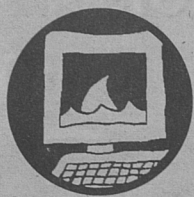


CYBER



SHARK

BY MIKI THOMAS

CyberShopping



Happy Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanza! Yes, it's that time of the year again, folks. If you celebrate one of the holidays or if you are ecumenically minded (or just plain greedy) and celebrate all three, that means having to drag yourself to the nearest mall, usually at the last minute, to buy presents for family and friends. However, the Internet and the web do offer alternatives to the holiday rush. These days, many people are shopping by computer.

Of course, Internet shopping is not without its drawbacks. There are security concerns regarding the use of credit cards. Never give your credit card number if a site is not secure. Often, you can tell a site is secure if there is an icon of a closed lock on the lower left hand corner of your screen. If the lock is open, that means that particular page of the site is not secure. If you want to purchase a product on a site that you are not sure offers credit card security, see if you can print the order form and pay for your purchase by check or money order.

Another drawback to shopping online is either the lack of information about a product or too much information about the product that takes forever to download. If you want more information about what you want to purchase, email the

company or call. You don't want to purchase something that may not be up to your expectations. Also, make sure the company in question offers a good returns policy. If a site is taking long to download, see about ordering the catalog by snail mail if one is available.

The biggest online shopping sites are CD Now (cdnow.com), Amazon.com, the online bookstore (amazon.com), and the online version of Barnes and Noble (www.barnesandnoble.com). I, and others I have talked to who have ordered stuff from those companies, found that often the prices are well below what one would pay at the mall, even when factoring in shipping costs. The service is quick and the returns policy for each is comparable to most catalog companies. Some companies have you register as a new account so that if you do order with them again, all you have to do is plug in your account number in the order form. If you do have any questions or concerns about your order, don't forget to print out the emailed confirmation with your account and order tracking numbers before contacting the company.

There are a few GLBT shopping sites. However, I can't vouch for their service or products since I nor anyone I know have purchased anything from them. The first is a "cybermall" dedicated to products geared to lesbians as well as women in general called The Artemis

Online Mall (<http://www.webgal.com/artemis>). Like a "real" mall, a "cybermall" is a site with links to other sites arranged by category. Artemis offers not only a list of categories to choose from but has a search engine as well if you are looking for something in particular.

For men, there is The Gay Men's Mall (<http://www.gaymensmall.com/gmm.html>). The real life counterpart for this particular mall would be located in a red light district. Nearly each link is for a triple X site. Unless you plan on giving your beloved a membership to the "Uncut Studs" website, there isn't much to recommend The Gay Men's Mall. It simply comes across as a cheesy and cynical way to exploit the stereotype that gay men are nothing more than sex maniacs.

For both men and women, there is Zebra'z (www.zebraz.com) which appears to be taking up where Shocking Gray left off. Like that late and lamented catalog, Zebra'z offers fashion accessories, jewelry, music and other GLBT themed products. The problem I found with this site is that because each offering is pictured, it takes forever to download a page. Just for the cards and posters page, there were 56 images. Thank goodness Zebra'z does offer a catalog available through snail mail for \$3.

If you really want to give a gift that is truly unique, especially to those who have everything,

Never give your credit card number if a site is not secure.

Follow Up to the November Elections

If you want to go beyond mere voting in getting your voice heard in the political arena, I have found the perfect web site. It's called E-The People (www.e-thepeople.com/), a self-described "interactive town hall." Through E-The People, you can send email messages to over 140,000 local, state, and federal officials around the country about your concerns. If the official you want to send a message to doesn't have an email address, E-The People will fax it to that official for free. You can also start a petition going about an issue you care about or sign a petition that's already posted. There are several on the site related to hate crime legislation right now. The site is free and non-partisan. ▼

take a peek at this site that came to my attention recently. The Woolly Hill Farm of Bridport, VT has a new website (www.sover.net/~wooly/) describing its operations and products. There are pictures of the Corriedale sheep that are bred on the farm (the lambs are especially cute) and information about the breed. If you are particularly ambitious, you can knit a sweater or a pair of socks using wool from Woolly Hill. How about organic lamb for that holiday feast? For the truly eccentric, you can buy an entire flock of sheep for \$2,000, but do check zoning laws first.

The Cybershark would like to wish everyone a Happy Holiday season! Now, I've got to go. I've got some major shopping to do.

STARGAZER

It may be December but the atmosphere is heated with anticipation. Goodbye 1998! Let's proudly welcome in 1999. The month begins with some beneficent aspects to surprising Uranus and mystical Neptune and finishes with a ho ho ho Sun in Capricorn. Sit on Santa's lap and confess; Have you been naughty or nice?

ARIES (MARCH 21 - APRIL 20)

Proud Rams combine business with pleasure this December when your wildest fantasies find an appreciative audience and your heated efforts produce enduring results. Travel far afield early in the month, cousin, but stick close to home for the holidays. Pals provide a few happy surprises that bolsters your sagging confidence. Let's hope those surprises come wrapped from Tiffany.

TAURUS (APRIL 21 - MAY 21)

How much fun can a gay Bull have without laughing? The planets pop your cork this December; spray the champagne around and don't slip on the puddles. Generate attention in your career before the 23rd; the Sun high-

lights your good points to those with the power in surprising ways. After you grab the glory, recharge in some faraway hideaway with a merry elf... or two.

GEMINI (MAY 22 - JUNE 21)

Pink Twins are happiest when ensconced in a relationship. Thank your lucky stars this December when the planets conspire to make a match. If you're already spoken for, use the time before Christmas to solidify and cocoon. If you're still trawling, try casting your net farther afield. Or send out a search party with the emphasis on party. New Years ain't that far off, kid.

CANCER (JUNE 22 - JULY 23)

Planets serve up a delicious combination of Uranus and Neptune in early December but queer Crabs can't decide how to feed their hunger. Is the way to a lover's heart through their stomach or some place lower on the body? (Hint: Stop at the knees and retrace your steps.) Feast before the 23rd. After that, you'll be content to plotz in your jammies and watch the ball drop on tv.

LEO (JULY 24 - AUGUST 23)

Proud and regal Lions are up to their old tricks in early December when a cavalcade of planets boogie their way through Sagittarius. Join the conga line before the 23rd. As the Sun moves on, so will you. Before you know it you'll be burning the midnight oil catching up on last minute job demands. Happy New Year! Turn out the light when you leave.

VIRGO (AUGUST 24 - SEPTEMBER 23)

Try to repair any frayed family lines in early December. The fates encourage gay Virgos to make one last try at harmony before 1998 is put to bed. No matter how your good intentions are received, you'll be party-hearty-ready by the 23rd. You'll have your choice of venues. The new year brings a fresh affirming breeze; don't be held back by anyone - animal, vegetable or parent.

LIBRA (SEPTEMBER 24 - OCTOBER 23)

Proud Libras have more energy than usual, thanks to robust Mars in your own sign. Make your opinions known in early December when the planets hand you an amplifier. It's never too late to become politically involved in our community issues. Work your wonders

before the 23rd, cousin. After that, you'll quiet down and sedately entertain at home.

SCORPIO (OCTOBER 24 - NOVEMBER 22)

There is a light at the end of the fiscal tunnel this December when more than a few planets highlight finances. Proud Scorps may receive a much needed boost from family members or discover a cache hidden away at home. Before you remove the floorboards in search of booty, remember that money cannot buy everything. Then again, it does buy nice champagne...

SAGITTARIUS (NOVEMBER 23 - DECEMBER 22)

Gay Archers are well rewarded in early December when four major planets hover in your own sign. Make good use of all this attention by launching some new projects and meeting scads of new people. But meet and greet before the 23rd, cousin. After that you're less inclined to strut your stuff for the hoi poloi. Life then has to make dollars to make sense. Invest wisely.

CAPRICORN (DECEMBER 23 - JANUARY 20)

Clean out your closet in early December and proudly welcome in

1999. Gay Caps are given plenty of encouragement from beneficial Uranus and Neptune. Long held values are examined and dissected. Toss out what is no longer affirming. Don't hold back after the 23rd; the world demands your attention. Hint: Cellophane panties make you the belle of the ball.

AQUARIUS (JANUARY 21 - FEBRUARY 19)

Friends conspire to push you Out into the limelight in early December as Neptune and Uranus guarantee that you will make an unusual first impression. (Can it be those whips?) Strive for personal fulfillment after the 23rd when you're driven to perform a good gay deed for a good gay cause. Ring in 1999 with enough good karma to float a flotilla. Is it cruise season already?

PISCES (FEBRUARY 20 - MARCH 20)

Pink Fish can make a few strides in their career in early December when the planets insure that all your hard work is recognized and rewarded. Gather your professional rosebuds before the 23rd. After that, you become more interested in expanding your social circles rather than your resume. Good thing too; they say it's lonely at the top, pal.