

in on the wave of hype pushing the Internet, but having your novel star a guy who's computer skills add up to self-admitted 'gulf of ignorance' is probably not the best way to do that.

After only a few pages both Adams and Nash reveal themselves as technophobic, and it gets worse as the novel progresses. Every possible computer cliché is dragged out, from a database that contains all known criminal knowledge to a Virtual Reality helmet that gets Nash hot and sweaty it's so real.

The bizarre thing is that the technology is a sideshow to the main story, and guns and gore have much more to do with carrying the story forward than anything else (see the movie 'The Net' for another example of this kind of thing). A gang of incompetent gangsters somehow manage to almost setup a new nation by using biological weapons (a new strain of the plague believe it or not) to hold the world to ransom. And it is most gratifying to see that the gang-

sters are a mixture of Russians, Japanese and Koreans. Racial stereotyping anyone? The cold war is over but the enemies remain the same.

Add to the mix some atrocious writing, a feature of which is a desperately scripted romantic interest ('How would she ever get to know this enigmatic man?'), an underground spy network called 'Spandau' (Maxwell Smart where are you when we need you), a penchant for espionage acronyms and some rather too graphic descriptions of violence and plague after-effects, and you have a novel to be avoided at all costs.

Perhaps the scariest thing comes in the final lines (don't worry, it doesn't spoil it):

One thing was certain — Spandau would be back. Well, so would he.

Help! A sequel!

CHRISTIAN MCGREGOR

Christian McGregor wishes Devo would tour again.

Cunning FOG index or the Coleman-Liau Grade Level. Despite this I am willing to recommend *Plain Language for Lawyers* as an interesting, edifying and useful read.

MICHAEL EASTON

Michael Easton works at the Australian Law Reform Commission.

Everyday Law

by Stella Tarakson; The Federation Press 1995; 291 pp; \$14.95.

As a kid, I remember my mother giving me the type of advice that mothers give — don't speak with your mouth full, pick your clothes up off the bathroom floor, be back before dark, etc., etc.

There were various punishments for disobeying these orders, perhaps I wouldn't be allowed to watch the A-Team, or Dr Who, but in general the punishment fitted the crime and I could comprehend why these things were bad.

However, there were some things that stepped outside of this set of rules: advice that was delivered in such a grave way, that I understood, even as a child, that these were not areas in which to test my independence — don't open the door if I'm not here, never go near that man's house at night, etc., etc. At the time it was hard to understand what was so different about these crimes. The full realisation would take many years to develop.

It was with a similar tone that I remember my mother once saying to me 'Never have anything to do with the law if you can help it'. This was good advice. Unfortunately, no one can help it. Some people will make a career of trying (usually criminals), but most of us will try to live within its bounds. Increasingly, the complexity of the legal system is making the task of living within its bounds difficult for all but the specialist. *Everyday Law* attempts to address this issue.

Everyday Law presents itself as a user's guide for living under Australian law. It is written expressly for the non-lawyer, and makes no assumptions about the reader's legal knowledge. Jargon is kept to a minimum, except where it serves to explain the type of language that you might encounter, and a glossary provides a quick point of reference for any terms that may have been forgotten.

Everyday Law is divided into three major sections each of which is further

Plain Language for Lawyers

Michèle M. Asprey; Federation Press 1996; 241 pp; 2nd edn, \$30.00 softcover.

Your average cynical lawyer might approach this book expecting a load of facile, tiresome, banalities squeezed from the pen of an underemployed, quixotic ex-Esperanto enthusiast.

They would be pleasantly surprised. In a well-written, witty and extremely readable book Michèle Asprey describes what plain legal language is, argues for its importance and provides practical advice for drafting legal documents that replace obfuscation with clarity.

According to Ms Asprey the secret to Plain Language, legal or otherwise, can be encapsulated in three words — consider your reader. How does she fare when judged by her own standard?

To appeal to the weary lawyer who spends the day immersed in dreary legal language she writes in a chatty style illuminated by the odd sardonic aside, well-chosen quotation and oblique reference. Unlikely as it may seem, given the rather dry topic, it is possible to read this book from cover to cover and enjoy it. An extensive index also enables it to be used as a reference book.

Of course lawyers want the facts, the evidence and the precedents along with a convincing argument before they will

believe anything. This book demonstrates research of considerable scope.

Ms Asprey canvasses national and international moves to eradicate legalese. She quotes studies demonstrating the economic benefits of plain legal language. She surveys plain language policies, the rules of legal interpretation and efforts to legislate for intelligibility. Cases where the clarity of language has been an issue, such as *Commercial Bank of Australia v Amadio*, are analysed. Legal precedents on specific questions such as the use of punctuation and the future tense are included for those reluctant to let go of hallowed legal clichés.

Finally, as all lawyers have their feet firmly on the ground, they want some practical advice. But watch it, they'll walk away in a huff if they think they are being patronised. Michèle Asprey does not provide templates or set little tests, but engages the reader in a discussion of issues such as vocabulary, grammatical structures, legal affectations, textual organisation and document design.

I didn't have the time to subject her prose to the precise statistical analysis of the Flesch Reading Ease test, the

divided (the book has a comprehensive index.)

Part One — Access to Justice — introduces our legal system, its processes, participants, and our rights and responsibilities within that system. Topics include: Lawyers and Fees, Going to Court, Alternatives to Court, Dealing with the Government, etc.

Part Two — Personal Concerns — covers Your Family (which includes areas such as Domestic Violence, Custody and Access, Property Settlements, etc.), Health and Safety, Children and the Law, Your Job, etc.

Part Three — Property Concerns — covers Your Home, Your Neighbour-

hood, Purchaser's Problems (including Consumer Protection and Credit Issues), Wills, etc. The book's intention is not to be a substitute for legal advice, but a point of reference, outlining various options and allowing the reader to make the most of the legal services that are available.

Furthermore, the book does not attempt to address every legal issue that you might encounter. Rather, it covers the most common areas in greater depth and each section ends with suggestions for further reading should you wish to take your research to the next level.

I found the book to be extremely clear in its explanations of the legal

concepts involved in each area as well as offering a number of practical suggestions for dealing with the realities of the legal system.

So who will buy this book? Lawyers won't need it, and the general public would probably rather buy the latest Danielle Steele. This is a shame because this book has a lot to offer your typical Steele reader.

Perhaps, you could slip a copy into someone's Christmas stocking (better put in a CD as well). Recommended.

DAMIEN HOGAN

Damien Hogan is not a lawyer.

Law Reform column continued from p.140

The national firearms register: The APMC resolved that all jurisdictions should have integrated gun licence and registration systems linked through the National Exchange of Police Information. This will mean NSW, Queensland and Tasmania must establish registration systems. The other jurisdictions already have gun registration.

Safe storage of guns: The APMC agreed on a national standard for gun storage. Category A and B guns must be stored in a locked hardwood or steel receptacle weighing more than 150 kg or fixed to a building. Category C, D and

H guns must be stored in a steel safe fixed to the building. All ammunition must be stored in a locked container separate from the guns.

Amnesty and compensation: Anyone who currently owns a prohibited weapon will be able to hand it in and receive compensation during a 12-month amnesty. The compensation will be based on the value of the gun in March 1996. People who currently own guns without a licence will have 12 months to apply for a licence. After the amnesty, penalties for breaches of the law will be severe.

What happens next: These measures will reduce the private arsenal in

Australia by taking certain types of gun off the market, and by making many current owners ineligible to own guns, since they will be unable to prove genuine reason. But the laws are not secure. The agreement is only the start — now comes the implementation phase, in which each State and Territory will amend their laws. The gun lobby may still succeed in pressuring politicians to water down the agreement when it comes to drafting State laws.

Rebecca Peters

Rebecca Peters, Coalition for Gun Control P.O. Box 167, Camperdown NSW 2050 Australia, tel 61 15 234 220 fax: 61 2 351 5038 email: rpeters@extro.ucc.su.oz.au

Anderson brief continued from p.144

controlled right for convicted felons to institute 'any civil proceedings in any court'. Current moves to deny such rights would have to amend this Act and reverse this reform.

An international challenge to new legislation which seeks to extinguish prisoners' rights would argue against the necessarily discriminatory nature of such laws, and against the denial of equality before the law. Politicians who seek to deny universal rights by closing this alleged 'loophole' will distinguish themselves from their predecessors, who helped establish these universal rights.

Tim Anderson is a lecturer in social policy at the University of Western Sydney, and a committee member of the NSW Council for Civil Liberties.

MORE NOTICES . . .

'Pickle Street' Educational CD Rom

The New South Wales Board of Studies has released a CD Rom which 'brings Australian law to life'. By meeting the residents of Pickle Street, discussing and evaluating their problems, users become familiar with legal and non-legal solutions to issues in family, housing and criminal law. The disk also includes commentary on the law by a number of prominent Australian legal, political and popular culture personalities. In addition there is a reference database containing over 100 articles. The CD Rom is available from the Board of Studies (NSW), phone (02) 9927 8111.

Coalition for Class Actions News

The Coalition for Class Actions is a group of community organisations seeking to reform the law on class actions in NSW to bring it in line with Federal Court

procedure. It was formed after the High Court decision in *Carnie v Esanda* which made class actions more widely available by holding that a class action can still be launched where there are separate contracts and where damages are claimed. The Carnies returned to the NSW Supreme Court in September last year where Justice Young decided that the 'class' would be defined on an 'opt in' rather than 'opt out' basis. The Carnies, wheat farmers in NSW who are legally aided, were required to foot the bill for sending out the letters inviting people to opt in. The Coalition can be contacted through PIAC tel 02 299 7833.

SUPPORT GUN CONTROL IN AUSTRALIA

Send a donation to the Coalition for Gun Control, P.O. Box 167, Camperdown NSW 2050. Tel 0419 603 527.