reading the magazine, share a subscription? Getting the magazine a week after it's out doesn't make the science any less up-to-date. The good thing about the magazine format is that you can take it to say, the loo—if one's like certain family members who take half an hour there! Someone I know subscribes to *New Scientist*, so sometimes I manage to get my hands on a copy, although I tend to keep myself to the couch.

I never thought of the story of the Bible in the way **David Grigg** mentions, that people wouldn't have made such a 'common' person up and then had all these bad things happen to him if he was a true being, that instead he'd have been saved at the last moment ... no, never really thought of that. Sets me to thinking about what the other saviour types have been like in other religions. Most of the time they're sorts who've had bad things happen to them. I don't know why it seems like people want to canonise and follow the unfortunate. I don't even want to speculate on why.

Again I agree with **David Grigg** that the two testaments are somewhat incompatible. I've always thought so, and had some resounding ... conversations ... with people who've tried to bring me into their churches. 'But if Jesus says that a man slaps you, turn the other cheek so he can slap that, how does that fit with the old testament saying eye for an eye, etc? It doesn't fit!' I am not very popular with people trying to convert me. It's funny, though; as a child I used to read the new testament and want to be a nun. Just recently I joined that United Churches thing and am now a Reverend, just for amusement value. (A lot of what I do is for that. People don't believe me when I say that, though.) Another Christian friend of mine says that really, Jesus was a Buddhist with what he was saying. If people only went by what *he* preached and not the extra bits tacked on or the old testament, the religion would be a lot nicer. Maybe. Maybe not. I have my doubts about any religion being nice, especially if established sorts. As soon as organisation jumps into being people want to have a say and all these little struggles go on to prove one's own supremacy. It seems so awfully convenient that wars spur up over religious disagreement.

It was absolutely fascinating to read **Nick Shears'** reviews of the gigs he's been to of late. I admit to not having gone to many live shows, in fact none at all in the recent years, but it is sad to hear that people like Bob Dylan don't put the effort into their shows. I'd seen that Jackson Browne was in town back when he was, considering Beth Orton was here too. I wished I could go. I get to read the *Courier Mail* because someone on shift in the gallery with me buys it every weekend, and there were full articles.

**Roger Sims'** recollection of a bus driver trying to scrape between vehicles reminds me of the time my family was travelling in the Andes. We looked out one window one morning and noticed that the road was real narrow. In fact, the tire was scraping the edge of the road. I do believe my parents were a bit nervous, but my brother and I were absolutely fascinated by how beyond the road there was a

sheer drop and nothing else. You just have to trust real hard that the bus driver knew what he was doing—and now it occurs to me to wonder if there ever were accidents of busloads of people tumbling down the mountainside.

I don't know that I agree with **Roger Sims'** saying that global warming is a myth; indeed the earth *does* change temperature with time, and if all things went to plan without human intervention we'd be heading towards colder years, an ice age. With a lot of time, of course, but there you go. I find it hard to believe that someone would deny humans have been pumping out crap into the atmosphere since the late 1800s and changing the forestation lines. CFCs, methane ... all contributing to warming up the atmosphere and ozone depletion. I rather doubt governments would go out of their way to sign treaties, beginning with Kyoto, to reduce amounts of environmental waste, or that governments would go into 'greening' of suburbs out of the goodness of their hearts.

A friend of mine had *Spirited Away* on DVD, and like **Gerald Smith** and **Jack R. Herman**, I thoroughly enjoyed the film. Beautiful both in the animation and the storyline. The last Miyazaki film I saw was *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, and I enjoyed that one most thoroughly—along with *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*. While *Nausicaä* isn't available on English DVD as yet, I got myself a fan-subbed copy. Thank goodness for fansubs; they may not be the best in the world, but they do allow one to get hold of anime one wouldn't have otherwise had chance to be exposed to. A friend of mine has *Princess Mononoke*; that's on my list to be seen. I do like a lot of anime, and these days it isn't nearly so *weird* to admit that one likes to watch it, or so it feels! There are still a number of people holding out, saying they wouldn't watch the stuff even under threat of torture, but I'm of the opinion they don't know what they're missing. Most people seem to really like *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, but I don't know if they've tried the series the creator made after that—short, but completely psychedelic. Talk about spin your head!

As for what **Gerald Smith** says about people misinterpreting Darwinism to suit themselves, it sometimes seems that most are more concerned with the well-being of themselves rather than what they can do for the planet. More concerned with purchasing that which is cheaper than which benefits the environment (e.g. cheap paper rather than recycled, and recycled with post-consumer waste). Cheap batteries rather than rechargeable. That sort of thing. I know that I for one have am paying a lot more when it comes to electricity, for example, because of my choice in paying more for 'green' energy. At the moment I am considering doing a community co-op where people can buy say, recycled toilet paper in bulk. Cheaper than fewer rolls in the long run, and reduces the 'too expensive' aspect of things.

The **Ashby's Goat Sneeze Charts** remind me of a project of mine in Australian music a while back. I did find some interesting stuff about the place, not things one would usually come across. Some of the favourites of that lot:

Suze DeMarchi, "Trapped in Amber"

Speedstar\*, "Fallen Star"

Augie March, "This Train Will Be Taking No Passengers"

Bluebottle Kiss, "Ounce of Your Cruelty"  
George, "Under The Milky Way (Live)"  
Gersey, "The Beautiful Look City"  
The John Butler Trio, "Pickapart"  
Mark Seymour, "The Ballad Of The One Eyed Man"  
Weddings Parties Anything, "One Perfect Day"  
Vika & Linda, "Grandpa's Song"  
Love Lies Bleeding, "When You Go To Town"

I could go on, but will desist. It was a wonderful project and I learned a lot about independent Australian music that way, and also about the styles of music predominantly featured.

Someone locally laments to me every so often about how Halloween isn't widely followed by the children in the area, despite her stocking up in candy and the like. I, like **Dan McCarthy**, don't like the idea of it—and am glad that the kids don't all come knocking on my door in search of stuff. I rather fancy with people's paranoia these days, both folks would be less likely to send their kids out and people would be less likely to give food in case some child choked on a lolly and they'd get sued. I'm amazed the Yanks, with their litigious tendencies, still follow it.

A quote for **Jeanne Mealy**, who asked how Australia was named:

"Flinders wrote: 'Had I permitted myself any innovation upon the original term (Terra Australis), it would have been to convert it into Australia, as being more agreeable to the ear, and an assimilation to the names of the other great portions of the earth.' The choice was inevitable; it was the name given by Quiros, without the Spanish flourishes, to what he thought was the southern continent [...] Governor Macquarie recommended the adoption of the name to the British Government, and it has been official since 1817."

(*The English Language in Australia and New Zealand*, G. W. Turner, p. 13.)

As always, it's sad to hear of people's relatives passing away. Condolences to everyone for whom this is true.

## Comics

Comics I've enjoyed since I began them, listed by title and not necessarily by each collection I've read, since as in the case of *ElfQuest*, they go on forever...

*Electric Girl*, Michael Brennan

*Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, Art Spiegelman

*Whiteout*, Greg Rucka & Steve Lieber

*Gemma Boverly*, Posy Simmonds

*Watchmen*, Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons

*The Authority*, Warren Ellis/Mark Millar

*Stormwatch*, Warren Ellis

*The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, Alan Moore & Kevin O'Neill

*The Tale of One Bad Rat*, Bryan Talbot

*ElfQuest*, Wendy & Richard Pini (many collections)

*Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Frank Miller

*Marvels*, Kurt Busiek & Alex Ross

*Meridian*, Barbara Kesel

*From Hell: A Melodrama in Sixteen Parts*, Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell

Versions of 'Free furniture exploits' and 'Salve oh Patria, mil veces oh Patria' first appeared in my online journal. (I left this until the last moment. Original material next ish.) The latter title is the first line of the Ecuadorian national hymn.