Cites & Insights:
Crawford at Large

Bibs & Blather
I Just Don't Know…

Some articles and postings don't seem to belong anywhere in my regular slots, but I feel obliged to make some comment. Take, for example, Abby Kalan's "On my mind" commentary in the May 2002 *American Libraries*, "Are we sabotaging ourselves with our 'professional' image?" She says librarians *do* wear "last century's clothing" ("We're all guilty," one of those universal phrases that sets me off) and that librarians need to "think like capitalists." Focusing on "customers" makes sense to me. It's the start of the column that got to me. She notes a friend's "librarian fantasy"—the one where a cliché librarian, "suddenly overcome with desire, casts off the glasses, unpins the hair, and voilà, she is every heterosexual man's fantasy woman. Of course, this friend would never have created such a fantasy about a doctor or a lawyer."

Read that last sentence again. Maybe she's *only* talking her about her friend. But if she's really saying men don't fantasize about prim female lawyers or doctors being overcome with desire and turning into fantasy women—it seems to me there are enough TV shows and movies to indicate otherwise.

Glib Naysaying

Peter Suber prepared an interesting response to the lead essay in last month's *Cites & Insights*. You'll find that response "Feedback: Your Insights."

That wasn't the only fallout from my essay. Stevan Harnad wrote a well-argued post to September98-Forum@listserver.sigmaxi.org, which made its way to me. Since he didn't submit it as feedback to *Cites & Insights*, I won't quote the whole thing (it was posted on July 2, and you may be able to find it in list archives), but I will quote one paragraph:

Slow progress? Researchers and their institutions are to blame, for being so slow to realize what the optimal and inevitable solution is, and just going ahead and doing it. They will realize it, sooner or later. But glib nay-saying like Walt's will get some of the historic credit for having helped to make it a little later rather than sooner.

I went back and read that again, then waited a few days to see whether Stevan Harnad would issue a post claiming that someone had forged his email address. Since that never happened, I went back to the original essay to examine my "glib nay-saying," apparently so potent that this Webzine is slowing the whole pace of scholarly progress!

Here's what I said about Harnad and his self-archiving solution:

While I've consistently questioned Stevan Harnad's economic assertions, his proposed network of archival repositories makes sense *as part of* the scholarly system—and it's also (I think) a key part of FOS. Note "as part of." [Followed by other pieces of the puzzle.]… Maybe I'm wrong and Peter Suber and/or Stevan Harnad are right. Harnad is fond of 'inevitable' to define his preferred future, a huge strike against it in my vocabulary…. Both sets of initiatives look good to me as portions of a complex mix, but not as overall solutions.

That's it. I dislike "inevitable" (from Harnad or anyone else), I question the economic assertions Harnad's always made and I don't believe a network of archival repositories is a total solution. That's some naysaying!

Inside This Issue

I don't care for being scapegoated. If failing to fall in line 100% with a crusade, even while supporting the primary technique of the crusader, is "glib naysaying," then I'm guilty. If anything in *Cites & Insights* is keeping scholars from self-archiving, an activity that I have never once opposed, then something's gone horribly wrong. We already know

they're serving snowcones in Hades these days, but this is *truly* bizarre. Maybe those really are flocks of pigs flying overhead, not crows…

I do owe an apology to Andrew Odlyzko, with no "s"—I have trouble spelling his name right. Sorry.

Feedback: Your Insights
Scholarly Journals and Grand Solutions

Peter Suber prepared a thoughtful commentary on my July 2002 essay, which he distributed to a Topica group related to the FOS movement. Here it is, in full, followed by my off-the-cuff response, his additional note, and my last word (this time around).

Peter Suber's Comments

In the July issue of *Cites & Insights*, Walt Crawford devotes his opening essay to reflections on the FOS movement.

In the process he comments on:

(1) my essay on why FOS progress has been slow, from *FOSN* for 5/15/02,

(2) my follow-up in *FOSN* for 5/23/02,

(3) Jeffrey Young's article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on the Public Library of Science,

(4) and his own article in the May 2002 *EContent*, "Electronic Access to Scientific Articles: Another Perspective."

He also comments on FOS positions taken by Stevan Harnad and Andrew Odlyzko. Here are some responses.

Walt writes:

If, after you read these articles [by Suber and Young], you're satisfied that your Grand Solution works for the future, keeps scholarship healthy, keeps previous resources available and libraries healthy, supports indexing and abstracting, and has a solid chance of success—well, then, I wish you well.

Yes, I'm still satisfied. That may go without saying. But Walt implies that my articles, at least together with Young's, cast doubt on the merits of FOS. (Young's article reported that the PLoS boycott was a "bust", but that the PLoS founders have not given up and plan to launch a series of open-access journals.)

What they do instead is show why progress has been slow. It's important to distinguish explanations of slow progress, and even recognition of obstacles, from grounds for pessimism. Martin Luther King repeatedly pointed out that progress toward civil rights was slow, but he never interpreted the obstacles as reasons to think civil rights were unattainable or undesirable. The analogy doesn't have to hold on all points to hold on the important point. Compared to the pace permitted by our opportunities, progress toward FOS has been slow. I enumerated eight reasons why, but none them implies that FOS is unattainable or undesirable. Neither does the failure of the PLoS boycott and the PLoS shift to a new strategy.

Like Walt, I want to keep scholarship and libraries healthy and preserve support for indexing and abstracting. I believe that all other FOS proponents do as well. FOS is not in conflict with these goals, just moving more slowly than it might. Or, if anyone does see a conflict between these goals and the goals of FOS, then I'd like to see a more specific account of it.

[Later], after summarizing my list of reasons why FOS progress slow, Walt adds,

If I take issue with any of these, it's the concept that print journals are inherently undesirable, and I'm not sure that's what Suber is saying.

Walt's suspicion is correct; that's not what I was saying. I criticized journals that still demand that authors transfer their copyright, but otherwise I didn't criticize any kind of journal. I merely pointed out that most of the prestigious journals are still priced and printed, which explains why most authors continue to submit articles to them. I also pointed out that journals might be daunted by the prospect of adopting a novel funding model that would allow them to dispense with subscription and licensing fees.

Because print journals cost much more to produce than online-only journals, print journals rarely have open-access editions. However, it's important that there is a growing number of exceptions, for example *BMJ*, *Cortex*, and the BMC journals. The main reason why print journals are not "inherently undesirable" is that they are compatible with open-access, even if the conjunction is uncommon. I've made this case in many places, most recently in the inaugural issue of the BMC's *Journal of Biology*.

While print journals are not "inherently undesirable," most of them are too expensive to adopt open access, the form of distribution required to maximize impact for authors and access for readers. But rather than cast them as enemies or obstacles, it's more constructive to see them simply as the competition.

As the BOAI says in its FAQ,

Journals that do not wish to provide open access have nothing to fear from BOAI except competition. We do not endorse the piracy or expropriation of their intellectual property. We do not demand that they change their access policies and do not threaten them with boycotts or other sanctions if they do not change. We encourage them to offer open access,

and will help find the money to defray the costs of the transition to open access for journals willing to make the change.... Our project is constructive, not destructive.... For our constructive activity to succeed, no institution or business needs to change its policies. However, we welcome the assistance of all who share our vision.

[Later], Walt criticizes Stevan Harnad:

[H]is proposed network of archival repositories makes sense *as part* of the scholarly system—and it's also (I think) a key part of FOS.

Stevan can speak for himself; but as I read him, he agrees with this. Self-archiving is only part of the solution and must be complemented by journals. It's not self-sufficient because it doesn't include peer review. Self-archiving is the component of the solution that provides immediate open access to new work, and that doesn't depend on the (slow) adoption of new funding models by journals. It's the component of the solution that doesn't depend on anyone but the author and to some extent the author's institution. But it needs another component to provide peer review, and Steven is emphatic that peer review must be part of any complete solution.

[Again quoting from the July essay:]

But SPARC also serves a purpose —and SPARC leads to priced journals, some of them in print form, not the pure "free online" model that Suber favors. As part of a network of efforts to make access to STM articles more affordable and more assured in the long term, SPARC is a good tool; in FOS terms, I have to assume that it's a negative force.

I love SPARC; it's a very positive force.

First, SPARC lends its assistance to both free and affordable journals, not just the latter....

Second, even affordable journals count as progress. Again, to quote the BOAI FAQ:

We hope these initiatives [to make journals affordable] succeed, because their success will make scholarly literature more accessible than it is today. However, we believe that the specific literature on which BOAI focuses, the peer-reviewed research literature in all disciplines, can and should be entirely free for readers. If the initiatives working on affordable literature are persuaded by the case we have made, then we welcome them to join us. If they are not persuaded, then we wish them success in making progress toward wider access.

If Walt's suspicion of grand solutions is based on a suspicion of haste in making fundamental change where the stakes are high, then I share it. However, I wouldn't characterize the goal of open-access to peer-reviewed research literature as a grand solution in this sense. The main reason is that gradualism

and flexibility are possible in selecting the means to this end. I endorse both.

So does the BOAI:

There is no need to favor one of these solutions [for funding journals] over the others for all disciplines or nations, and no need to stop looking for other, creative alternatives... While we endorse the two strategies [of self-archiving and open-access journals], we also encourage experimentation with further ways to make the transition from the present methods of dissemination to open access. Flexibility, experimentation, and adaptation to local circumstances are the best ways to assure that progress in diverse settings will be rapid, secure, and long-lived.

(If I keep quoting the BOAI, it's because it represents the kind of FOS I advocate. This is no accident; I was one the drafters.)

Here's how I put the case for gradualism—and incidentally, the benefits of slow progress—in a letter to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for October 12, 2001. The letter responds to a *Chronicle* article by John Ewing and a *Nature* article by Richard Kaser [references omitted here], which both argued against haste in making fundamental changes to the scholarly communication system.

It is far-fetched to assume that the journal system will change suddenly or before we adequately understand what is happening. Free online scholarship is emerging gradually, one journal or archive at a time. The slow pace of change provides all the time we need to monitor our experiment, measure its impact, make midcourse corrections, and chart an informed future course.

[Finally], Walt: Thanks for your public reflections on FOS. I wish that all those who were unpersuaded were as open to persuasion as you are, and as willing to read and respond to the arguments.

Best wishes, Peter Suber, Professor of Philosophy Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana, 47374, Email peters@earlham.edu.

My Response

Peter,

I appreciate your thoughtful response to my essay. With your permission—I always ask permission these days—I'd like to include part or all of it as Followup in a future *Cites & Insights*. If I do so, I think my only real demurrers might be:

1. I don't argue that FOS is a bust or will be a bust. I only argue that it is not a Grand Solution, but part of a network of efforts that should and probably will improve the price-of-access problem. This may be a terminology question.

2. Ditto OAI and Stevan Harnad's self-archiving initiatives. I tend to take issue with Harnad because

he tends to make sweeping (and sometimes unsupportable) statements, and particularly when, for example, he asserts that digital archiving is simply not a problem. (Cf. the text-e e-conference.)

3. I believe that the PLoS petition was demonstrably a bust, one that may have done more harm than good: It showed that hundreds of thousands of scientists were not, in fact, willing to back their asserted belief with action. My poker analogy was carefully drawn.

I don't need to be persuaded that FOS is a valuable piece of the puzzle, a valuable small-s "solution" to the complex access situation. Even as a nonscholar, but one deeply interested and involved in libraries and the pricing puzzle, I see that it's a worthy set of ideas that's made a difference and will probably make more difference in the future.

The distinction is between small-s "solution," of which there are many, some of which do more good than others but most of which improve the situation, and the big-S Grand Solution, the "inevitable optimal" future of all scholarly communications (the quoted phrase being one of Harnad's favorites).

I believe that many small-s solutions, including all but one of the ones I named in my commentary, will help--indeed, that they've already helped convince some of the big international publishers to moderate their enthusiastic price increases and, in some cases, improve long-term access.

I don't believe that any one Solution makes sense as a universal, comprehensive answer. The world doesn't work that way.

Based on this commentary, it appears that you don't, either—in which case, there's no argument between us.

Another Note from Peter Suber

I don't argue that FOS is a stand-alone or self-sufficient solution. There are many kinds of scholarly literature unsuited to open access—all the writings for which authors expect payment, including textbooks, some monographs, and some software. But I do argue that open access is the best solution for the special body of literature for which authors do not expect payment—journal literature mostly, but also theses and dissertations, some monographs, some software, most gray literature, and all statutes and judicial opinions.

If arguing that open access is the best solution for a certain category of literature is a Grand Solution, at least for that category, then I'm advocating a Grand Solution. If recognizing other categories where open access is inappropriate means that I'm not advocating a Grand Solution, then I'm not. This may clarify the terminological problem.

In this sense I fully agree with your "network of efforts" position. But within the category of literature that authors give away, I support pluralism and experimentation of means to the end of open access, but no forms of pricing or distribution other than open access.

Getting In The Last Word

There is, in fact, a disagreement—but it's such an arcane one that it isn't worth pursuing. Peter Suber argues that open access is the best solution for writings for which authors do not expect payment. I don't disagree in principle. Is that achievable for all such literature? I doubt it, but that doesn't make it undesirable—particularly when pursued the way Peter Suber and other FOS people do. In essence, the disagreement is one of those "big bets" that would take longer to settle than either of us is likely to be alive. Peter explicitly appreciates other "pieces of the puzzle" that work in other ways to reduce the cost of access to scholarship and improve its long-term prospects. What more can I ask?

Peter Suber is a serious participant in this complex situation. I'm an observer. I appreciate the time he took to respond to my commentary, his immediate posting of my reply to the same list, and his immediate permission to publish his comments here. I'll continue to check the FOS Weblog (which replaced the *FOS Newsletter*, no longer feasible now that Suber's sabbatical has ended) and include appropriate material here. The access situation isn't going away any time soon, and I'll continue to mention some of the many ways of alleviating intolerable costs and access restrictions—and, of course, making sometimes-ignorant comments on them as well.

The Filtering Follies

As expected, the government appealed the CIPA decision to the Supreme Court. I devote half of the October "Crawford Files" in *American Libraries* to the *real* issues in CIPA, excerpted from the plaintiff's joint post-trial brief. The second half of that column is a challenge for facts behind the folklore that ALA ostracizes pro-filtering librarians or punishes libraries that filter. If you're not a member of ALA, *join*—but, short of that, "Crawford Files" shows up about a week before issue date at ALOnline and stays available online permanently, as far as I can tell. I won't repeat the summary here. The post-trial brief is

available from ALA on the CIPA page on its Website (www.ala.org, which also leads to ALOnline).

CIPA Notes

First came the news reports. *WiredNews.com* posted a Declan McCullagh report at 7:01 a.m. PDT on May 31, 16 minutes after AP's story hit the wires. The AP story quotes a single key sentence from the massive district court ruling: "Any public library that adheres to CIPA's conditions will necessarily restrict patrons' access to a substantial amount of protected speech in violation of the First Amendment." That story summarizes the Justice Department argument thusly: "Internet smut is so pervasive that protections are necessary to keep it away from youngsters, and...the law simply calls for libraries to use the same care in selecting online content that they use for books and magazines. They also point out that libraries can turn down the federal funding if they want to provide unfiltered Web access." The first sentence, if taken literally, would suggest that the only reasonable way for public libraries to offer Internet access is through a mechanism that goes only to sites specifically selected by librarians.

McCullagh's report notes other court comments, including this one: "Filtering products' shortcomings will not be solved through a technical solution in the foreseeable future." He quotes Justice Department attorney Rupa Bhattacharyya: "There is no constitutional right to immediate, anonymous access to speech, for free, in a public library." But a key previous ruling—one that *upheld* a restriction on Federal funding—stated that Congressional spending power "may not be used to induce the states to engage in activities that would themselves be unconstitutional." Both reports note two previous Congressional attempts to restrict online porn, both partially or wholly overturned.

That same day, ALA issued a news release entitled "ALA applauds federal court ruling on the Children's Internet Protection Act," which offers a succinct statement of ALA's reasons for suing and ends, "We commend the judges for affirming that local libraries, working with families and trustees, should continue to determine what works best in their communities."

A CNN.com article by Terry Frieden included a charming quote from John Ashcroft, appearing on "Larry King Live":

> Very frankly, I think the courts need to find a way to respect the Constitution and defend our children. And we've got to be very careful that we don't energize individuals whose object it is to abuse the chil-

dren of America, and to have that happen on the Internet.

The courts did find a way to respect the Constitution. Your guess as to the meaning of the second sentence is as good as mine.

The Legal Intelligencer offered a longer summary of the decision on June 3 (downloaded from www.law.com), "Children's Internet Protection Act struck down." The magnitude of overblocking shows in excerpts selected from the decision: "Commercially available filtering programs erroneously block a huge amount of speech that is protected by the First Amendment." Somehow, "huge" strikes me as more definitive than "substantial." This report also included this note: "Stefan Presser, the ACLU's legal director in Pennsylvania, said he hopes the ruling will convince Congress to give up its effort to regulate speech on the Internet since the courts have also struck down two previous laws." If you don't have time for the full decision, this summary shows a lawyer's insights and points out where the District Court "took the easy way out" and ducked some ALA/ACLU arguments. For example, the Feds claimed that the law should stand unless plaintiffs could show that *any* public library complying with CIPA necessarily violated the First Amendment, while the plaintiffs thought the test shouldn't be that strict. The court basically said, "Since the strict test [urged by the government] fails, we won't bother with the looser test." The decision also clarifies the "public forum" issue, asserting that the Internet is an open forum and not directly comparable to a library's collection.

Analyses and Commentary

Seth Finkelstein, the researcher who argues convincingly that "censorware" is a better name for filtering software, popped in to Web4Lib on May 31 to note the CIPA decision and his pleasure that the court seems to have used some of his anticensorware work in the decision. Specifically, the decision discusses "loophole" sites (e.g., Google's cached copies and anonymizers), one of Finkelstein's specialties. (Finkelstein's also a fast reader, as this posting appeared at 7:41 a.m. PDT on the same day the decision was handed down.) I don't flag the posting with "Recommended" because it's just a list posting, but will once again **recommend** that you visit Finkelstein's site, sethf.com/anticensorware/. Finkelstein's own analysis of the decision, "CIPA ruling as censorware argument handbook," appears at sethf.com/freespeech/censorware/essays/cipa_analysis .php. This essay, prepared a few days later, calls the decision "notable for thoroughly demolishing virtu-

ally every legal argument in favor of censorware in public libraries" and focuses on specific elements of the decision. **Recommended**.

Dan Gilmor of the *Mercury News* offered a straightforward commentary at SiliconValley.com the next day, "Three judges stand up for First Amendment." The first sentence is sad but, I fear, true: "The federal judiciary remains the only branch of government with the slightest appreciation of constitutional rights." Later he notes, "Libraries aren't in the business of watching over the shoulders of their customers. They are in the business of making sure people have access to a broad variety of information. Librarians are under constant pressure from the blue-nosed elements of society. They protect our liberty on a routine basis, with insufficient credit. The next time you stop at the library, say thanks." **Recommended**.

I'm never quite sure what to make of *The Register* (www.theregister.co.uk), with its vulture icon, but the commentaries are frequently fascinating. One such is "Why Net filtering is an abomination," posted by Thomas C. Greene on June 6, 2002. He notes the CIPA ruling and its background (and notes that censorware at one time blocked *The Register* "in fear that the world's tender sprouts might be corrupted by our cynicism"). He might be wrong on one account: "Congress, no doubt bamboozled by numerous rigged demonstrations cheerfully proffered by the vendors, superstitiously believed that the technology would work as advertised." (There's more, and it's hilarious.) I wonder whether Congress needed demonstrations, flawed or otherwise, or whether "We Must Shield the Children at All Costs" was, as usual, enough to sell the bill.

Tech Central Station has a June 6 article by Eugene Volokh, "Where obscenity meets speech," that I've seen mentioned often in other postings. Volock is a professor at UCLA School of Law. He summarizes the decision and the reasoning neatly, from the perspective of an established expert on free speech law, including an absolutely key point: "The court held that under the First Amendment, public libraries, whether or not funded by the federal government, *may not filter access for adults.*" Barring absolute idiocy from the Supremes, that finding is an open invitation to plaintiffs to sue any library that does filter adult access. There's more at techcentralstation.com; **recommended**.

It took a week for most analysts to digest the decision and draw conclusions; I see at least two more commentaries also dated June 6. Don Wood forwarded Steve Chapman's "On Internet speech, librarians to the rescue," which appeared in the Chicago *Tribune* (chicagotribune.com). It's a fine column

that recognizes that properly-working filters are "a fantasy." **Recommended**, and I trust quoting the first paragraph won't exceed fair use limitations:

> The people who have advanced the cause of free speech have often been wild, radical or dangerous types—communists, anti-Semites, pornographers, war resisters, flag-burners, and the like. Today, storming the barricades of censorship and rejecting the demands of conformity, we have a different group of firebrands: America's librarians.

PCWorld.com posted "Can the Net even be made safe for kids" by Anne Ju of Medill News Service. Although "ever" would seem a better word than "even," it's an interesting piece that focuses on censorware companies as much as the decision itself. "Supporters say the law should stand, because future technology will meet its requirements." Even if true, which I don't believe, that would be an idiotic argument: You don't establish legal requirements in 2000 that can only be satisfied by technology that might be available in 2008. She quotes Bruce Taylor of the National Law Center for Families and Children, who claims that overturning CIPA "disenfranchises the most needy kids from working families" and that CIPA aimed "to protect the rights of children." He also claims that the court could find only "a few thousand sites out of two billion online" that were mistakenly blocked. That should give you a sense as to Taylor's credibility. Ju ends a basically pro-filtering report by noting Gordon Ross of Net Nanny's assertion: "Today's technological shortfalls in filtering shouldn't cloud the fact that future technical solutions will likely solve the impasse defined by last week's ruling." I'd bet Ross knows better.

Leonard Pitts Jr. of the Miami *Herald* is sympathetic to the aims of CIPA in his June 11, 2002 "History didn't foresee cyber sleaze" (downloaded from siliconvalley.com). But he recognizes that the decision was correct and suggests other means, ones that don't involve legislation. Those include filtered children's terminals with parental permission to turn off filtering, and privacy screens—just the kind of things that libraries have been doing.

Here's one I **strongly recommend**, from llrx.com (www.llrx.com): Mary Minow's "The Children's Internet Protection Act: The recent district court decision in context, for librarians and library patrons," posted June 17. The six-page analysis, done in FAQ form with a table of contents for the 16 questions, is much more succinct than the title— and it's an expert analysis. Minow is an attorney and former librarian. If you only want to read one analysis of the CIPA ruling, make it this one.

The Justice Department appealed the decision on June 21, not very many days before the deadline.

A *Wired News* report by Julia Scheeres notes the confidence of ALA and ACLU that the Supreme Court will uphold the district court's ruling, quotes physician Jonathan Burt of Afraidtoask.com (a blocked site that deals with tough health issues) who's "disappointed the government is going to waste our time and taxpayer money on a law that clearly tramples on my rights of free speech," and goes on to quote two "family" and "community" types. As usual, they know better than the courts. Stephen Crampton, chief counsel for American Family Association: "The issue is not whether patrons have been denied First Amendment rights but rather, whether public libraries must be forced to become purveyors of pornography and deliver obscene material to innocent children." David Miller of Citizens for Community Values: "They already pick and choose which books their patrons have access to. Why are they unwilling to filter out Internet material that is harmful to children?" (By the way, not that AFA would care, but obscenity is illegal; obscene material is simply not part of the issue.)

That same day, Karen Schneider, "filtering expert emeritus," posted an excellent commentary, "CIPA and a backwards glance," on Publib. I **recommend** it, but it doesn't excerpt neatly. You should be able to find the posting in the Publib archives at sunsite.Berkeley.edu.

The Opinion Itself

Don't be too frightened by the "190-page" claim. It all depends. The HTML version I downloaded was a mess but a mere 110 single-spaced pages.

I find myself exhausted by any attempt to provide excerpts. We're talking about a book-length decision here; if I entered the portions I flagged while reading, it would fill the rest of this issue. The commentaries noted above provide many of the key elements (and, again, if you don't have time for all of them, get Mary Minow's first). Beyond that, it is a well-written decision that shows careful attention to the arguments, the technology, and the law.

I'm not a lawyer or an expert on these issues. The more I look at the decision, the more I despair of providing added value by doing my own set of excerpts. Sorry.

Beyond CIPA

Seth Finkelstein has a wonderful piece at sethf.com/anticensorware/websense/free_sex.php: "Websense—free sex sites and 'blacklist wars.'" The gist: Websense, one of the censorware companies, has become a great place to find sex sites! It's "now distributing daily lists of sex sites supposedly not blacklisted by other censorware companies. This is hilarious. I am not making this up." Maybe they've stopped by now (I didn't check), but you gotta love these people. I shouldn't be surprised. I've never encountered porn accidentally (or intentionally) on the Web, but Laura Morgan's postings to various lists certainly gave me great URLs to try if I did want nasty stuff. Websense as smut peddler, even if only to make its competition look bad? Why not? As Finkelstein notes, "I can hardly imagine how censorware critics would be pilloried if they pulled a stunt like this. Think of the children!"

How long did it take our honorable representatives to try again, after CPPA was struck down? Not long. Orrin Hatch and others introduced a new proposal on May 15 that would "outlaw the distribution of images that have been digitally 'morphed' to look like child pornography," according to a Washington *Post* report. A similar bill has already come out of a House committee, but that bill (an Ashcroft special) is probably as unconstitutional as its predecessors. The Senate bill uses a "guilty until proven innocent" approach: you can be arrested if "the people portrayed in the images are virtually indistinguishable from real people," but pornographers have a safe harbor if they can "prove that they did not use real children to create their images." It's a start. The House approved COPPA 2002 on June 27. That bill also uses a "guilty until proven innocent" approach.

disContent
Dear AT&T Broadband…

What follows is a hypothetical letter, but it illustrates a real quandary—not for me or other customers, but for the content'n'convergence megacorporations counting on big monthly fees to pay back their investments. Whether the specifics below refer to me or to a hypothetical composite in my high-tech middle-class Silicon Valley neighborhood doesn't matter; the point remains.

"Dear AT&T Broadband,

"I'm a little confused. I hope I have the name right this month. 'Dear striped blue deathstar' seems too informal (and may infringe on a high school classmate's intellectual property—sorry, George). 'AT&T' I understand; 'Broadband' I'm not so sure about. But never mind. I'm one of your customers and, I suspect, a hot prospect to get where you and other convergence operators need to be—and I just don't see it.

The Goal?

"I'm no businessman, but I read the business section. Don't we all? As I understand it, you and your primary competitors are investing tens of billions in infrastructure and content with the expectation that you'll get it back (and more) in monthly fees. I've seen a target number floating around $150 to $170 per month for a middle-class household, for a full range of 'broadband' services and content.

"Maybe your goals are more modest. Would $120 per month be enough? I know you're not the only ones in the game; the frequency with which they tear up El Camino Real to lay new fiber demonstrates that.

The Quandary

"Here's my question: How do we get there from here? To put it another way, what combination of services and content will convince a moderately skeptical, college-educated, literate householder to pay you $150 to $170 per month?

"I should be an easy sell. Consider where you touch me already:

➢ You know I use your cable TV. There's no decent rooftop reception around here and your competition is typically nonexistent. That's $32 a month. Your customer service is no worse than TCI was—but then, how could it be?

➢ You're not as big a player in the Internet business, but you're *my* ISP, and in that area I think you're great. Consistent 50K connections, fast connections, good Web hosting with plenty of space: I see why you come in tops on PC magazine studies. That's another $19.50 a month.

➢ I still use your long distance, mostly because we don't do enough long distance calling to justify any fancy plan—and I even carry one of your credit card/calling card combinations (with the $1/month plan to reduce calling-card costs).

"That's $52 a month, plus maybe another $3 to $6 in long distance revenues. I notice that there are no price breaks for using multiple AT&T services, which doesn't entice me to consolidate more stuff with you.

The Possibilities

"Sure, I know you want my local phone service and keep throwing that "digital" line at me. But I like having some competition, thank you—and you'd only get another $12 or so if I did switch.

"You'd love to have me add $10 for digital cable and $20 for @Home Net access. Given the lack of bundling price breaks, that would bring me up to $82, or even $94 with local phone service.

"But that highlights one of our problems. Offer me 'all the cable I can eat,' TV and high-speed net alike, for (say) $55 a month and we might have a deal. Otherwise—well, I know the reputation of TCI Digital for overcompressing signals; if I had enough Net use to justify @Home, I wouldn't have time for digital cable (and vice versa); it just doesn't add up.

"Even if it did, $94 is a long way from $150. I don't comprehend what you're going to offer that makes $1,800 a year sound like a great deal. Some kind of content? You're doing that already, with the expanded cable service that proves Bruce Springsteen's point. Once I knock the shopping, foreign language, sports, and ultraconservative news stations off my TV's channel-surfing list, I come up with almost exactly 57 stations—and sure enough, most of the time nothing much is on.

Tell Me More—Or Don't Bother

"Here's the thing. Silicon Valley isn't really the suburban wasteland you may think it is. Mountain View has good local restaurants, good local stores, good local libraries. We rent our DVDs or videocassettes from a personable type at a neighborhood store, and we have at least three chain rental operations within a three-minute drive. We're not good candidates for video-on-demand—particularly since I'm not convinced you will provide DVD quality and I'm pretty certain you won't offer the range of choices we get at the store.

"Maybe you hope we'll move all our 'content' shopping online so that you can get a piece of the action. Probably not. Like most people, I suspect, we might do as much as 10% of our shopping online—but given a local store we like (and given that the price differentials have disappeared), the Net doesn't compete. Offer me all the ebooks I can read and all the music I want to hear for $50 a month? Sorry; not interested.

"I've read about suburbanites back east who actually pay $150 to $170 per month for some glorious package of services and content. They're thrilled at having everything in one big pot, with one check going to one provider. I don't see it. Even if I wanted to get more stuff online, I'd like to have options— and that means supporting competition.

"I look at our cable TV bill and how much TV we actually watch. I look at the Internet bill and how much time I spend on the Internet (at home). I think about rental videos and purchased CDs and

books. It comes out to about $1 per hour, a little more for rental DVDs and a lot less for the books we get from the library.

"That means you need to sell me 150 to 170 hours a month of your services. That's at least five hours a day. The only way we'll spend that much time on your stuff is if you consume 100% of our free time.

"That's not going to happen. I don't believe there's enough online and cable content in the world to convince us to devote all our free time to taking it in. Not when there are libraries, local businesses, parks, and a world to experience in non-virtual reality.

"Now that I think about it, I'm a little nervous about the number of services you already sell me. You know, Pac Bell and Sprint and MCI would be only too happy to take over our long distance; Earthlink has a fine reputation as an ISP; we don't seem to be hurting for credit card offers; and…well, there's the Dish."

"Yours, but only up to a point—and that point appears to be about $60 per month,

"Fred Middleclass, Mountain View, CA."

This "disContent" column originally appeared in *EContent* 24:5 (July 2001), pp. 48-50.

PostScript and Update

@Home went under, but AT&T Broadband continues to push high-speed cable Internet access, still $20 extra if you own your modem, $35 otherwise. There's a new gimmick for AT&T long distance: Spend $20 a month and you can talk to other AT&T subscribers as long as you want. The company has tried to make its local service attractive by bundling several features in a $25 monthly rate—but none of them are features we want or need, making the rate about twice what we currently pay. Oops, sorry, what Fred Middleclass pays.

The message stands. For people who live in communities with good libraries, who understand the implications of monopolies, and who lead balanced lives, it's hard to see how any company gets to $150 a month. As the players are finding out, much to their dismay.

More Literacy Notes

It's been four months since I devoted five pages to confused commentary on adult functional literacy—

and more than five months since the *Chronicle of Higher Education* article that got me interested in this topic. I've been waiting for public reassessments of the 1993 claims of massively poor functional literacy in the U.S., possibly literacy organizations changing their home pages, possibly admissions that the original numbers simply don't make sense in terms of how America has functioned in the last decade.

I've seen almost nothing. My guess is that the literacy establishment is dealing with the situation by ignoring it. Sensible people can't really believe that 22% or 47% of adult Americans "can't read" or aren't literate enough to fill out job applications or function in society, but that doesn't seem to bother some literacy organizations. That's a shame.

I had another stack of articles, chapters, and postings in hand when the April commentary appeared. I haven't added to that stack, and it's finally time to dispose of it. These notes don't amount to much. I'm still not enlightened on the subject.

Google led me to a posting on "NIFL-POVRACELIT," a government-hosted list on some aspect of literacy: Tom Sticht's response to Scott Murray's Letter to the Editor of the Washington *Post* commenting on Jay Mathews' "Adult literacy, rewritten," one of the few newspaper reports on the 2001 reassessment of the 1992 study. Thomas G. Sticht is an international consultant in adult education. Murray is an official at Statistics Canada. Sticht encountered this paragraph in Murray's letter:

> Specifically, I want to take exception with the statement that the results of the original National Adult Literacy Survey were wrong. The comments attributed to Messrs. Kolstad and Sticht reveal a profound misunderstanding of the aims of the study and leave the mistaken impression that the methods employed to profile and report the literacy proficiency of American adults were flawed. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Dr. Kolstad was the director of the original project. Murray's dismissal of Kolstad's rethinking seems implausible on its face. For his part, Sticht cites his quotes from the *Post* article and defends each of them ably. He notes that most adults pegged as having low literacy said they could read and write English well or very well, with only about 6% saying otherwise, and adds, "It seems a bit arrogant for researchers to just dismiss what adults say as 'response bias' in these national assessments." Then he adds a key comment:

> And I would think it particularly galling to a "learner centered" adult literacy practitioner to read the Secretary of Education's remarks at the September 8, 1993 release of the NALS. After he states:
> "This report is a wake-up call to the sheer magni-

tude of illiteracy in this country" he goes on to say: "It paints a picture of a society in which the vast majority of Americans do not know that they do not have the skills they need to earn a living in our increasingly technological society and international marketplace." Such extraordinary arrogance based on very fragile social science!

Look again at that second sentence from 1993: "The vast majority of Americans do not know that they do not have the skills they need to earn a living…"

The statement is true, but not as the Secretary of Education intended. Based on the unemployment rates, productivity gains, and overall functioning of the economy between 1993 and 2000, the vast majority of Americans didn't know they lacked the skills needed to earn a living—because it wasn't so. It *could not have been so*.

Looking at the NAAL site (nces.ed.gov/naal/), one chart suggests that definitions may have gotten out of hand. Namely, census figures show an adult illiteracy rate of 0.6% in 1979, as compared to 1.0% in 1969, 2.2% in 1959, and 2.5% in 1952. While I found various explanations of the study methodology at the site, the FAQ on sampling and scoring is completely silent on the 80% response probability issue, the key weakness in the 1993 numbers. It does, however, include language that strongly suggests (to this reader) that attempts to break results down at anything lower than the state level can't be justified based on the original data.

Given that, I went back to the startling assertion at one Web site that "Forty-nine percent of the adults in Camden, New Jersey can't read." I downloaded samples from the report used as the basis for that claim, along with an FAQ on "the state of literacy in America" and a paper by the statistician whose methods were used. I'm defaulting on my promise to comment on the methods used for "synthetic estimates" of functional literacy at the city level, but it's fair to say I read "synthetic estimate" as "Guesswork justified by presuming that correlation is always meaningful." The overview of the local estimates is remarkable for one item I'd missed, the Congressional definition of literacy in the 1991 National Literacy Act:

An individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential.

Once you include "develop one's knowledge and potential" you've opened the floodgates for the most extreme definitions of functional illiteracy. On the other hand, "to achieve one's goals" seems entirely at odds with the attitudes of researchers that people's opinions of their own abilities are meaningless.

I looked at adult literacy estimates—nine years out of date, of course—for various places that I'm familiar with, as well as Camden, New Jersey. The Camden figures are astonishing: 49% Level 1, 87% Level 1 and 2, even though 50% of adults had at least a high school education, 86% speak English very well, and only 9% are unemployed.

Go to www.nifl.gov/reders/ and try cities you're familiar with. Remember that, if you're not at Level 3 or higher, you can't function well in today's society. See if these estimates make sense.

What to say about all this?

➤ *Of course* there are adults who read and calculate so badly that they're not able to function well in society. It's possible that those adults make up 5% or even 10% of American adults. It's improbable that they total nearly half of the country.

➤ Needing help with English as a second language isn't the same as being illiterate. Two different situations. Lumping them together is insulting to Latinos, Hmong, and all the others who bring their talents and education to the U.S. but aren't yet proficient in English.

➤ The cry that adult literacy must be everyone's top priority—or, as one NIFL paper puts it, "All Americans can and should be doing much more to address our nation's literacy needs"—turns an ongoing situation into an unsolvable crisis, and damages efforts at improving literacy. We are *not* all, individually, going to "do much more to address our nation's literacy needs"— and if you start by telling us that half of us need help, we'll walk away from the situation (and possibly label you as innumerate as well).

I'm done. This isn't a core interest of mine, and it's clear that people interested in exaggerating the level of functional illiteracy have chosen to ignore the evidence or deny that the original numbers could be faulty. Faced with that attitude, and since I have no interest in leading an "anti-literacy" crusade, I'm walking away—at least for now.

Ebooks and Etext

There's no hook for this edition of "Ebooks and etext." With the exception of a few true believers, comprehension may have set in. Some aspects of what we loosely call "ebooks" will succeed (are succeeding), but—barring that revolutionary textbook appliance and agreements with the text publishers—

on a relatively modest scale. The revolution hasn't been postponed; it was never going to happen.

'Brary Developments

I haven't heard a word about Questia in months, either final closure or any sign of success. Walking right on by…

The May 28, 2002 *Chronicle for Higher Education* has a brief update on netLibrary, "NetLibrary's new owners hope newer e-books will be more attractive to academe." I didn't realize so many of netLibrary's 7,300 customers are academic: 3,000! "Some of those libraries joined on a trial basis, however, or have ordered only small numbers of e-books." Jeffery R. Young, author of the article, puts it right on the line: "The question now is whether OCLC can make the e-book service work." He notes Rich Rosy's comment that netLibrary began with mostly backlist titles, many 10 years old or older—and adds that the company has added 4,400 newer book recently, making a total of 42,800 titles. One clear advantage of OCLC's purchase, which I've noted before: Although OCLC can and does drop services, it's *extremely* unlikely to disappear as a corporation. Rosy (head of the netLibrary division) also notes that some publishers are ready to consider "all-you-can-read" services rather than the one-at-a-time business.

Two comments from librarians on ebrary appear in the April 2002 *Charleston Advisor*. Margaret Landsman (University of Utah) finds the ebrary model promising, criticizes the netLibrary model as too traditional, and rejects subscription models as too expensive. I'm surprised by a section of the article that seems to dismiss backsets of print serials as being irrelevant for a library, but I may be misreading. I wonder whether Landsman is accepting ebrary's promise (that the "subscription component" of its pricing, which wasn't even part of its original model, won't increase in direct relationship to the number of titles) a little too easily. She says "companies, like libraries, have their ideals and the democratization of information is ebrary's." That sounds good; one can only hope it proves out in practice.

Evan A. Reader of Cal State's SEIR program offers a shorter commentary that's less enthusiastic. He—or, rather, the CSU EAR Committee—doesn't like the InfoTools Reader plugin required to use ebrary texts. The cost for "eMARC" records to go with the ebrary records is too high, $52,500 for the initial 5,000 titles for the 21 CSU campuses. There are other issues, including the fact that libraries pay a subscription fee while individual consumers can access ebrary's collection for free (until they copy or print, as with library use). Reader would prefer a fixed-price model covering use as well as access—the subscription model that Landsman finds objectionable. I don't know what to make of all this—or of ebrary itself.

Mighty Like a Rose

Give me a break. M.J. Rose's weekly *Wired News* column is the most interesting material about e-publishing around, and her name does lend itself to a little humor. The column really isn't about ebooks most of the time, but it's always an interesting read. Some notes:

➢ The Frankfurt E-book Awards were discontinued and an honest discussion of that announcement leads Rose's April 23. 2002 column. "Nut much about e-books has met the over-hyped expectations that greeted the birth of the new form in early 2000." (Some of us would put the birth, and particularly the hype, many years earlier!) The biggest problem with the awards is that they were "created for a new technological form, yet judged on literary merit." Judges either didn't recognize or, more likely, care about ebook features that print can't duplicate, and 80% of award finalists were ebook editions of print books. Originally, a company had to publish more than 20 titles a year to enter, an absurd requirement for a new medium. Even a winner of a $50,000 prize, one of only two that hadn't already been published by a big company, was soured by the lack of promised help in making big-time print happen: "It was a terrible experience." In other items, there's possible good news: Microsoft, which dropped its Frankfurt funding, launched a new European ebook association with a new set of awards. And Xlibris now offers color print-on-demand (PoD) publishing, but it isn't cheap: Setup takes a few months, the book length is limited to 24 to 60 pages, and the author pays $999 to $2,499 before the first PoD "book" appears.

➢ Remember the magazine that was offering book reviews for a price? Now *Moxie*, an online magazine, is charging writers $10 per article for submissions. If the zine accepts the article, you get $20 (they refund the fee and pay you $10). That's the lead item for April 30, followed by a mention of yet another new ebook appliance, this time from Samsung. Once again, we shall see—or not.

➢ May 7's headline is "Looking for the 'E' at BEA," a reference to Book Expo America.

There weren't many ebook vendors among 2,000 exhibitors, but the Open eBook Forum made the most of the event, launching its "Open an eBook Campaign." Publishing executives wonder whether it will make a difference, since it's based on offering free ebooks. As they note, people already download free e-texts—but will they buy them? The column ends with a striking number for the healthiest (and least "e") part of digital book distribution: Xerox printed 20 million b&w PoD books last year—and is demonstrating a $200,000 full-color PoD system. Twenty million in 2001: that's a real business.

➢ You might have missed this three-week wonder, noted on May 14: *Salon* was going to be the exclusive outlet for John Dean's e-book "that will reveal Deep Throat's identity." *Salon* could use the hype—but as June 7 came and passed, the truth emerged: Dean ducked, naming a group of possibilities.

➢ First a Web zine, then a publishing house: *MobyLives* has spawned Melville House Publishing, with two titles out this September. That's not the lead item in Rose's May 21 column—but it's one that leaves out a key detail: Will the Melville House titles be print books or ebooks? I love the subhead on an item about John Riddle's suggestion that Congress declare November 15 "I love to write day." The subhead: "Do we need more writers?" And here's an interesting one: John Scalzi's science fiction ebook, *Agent to the Stars*, appears as shareware: Download it and pay what you think it's worth via PayPal. So far, those who've paid average $3.80 each. Since Scalzi gets it all, those are *great* royalties.

➢ May 28 features Michael Kel Thompkins' attempt "to disguise content in marketing via eBay": each week for 17 weeks, this guy's putting one used designer item up for auction, accompanied by a brief installment from *The Neon Klintukh of Patusan City*, his serial work. Rose also discusses the Eldred v. Ashcroft case and notes the Palm eBook Studio, a $29 program so you can create, distribute and sell ebooks for the Palm OS platform.

➢ June 4 brings "M is for Nottingham?" from the trace Online Writing Centre, an "interactive collaborative Web drama" that unfolds in real time that "hopes to trace the lines of continuity between the book, electronic hypertext and live drama." The creator says, "The notion that the printed word has to be confined to print on paper is to disregard all of the other important forms of storytelling—from oral tales told around a fire to Egyptian tomb paintings to manuscripts on vellum to radio broadcasts." Assuming, charitably, that Marjorie Coverley Luesebrink really meant "stories" rather than "the printed word" (which doesn't work worth a damn on radio broadcasts, for example), my question is: "Who ever claimed that print on paper was the only narrative medium?"

➢ The lead item for June 25 is "*USA Today*'s news is fiction." The story: The paper's online Open Book Program, which serializes an original story every eight weeks. It's a great idea—but it's another stretch of the last four letters in "ebook." The current installment, for which the writer was paid less than $10,000 (but retains all other rights), is all of 7,000 words. 7,000 words is not a book. Also, Bowker wants to do PoD as a form of test marketing for out-of-print books—and Powell's Books is getting into the PoD business with the Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission, using Lightning Press for fulfillment.

Miscellany

KnowBetter.com is one of several sites dedicated to all things ebook. J. Alan Hartman has done the first two pieces of an eight-part article, "8 stupid things publishers to do mess up their sales," and it's not bad. He's talking about epublishers, of course. Number 8, posted May 24, is "formats"—mostly a complaint that epublishers don't make their wares available in all eight or more ebook formats. Number 7, posted June 11, is delivery options for ebooks—which he finds bizarre compared to real-world purchasing. I didn't realize most small epublishers don't provide instant download once your credit card is entered, and can only wonder why the big players can handle this. If you're hankering to publish your own ebooks, Hartman's worth reading.

I've been hearing about the Baen Free Library, and as a long-time science fiction reader I'm certainly aware of Jim Baen. The site is www.baen.com/library/ and there's some interesting stuff there. Baen Books puts *some* of its print titles up in ebook format. Free. "No conditions, no strings attached." Eric Flint's introductory essay gives the reasoning behind the decision, and I find it convincing. "Losses any author suffers from piracy are almost certainly offset by the additional publicity which, in practice, *any* kind of free copies of a book usually engender." Sensible authors know that public library circulation improves book sales; why wouldn't selective free versions work that way? Baen

Books isn't the only print publisher to figure this one out; National Academies makes its books available online, free, and finds that enhances sales. If people prefer to read booklength works as bound books, as I believe they do, this all makes enormous sense—and, so far, it's working for Baen Books. The Baen Free Library is voluntary for Baen's authors; they can choose not to participate and they can take books down after a while. Baen suggests that the first book in an ongoing series be posted—which makes sense, as it generates interest in the whole series. Baen Books expects the Free Library "to make us money by selling books." (Jim Baen also believes that "most people would rather be honest than dishonest"—as do I. Too bad RIAA and MPAA, and apparently AAP, seem to believe just the opposite.)

Eric Flint is doing a series of "Prime Palaver" pieces at the site; he's an engaging writer and the experiment is proving out nicely. The sixth in the series (with a Web title showing it as #3—Flint's as good with HTML as I am, apparently!) appeared on April 15. He takes the facts of the first 18 months' experience with the Baen Free Library (the introductory essay was posted in October 2000; I'm slow sometimes) and makes a convincing hard-figures case that it's working.

Two years ago, Donald T. Hawkins published a two-part article on ebooks in *Online* and called them "a new publishing revolution." My August 2001 "disContent" column was largely an update on the companies mentioned in Hawkins' article. Now he's back, in the July/August 2002 *Online*, with "Electronic books: Reports of their death have been exaggerated." It's an interesting article. "It is now apparent that the e-book shot missed its mark, and the e-book revolution has fizzled. Indeed, it never really got off the ground." He notes that attendance at the 2001 NIST ebook conference was down 50%--and goes on to say (correctly) that "e-books are not dead." This article is, to my taste, more balanced and interesting than his original, possibly because it lacks the "revolutionary" tone of that one. He now admits, "Most people don't like to read from a screen, and it will be extremely difficult to change that perception." He does suggest Questia is still around, but down to two dozen staff members. He then notes some signs of life for ebooks and suggests appropriate markets, among which he doesn't include books for "consumers." Most of Hawkins' current analysis is pretty much on the money.

It's always fun to see market forecasters "distancing themselves" from their earlier forecasts. A Reuters piece posted May 8, 2002 includes the following from David Card of Jupiter Media Metrix: "We haven't issued forecasts for the [ebook] indus-try in two years, because the market's going nowhere. E-books were a dumb idea. I am very negative on this market." And a Simon & Schuster VP says "everyone who works in this industry did not really think" that the aggressive sales forecasts were "what the future held." Naturally enough, S&S won't disclose ebook sales but says that they're "meeting its own internal forecasts, with year over year growth in the double digit percentage range."

PC Group Reviews

Desktop Computers

Atkin, Denny, and others, "The studio systems," *Computer Shopper* 22:6 (June 2002), pp. 104-9.

This roundup features "video-editing desktops," which means PCs with IEEE1394 ports, recordable DVD drives, some form of digital video editing or mastering software, and loads of hard disk space: the bar is 100GB. No CPU limit was set, 256MB RAM was required, and the video card only needed 32MB RAM. Two systems cost roughly $2,500-$2,600, another two in the "low $3,000s," while the last was $2,499—but without a display.

Highest rating goes to the $2,599 ABS All U Can DV, which features a 17" LCD display and the ability to accept analog as well as digital video. Best among the brand-name units is Dell's $3,399 Dimension 8200 with Dell Movie Studio; it includes a 120GB 7200RPM hard disk, a 2.2GHz Pentium 4, and an 18"-viewable Trinitron display, along with a Philips DVD+RW burner—but it doesn't have a second optical drive (all the others do), it's the only one with 256MB RAM instead of 512MB or more, and that price includes a mere one-year warranty.

Atkin, Denny, and Rick Broida, "Sweet deals for sensible gamers," *Computer Shopper* 22:7 (July 2002), pp. 102-7.

A little offbeat for *Cites & Insights* readers, if not possibly an oxymoron: Computers for dedicated game-players who won't spend more than two big ones for their hot gaming system. As you might expect for a bunch of price-trimming power systems, these are all AMD Athlon XP-based, using either the 1.53GHz 1800+ or the 1.67GHz 2000+, mostly the latter. All five come with 18"-viewable displays and four to six-part speaker systems. Four of five have 256MB DDR RAM, one has 512MB; hard disks (all 7200rpm) range from 40GB to 100GB. Surprisingly for gaming systems, two of the five use nVidia's GeForce3 Ti500 with 64MB display RAM; the others use today's hot card, the GeForce4 Ti

4600 with 128MB. They all include CD-RW burners and all but one also has a DVD-ROM drive.

Editors' Choices are the two most expensive machines: Alienware's Aurora DDR and Vicious' PC Phantom. Should your next PC be Vicious or Alienware? Don't ask me; I still haven't loaded the DVD-ROM game that came with my PC in 1999.

Karagiannis, Konstantinos, "Celeron gets serious," *PC Magazine* 21:12 (June 30, 2002), pp. 30-1.

The first two top-tier desktop PCs using 1.7GHz Celerons, for the first time based on the Pentium4 logic core. As the title suggests, *PC* likes the chip, saying that "the time has finally come to bury the desktop Pentium III." The new Celeron outperforms the older models on some benchmarks, while trailing on pure business applications. (The explanation for that failing, the deeper pipeline of the P4 architecture and the "branchy" nature of business applications, is at my eyes-glaze-over stage.)

The odd aspect is in a July 2002 *PC World* news-section commentary on the new Celeron with this contrary heading: "New 1.7-GHz Celeron: a bad buy." Why? Because *PC World*'s "PC Worldbench" number yields poor results—although, in this case, the comparison isn't to the earlier Celeron but to a 1.7GHz P4. So it all depends whose benchmarks you believe.

Dell's $799 Dimension 4500S is a "stripper," a system that cuts corners to meet an aggressive price point. It has no available PCI slots or drive bays and doesn't include a CD burner, and the 14" CRT is mediocre. On the other hand, Gateway's $1,099 300X is well equipped, with both CD-RW and DVD-ROM drives, a larger hard disk (40GB, 7200RPM), six USB2.0 ports, expansion slots, and a 15" LCD display. Despite costing $300 more, it's a better deal and wins the Editors' Choice.

Steers, Kirk, "Buying budget PCs: Dollars and sense," *PC World* 20:7 (July 2002), p. 64

What do you get for $749 or $833 ($658 after rebate)? A 1.3GHz Celeron CPU, 128MB RAM, Windows XP, and a fairly handsome minitower. The EMachines T1150 (cheaper after rebate) adds a 40GB disk, CD-RW burner, and 16" CRT; it rates 3.5 stars. Compaq's Presario 4000 has a better keyboard and has a slot to allow a graphics-card upgrade, but the display's only 14", the disk 20GB, and the optical drive read-only.

But the latest *PC World* reliability and service survey gave EMachines an Unacceptable rating, while Compaq squeaked by with a Poor. I guess Unacceptable doesn't really *mean* unacceptable.

Digital Audio

Kumin, Daniel, "May we serve you?" *Sound & Vision* 67:4 (May 2002), pp. 66-73.

It's hard to believe that this new product category—digital audio servers—already has five competitors. It's part of "convergence" but in an oddly divergent way. A digital audio server is a box that looks like an audio receiver or big DVD player, contains a hard disk and CD or DVD drive (maybe a CD burner), usually includes network/Internet connectivity, and has the software and controls to rip tracks from CDs and compress them into MP3 or another compressed audio format, identify them (usually using Internet databases), organize them, and play them back to a home audio system. Prices range from $800 to $1,500. The advantage: you don't need a computer to do any of this.

If you want this sort of device, the article offers a good set of reviews and, being in an audio magazine, includes lab reports. They're not that useful; the nature of MP3 is such that audio defects only show up in standard tests as a rolloff at 15.3 to 16KHz. Comments on sound quality are what you'd expect from a reviewer with functioning ears: 128kbps, the default MP3 encoding rate, offers *near*-CD sound "with only occasional telltale compression artifacts." At each player's maximum bit rate (always at least 192k), it was essentially impossible to distinguish compressed tracks from originals.

Should you pay $1,500 for a box with a 40GB hard disk, CD burner, Internet connection, and audio software? That depends in part on how you feel about computers, and some PC writers have pointed out that it would be far more economical to attach a cheap PC to your audio system—after all, those specs define part of an entry-level PC, selling these days for $600 to $800 *including* a display and software. But the PC will be bulkier and probably noisier, and may not be as convenient.

DVD Hardware and Software

Jacobi, Jon L., "Author, author: Burn video onto DVDs," *PC World* 20:6 (June 2002), pp. 60-1.

This mini-roundup might not be noteworthy except that it offers a second opinion on DVD authoring. It's an odd second opinion: Sonic MyDVD 3.1, PowerDirector 2 Pro, and DVD Workshop from Ulead *all* earn 3-star reviews; MyDVD ($79) and PowerDirector ($120-$135) are less expensive.

Jacobi, Jon L., "DVD burners: The right time to buy?" *PC World* 20:7 (July 2002), pp. 62-3.

Another mini-roundup, this time covering two DVD+RW drives. They both cost $499, they both earn three-star ratings, they both write faster than DVD-RW—but the discs are likely to be less compatible than DVD-R, based on Jacoby's experiments. The HP Dvd200i DVD+RW/+R and Sony DRU-120A are actually the same drive with different faceplates; the difference is software, and that turns out to be a mixed bag. Jacobi's advice is to wait a while before buying any flavor DVD burner.

Jacobi, Jon L., and Don Labriola and Alfred Poor, "The right writer," *Computer Shopper* 22:7 (July 2002), pp. 116-20.

This review of three DVD burners, covering four of the five possible standards (DVD-R, DVD-RW, DVD-RAM, and DVD+RW), omits DVD+R because it "isn't yet shipping"—even though a columnist in the same issue talks about the DVD+R's he's already burned. I wonder about Jacobi's internal consistency; this review says that DVD+RW discs "will play on most DVD players," but that's not what he says in *PC World* (above).

Oh, never mind; why should I expect consistency, particularly when the same writer does reviews in competing publications? This time around, there are no Best Buys. Highest-rated of the three drives is Panasonic's $350 DVDBurner, but it won't write CD-R or CD-RW discs, which makes it a thoroughly odd choice. (It burns DVD-RAM and DVD-R.)

Ozer, Jan, and Bill Howard, "Making your own DVDs just got easier," *PC Magazine* 21:10 (May 21, 2002), pp. 28-33.

This "first looks" article includes three group reviews related to DVD burning on Windows PCs. There are three different incompatible "standards" for rewritable DVD. In the hardware area, Pioneer's DVR-A04 updates the first affordable DVD burner, the DVR-A03 (if you're a Mac user, the SuperDrive is a DVR-A03), at a lower price and with strong resistance to underrun problems. It writes DVD-RW, DVD-R, CD-R, and CD-RW; DVD burning speed is good and data CD-R speed is very good at 7X measured rate. That $499 unit earns a perfect five-dot rating; the Vivastar RS-111, a $399 DVD-RAM and DVD-R writer, is slower and offers inferior software.

For DVD authoring, there's finally a competitor to DVDit! in the consumer-priced category. Ulead's $299 DVD Workshop appears to have more ease and flexibility than DVDit! but lacks Dolby Digital Import and DLT output, the latter omission meaning you may not be able to use Ulead to master a replicatable DVD. Ulead earns four dots to DVDit!s three. Three other products are grouped under "DVD utilities." MedioStream's neoDVD offers simple ways to capture videotape and create DVDs in a $30 program. Pinnacle's $299 Bungee DVD offers "TiVo-like" PVR functions for a PC along with DVD and SVCD authoring in an external box. Stomp's $79 RecordNow MAX Platinum is essentially a competitor to Roxio's Easy CD Creator, but it also includes some DVD authoring facilities (by bundling MedioStream neoDVD, actually). See the "Utility Software" section for further ntoes.

Sauer, Jeff, "Amateur hour," *EMedia* 15:4 (April 2002), pp. 30-9.

No point ratings, but good comparative reviews of under-$100 DVD authoring tools from a professional perspective. "Are these products serious enough for corporate users as well?" The answer seems to be a definite "Maybe," particularly in the case of Dazzle DVD Complete. These thoughtful discussions approach programs differently than reviews in computing magazines; as a result, the article offers an excellent complement to the other reviews.

Winkle, William Van, "DVDs on your PC," *PC Magazine* 21:11 (June 11, 2002), pp. 156-7.

This one isn't about creating DVDs—it's about playing them. Your DVD-ROM drive probably came with one of these five programs, unless it relies on Windows XP's Media Player support—but if you watch movies on your PC a lot, you might read this roundup. WinDVD 3.1 ($50) is the Editors' Choice, with PowerDVD XP 4.0 Deluxe a close second.

Notebook Computers

Behr, Mary E., "Power to the portable," *PC Magazine* 21:12 (June 30, 2002), pp. 98-115, and Howard, Bill, "IBM T30: the best business notebook," p. 38.

Why two stories? Because "First looks" has a later copy deadline than the main portion of the magazine, which allowed them to test the late-arriving IBM T30 along with the 13 notebooks in the roundup. The single review gives the T30 an Editors' Choice, unusual for standalone reviews; the $3,499 unit is expensive, but it's powerful, well-equipped, and for the first time in an IBM offers a touch pad along with the traditional IBM stick.

The primary review covers two segments of notebook computing: desktop replacements (which aren't quite) and "mainstream" notebooks (last year's thin-and-light notebooks). The other segments are value notebooks ("last year's model at a discount") and ultraportables.

Dell Latitude models take both Editors' Choices. The Latitude C840, $3,256 with a P4-1800 CPU, 37GB disk, CD-RW/DVD combo, 15" display, nVidia GeForce4 graphics with 32MB RAM, and 256MB DDR RAM, "comes very close to replacing your desktop PC." It weighs 8 pounds, 9.3 travel weight; the screen is one of Dell's high-density units, showing 1600x1200 on a 12x9" screen (15" diagonal): that's 133dpi resolution, the highest I've seen on a large LCD. (IBM, Sony, and Toshiba use similar high-definition screens).

The $2,756 Latitude C610 is slower, has a slightly smaller screen with slower graphics, and a smaller hard disk—but it's also lighter (5.7 pounds or 6.5 travel weight) and cheaper.

Optical Character Recognition

Breen, Christopher, "Optical character recognition applications," *Macworld* 19:6 (June 2002), pp. 31-2.

This little review is a comprehensive roundup of professional OCR programs for the Mac, apparently—both of them. ("Professional" as opposed to the cut-down versions bundled with scanners.) While FineReader Pro 5 is cheaper at $129, OmniPage Pro X has a better spell-check interface, more flexible recognition, PDF import, and a native OS X version. As a Windows user, I continue to be bemused by the comment that OS X native status doesn't matter much "because few scanners work with OS X," given how long it's now been since it became the standard Mac OS. Technically, OmniPage sells for $499, but you'd have to be a complete idiot to pay that much since the upgrade from *any* OCR package is $149. Even if you don't have a scanner-bundled program, just by FineReader first and save $222! For those looking for nirvana, the last phrase in the first paragraph is critical: "turning paper into pixels remains an imperfect process." Expect to spend a lot of time correcting words.

PDAs, Pocket PCs, Cell Phones, Pagers

"A show of handhelds," *Consumer Reports* 67:6 (June 2002), pp. 22-25.

This overview doesn't provide detailed specifications but does offer a good summary of the market and which units might best serve your needs. One illustration makes a point about thin PDAs that I'd never read before: While superthin units like Sony's Clié PEG-745 ft more easily in your pocket, they may be less comfortable to hold than the inch-thick Handspring and its ilk. The reviews give top marks to Sony's Clié PEG-S360 ($200) among Palm OS models and HP's Jornada 565 ($550) among Pocket PC models, with Palm OS models generally ranked higher and a slew of units just behind the Sony.

Nadel, Brian, "Waiting for the wireless revolution," *PC Magazine* 21:10 (May 21, 2002), pp. 84-98.

Make up your own mind about the inevitability of all the stuff discussed here—the "liberating" effects of being at work (or close to it) 24 hours a day, the likelihood of useful videoconferencing on wireless devices in the next few years. "Enrich our lives through constant communications" is one of those phrases that either resonates or raises hackles.

Worldviews aside, this long article includes useful background along with three group reviews: smart phones, PDA modems, and email devices. Editors' Choice among smart phones is Motorola's $299 V200 Personal Communicator, a cross between an overgrown two-way pager and a phone. Sierra's $300 Wireless AirCard 550/555, tested with the Compaq iPAQ 3800, is the Editors' Choice among PDA modems—at least partly because the device is also a cell phone (although it can't use the iPAQ's built-in microphone and speaker, relying instead on a headset jack). Finally, in a two-item roundup, the $500 BlackBerry RIM 957 gains the email device award; it's not a great PDA but the monochrome screen and real (albeit tiny) keyboard make it a fine email device.

Thornton, Carla, and Grace Aquino, "Next-generation PDAs," *PC World* 20:4 (April 2002), pp. 84-94.

This review covers a lot of ground, including 16 units in three groups: Basic PDAs (all Palm OS), advanced PDAs (mostly Pocket PC), and PDA/cell phone combinations. You need to understand your needs and read this and other articles to make sense of this field. For the record, the Best Buy among basic units is the $299 HandEra 330 (from a company I've never heard of), with a larger-than-usual screen (2.9x2.2", 320x240 pixels) and strong expansion capabilities, although it has a gray-scale screen. Casio's $545 Cassiopeia E-200 is the winner among advanced units, again for expansion as well as a bright screen and lots of RAM. There's no Best Buy among the combo units; they're strange hybrids that require careful consideration. The two highest ratings among the five are for Handspring's $399 Treo 180 and Samsung's $499 SPH-1300, wildly dissimilar devices.

Portable MP3 Players

Brown, Bruce, and Pete Brown, "Move with the music," *PC Magazine* 21:9 (May 7, 2002), pp. 146-8.

If you're willing to deal with a little more weight and size than "standard" MP3 portables, you can carry a lot more music a lot more flexibly. This review includes four CD/MP3 players (units that play CDs, either as audio carriers or encoded with MP3 tracks), one jukebox (with a 20GB hard disk), and three somewhat traditional small portables. Four-dot ratings go to the $400 SonicBlue RioRiot, the 20GB "jukebox" (a hardened battery-operated hard disk with MP3 electronics, a tuner, and a display), and iRiver's $200 iMP-350 SlimX, a CD/MP3 player that's slightly bigger than a CD at 5.5x5.25x0.75" (it weighs 8.8oz. and includes an FM receiver; the LCD is on the remote). Oddest unit? Probably the $150 Philips eXp401—it's the smallest and lightest of the CD players, but that's because it plays 8cm (3") CDs, hard to find and almost certainly more expensive for comparable capacity, since each one holds 180MB. For that matter, how many prerecorded 3" CDs have you seen? Most problematic: the $150 TDK Mojo 620 didn't read CD-RW discs—not unusual for an older CD player, but questionable for a modern MP3 unit.

Printers

Blachere, Kristina, and others, "Color coordinated," *Computer Shopper* 22:5 (May 2002), pp. 114-20.

This roundup includes a sampling of inkjet printers in three different price categories—but with only two budget, three midrange, and one high-end choice, it's hard to do much with the results. Maybe it's news that you can get a decent printer for $100—but you'll do better in the $150-$180 range. Given reviews elsewhere, I'm a little surprised to see Epson's Stylus C80 get the lowest rating in the roundup (tied with HP's Deskjet 940C), but it's hard to explain *Computer Shopper*'s numeric ratings.

Carlson, Kyla K., and Sean Timberlake, "The fine print," *Computer Shopper* 22:3 (March 2002), pp. 110-14.

Inkjets may dominate the home market for good reason—but if most of your printing is black and white, today's low-priced lasers will save money in the long run and probably print faster. This roundup includes five lasers that cost less than $300, print at 600dpi or better, and claim at least 10 pages per minute—although those speed claims are almost always exaggerated. Brother's $299 HL-1440 takes the Editors' Choice for speed and print quality.

Snell, Jason, "Turn pixels into print," *Macworld* 19:6 (June 2002), pp. 70-8.

This surprisingly long article (no ad pages) isn't primarily about printers, but it's a convenient category. There are two sets of comparisons: one of twelve online photo services, one of five photo-oriented inkjets. It's a solid article if you're considering online services, particularly if you're a Mac owner (although most of these services work equally well with Windows); a comparative table and text support allow reasonable comparison, but there are no mouse ratings. For print quality, Shutterfly comes in best, with PhotoAccess, Snapfish, and Kodak Picture Center just behind. Worst of the lot was PhotoWorks: "the photos we ordered were savagely autocorrected… PhotoWorks also heavily oversharpened our images."

The printer roundup includes two each from Canon and Epson, one from HP; the two Epsons cost $150 to $200 while the other three are $399 each. The two Epsons, the Stylus Photo 785EPX and Stylus Photo 820, share something else: the highest rating because of superior color fidelity and print quality. If you do much printing, you're better off with the $200 785EPX and its larger ink tanks.

Utility Software

"Cyberspace invaders," *Consumer Reports* 67:6 (June 2002), pp. 16-20.

Sure, it's an odd venue, but it's also a good commentary on threats to home computers with broadband Internet connections. Ratings include seven firewalls (six software, one hardware) and four antivirus packages. The article says six of the seven firewalls offered excellent protection against incoming threats (Sygate's Personal Firewall was the exception), while only two provided solid protection against outgoing threats. Outgoing threats may not be problematic if you also use antivirus software "and practice good computer hygiene," but if you use IM or file sharing, you need it. The two products with excellent protection in both directions are ZoneAlarm Pro 3.0 and Norton Personal Firewall 2002. ZoneAlarm (also highly rated by *PC Magazine* in a recent standalone review) offers more features and rates slightly higher. The firewall included with MS Windows XP does fine for incoming threats but has no protection against outgoing problems. Among antivirus products, Norton Antivirus and McAfee VirusScan both offer outstanding performance. Nor-

ton does full-disk scans faster than McAfee, but McAfee's a little easier to use.

Luhn, Robert, and Scott Spanbaurer, "Protect your PC," *PC World* 20:7 (July 2002), pp. 92-106.

This four-part article discusses dangers to your PC and rates 26 antivirus, firewall, "stealthware" elimination, and "spam-busting" programs. As usual, Norton AntiVirus gets the Best Buy mark for virus protection among a surprisingly broad range of seven programs. For firewalls, Sygate Personal Firewall Pro 5 and Zone Labs ZoneAlarm Pro 3 both get Best Buy seals. Lavasoft Ad-aware Plus 5 is the preferred stealthware finder; McAfee.com SpamKiller 2.87 the highest-rated spam fither.

Spector, Lincoln, "Tools for trouble-free computing," *PC World* 20:5 (May 2002), pp. 72-80.

This review considers several categories of system utility, reviewing Windows XP components alongside suite components and standalone programs. As with most utility software reviews, you need to read the article carefully before taking its advice. PowerQuest PartitionMagic is still the best tool for partitioning a hard disk. Surprisingly, Windows XP's built-in disk defragmenter gets the nod over Norton SpeedDisk—and, for the first time, tests under XP do *not* show speed improvement from defragging. OnTrack SystemSuite 4 offers the best disk cleanup and diagnostics, while PowerQuest Drive Image 5 offers the best tool to build a disk image. Although none of the tests showed Norton tools as Best Buys (virus protection wasn't included), SystemWorks 2002 gets the nod over Ontrack SystemSuite—largely because it's more reliable. One reason may be that Ontrack still includes CrashProof; back when Norton included a "crash guard," it seemed to be the most destabilizing program on my PC!

"10th annual utility guide," *PC Magazine* 21:11 (June 11, 2002), pp. 94-141.

This section has 36 pages of reviews—nothing compared to the good old days when *PC Magazine* could break your desk if you dropped it from a height, but still a monster review. "94 ways to make your computer work better," divided into 16 sections—from Personal Antivirus to Zip Utilities.

Don't expect a detailed summary; too much depends on your Windows version and particular needs. You *absolutely* need antivirus software, of course, and Norton AntiVirus is Editors' Choice among *ten* personal choices. (If you think you don't need antivirus software, please don't send me email! NAV quarantines *at least* two attachments a week on my work PC, even though they're always attachments I wouldn't open on a bet—NAV flags them as I'm marking them for deletion in Notes Mail.)

You might want to add Trojan horse protection. There's no Editors' Choice, but PestPatrol and Tauscan 1.6 both got perfect five-dot ratings. *PC Magazine* thinks disk partitioning is a great idea, and PartitionMagic 7.0 is a clear Editors' Choice.

The utility suite category has fallen on hard times, as Network Associates discontinued McAfee Office. Editors' Choice may be unexpected: Ontrack SystemSuite 4.0 gets the nod over Norton System-Works for better integration, useful extras, and a more coherent approach to Windows XP. In this roundup, Easy CD Creator 5.1 Platinum is Editors' Choice for CD & DVD writing. FTP Voyager 9.0 gets the award as an FTP solution, Kontiki 1.02 is the best download manager (and it's free), and PKZip 4.5 is the choice as a Zip utility. Some categories lack an Editors' Choice either because there's more than one excellent choice or no choice scores high enough for the honor.

Vamosi, Robert, "Subtract the ads," *Computer Shopper* 22:7 (July 2002), pp. 130-2.

The problem with blocking pop-ups is that some software blocks *all* pop-ups, including those that make Web sites work properly. Still, some people get frustrated enough by ads and unexpected pop-ups and pop-unders (which seem to be a remarkable combination of annoyance and uselessness) to add special software. According to this review, your best bet is InterMute's $30 AdSubtract Pro. (In this test, Ad-Aware didn't stop pop-up ads.)

The Details