

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