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## Leaving Reality Behind

by Dave Green

Most Mute readers will remember the 'Toywar'. November 1999: European art group etoy get sued by 'real' corporation eToys. They argue that eToys customers are being confused and upset by the spoof dot-com when they mistakenly visit 'etoy.com' instead of 'etoys.com'. Fortunately, the artists at etoy.com could muster a persuasive counter-argument: they'd registered this domain years before their new rival even existed.

Adam Wishart (who's made a few of those Back To The Floor shows for the BBC) and Swiss TV reporter Regula Bochsler present an impressively impartial account of what went on before, during and after the Toywar - right down to how the internet's domain name system came to be. It's hard to imagine many readers siding with the big US company, but the book does illustrate the views of both sides, and provides plenty of context for those of us who never got the hang of reading etoy.com's CAPS LOCK-packed press releases.

As luck would have it, eToys' share valuation hit the skids at around the same time that etoy.com's campaign of online outrage was gathering increasing support, and it all ended happily for supporters of the little guy. Or did it? As Josephine Berry pointed out [Mute, 16], the line between parodying corporate behaviour and actively emulating it became (intentionally?) blurred for the triumphant art group, now happily photographing themselves outside skyscrapers in Matrix-style sunglasses.

Bizarrely, the book was due to be published earlier this year, but was held up after etoy - the art collective, i.e. the 'good guys' - tried to bring out an injunction against the writers for allegedly portraying them in a negative light. Like Nietzsche says: battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster. And if you're in the habit of gazing into the abyss of corporate morality, then remember: it's gazing into you too.

Leaving Reality Behind: The battle for the Soul of the Internet // Adam Wishart & Regula Bochsler // 4th Estate // hb 356 pp // ISBN: 1841155934 // £16.99

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