



Belinda Weaver

weaver@alia.org.au

Even if the thought of e-books makes you squirm, they are out there, and many libraries are trying them out...

You have to know about them

Even if the thought of e-books makes you squirm, they are out there, and many libraries are trying them out, for example, as a way of making popular texts more easily available to students. Papers from the day-long conference, *E-Books 2001 — the next wave of the digital library*, held in London in March this year, will get you up to speed on the topic. The conference attracted attendees from university and research libraries in the United Kingdom and abroad as well as representatives from scholarly and commercial publishing. Services from publishers such as Questia (<http://www.questia.com/>), ebrary (<http://www.ebrary.com/>), Cambridge University Press and Taylor & Francis were covered. Questia currently has 35 000 complete books and journal articles online, while ebrary, despite a publishing deal with Yale University Press, is yet to launch. You can read the conference report online or see presentations from individual sessions. There are also further e-book and e-library links provided. <http://litc.sbu.ac.uk/ebooks2001/>. If you are interested in the technology for using e-books, have a look at Bibliofuture (<http://www.geocities.com/bibliofuture/>), a spot for librarians to share information on electronic book readers.

A warlike warlock?

MERLN is an acronym for the Military Education Research Library Network. This United States network offers search access to library holdings and electronic information resources of participating libraries. Libraries include those of the Marine Corps University, the National Defense University, the United States Air Force Academy, the United States Army War College, the Military History Institute and the United States Coast Guard Academy. When searching, you can search any or all of the library catalogues, or search the AUL Index to Military Periodicals. Search options include author, title or subject, and there is an advanced search for greater precision [<http://merln.ndu.edu/>].

Not a myth

The Encyclopedia Mythica [<http://www.pantheon.org/mythica.html>] contains entries on mythology, folklore and legends. These include more than 5700 definitions of gods and goddesses, supernatural beings and legendary creatures and monsters from all over the world. The encyclopaedia has been on-

line since 1995, and is updated frequently. You can browse by category, or search for articles on a specific topic such as Excalibur. There is information here on legendary animals such as unicorns and dragons, on gods and goddesses from many religions, including Greek, Japanese, Hindu, and Native American, on mythical places such as Atlantis, Avalon, and Thule, and on supernatural creatures such as gnomes, leprechauns, and fairies. There is an image gallery for artistic representations of heroes and gods, and you can get family trees for Zeus, Helen of Troy and others. The site is simply organised but looks very nice and is very easy to use.

The lowdown on USENET

For anyone who has ever struggled to locate USENET newsgroups, or who has felt that existing newsgroup tools were inadequate, Harley Hahn's Master List of Usenet Newsgroups [<http://www.harley.com/usenet/>] is for you. The array of topics is fairly confounding. Is there really a list devoted just to the discussion of interactive fiction games? Indeed there is. And it is great that the net has allowed enthusiasts of all kinds to come together to share their interests and expertise. It could be very lonely having a hobby shared by no-one else in one's circle. And it is not all hobbies and wacky stuff — there are serious newsgroups on a whole raft of topics. You can search for topics within messages here as well as using the site to locate groups. If you want the full USENET, Google Groups (<http://groups.google.com/>) is now providing message archives back to 1995.

Scientific searches

When I saw the blurb for Scirus [<http://www.scirus.com/>], a new search engine for scientific, technical and medical information sources, I thought it would be just another ho-hum tool struggling to make a place for itself in an already crowded area. But it is much more than that. It is an easy-to-use and very useful search service, especially for large organisations which subscribe to scientific journal services, such as Science Direct, as the search tool retrieves article links as well as links to websites on a topic. To see a full article, your organisation needs to be a subscriber to the journal. Searches can be limited just to 'membership sources', that is, subscription journals, or you can search for everything the site can offer. While the aim

of the site is to index 'hard' scientific websites and articles, there is some social and behavioural science material in there as well. You can search by word or phrase, and the search tool suggests a number of related terms you can try in an effort to help you improve your search results.

Free science

More science is on offer at the United States National Academies [<http://www.nationalacademies.org/>], a site which brings together a range of programs, information and publications from its constituent parts — the National Research Council, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine. There is a vast array of freely-available material here, including more than 2500 online books and reports, some journals (others may require subscriptions to view), and news of current projects. As with Scirus, it is not all hard science — there is material in the social sciences and education, transport and global studies along with the harder stuff of earth studies, life science and medicine, engineering and physical science. If you want to assist in the brain drain, point out to users the very large internship program offered by the National Academies for students who want to try their hand at a range of jobs and research opportunities in different disciplines.

Talking about usability

A new mailing list has been recently created for librarians and other professionals to discuss the usability (or otherwise) of online journal services. The list, Library User Interface Issues (LUII) [<http://www.cochran.sbc.edu/luui/>], will look at usability problems such as broken links, inadequate online help, difficulties with e-mailing or printing out articles, confusing layout and design, and frames. Subscribers to the list can get access to the Frequently Asked Questions file, product reviews and ratings, industry contacts, standards on library user interfaces and other usability links. Information about the list, including instructions for joining are at

LIS e-journals

The Electronic Journals in Librarianship and Information Science [<http://www.inf.aber.ac.uk/tpl/ejlib/>] pages from the Thomas Parry Library at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, provide an annotated list of electronic journals in librarianship and information sci-

ence. Titles are listed alphabetically, but you can also search for journals by country, or look for titles by topic, for example, acquisitions. When you select a journal, you get a table of relevant information about the title, such as the URL, publisher, dates available, latest update to online issues, software required (if any) and navigation tools at the site, for example, search engine, table of contents. In some cases, you can link straight through to the journal itself. Some entries link readers to further information about service providers such as Aslib, OCLC and Ingenta.

The biggest job in the world ?

The folks at the Internet Archive [<http://www.archive.org/>] have taken on possibly the world's most mammoth task — that of building a digital library of internet sites and other cultural materials that exist in digital form. The archive, founded in 1996, will provide free access to researchers, historians, scholars, and the general public to their collections. The archive's aim is to prevent future scholars experiencing a 'digital dark age' where important collections are unavailable or incomplete. The Archive cites the lack of a comprehensive archive for radio or television programs as one incentive for ensuring that 'born digital' materials do not similarly vanish permanently. The Archive is collaborating with other institutions such as the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian to permanently preserve public material. There is also information on the site for anyone wishing to donate a digital collection to the Archive.

Digital Nature

Nature journal is currently hosting a forum on the impact the growth and spread of the web has had on the publishing of original scientific research. While this topic has been substantially covered in specialist journals, the forum aims to spread the discussion wider and allow anyone with an interest in the topic — libraries, print and digital publishers, scientists and researchers — to record their views online about what has happened up till now, and how things will develop in the future. Will the scholarly journal vanish from sight to be replaced by eprint services? Have your say on future e-access to the primary literature at <http://www.nature.com/nature/debates/e-access/index.html>. ■

**This column
[with URL links]
can be found at:**



Contributions and suggestions for this column are always welcome. Please contact Belinda Weaver via e-mail.

A new mailing list has been recently created for librarians and other professionals to discuss the usability (or otherwise) of online journal services...