



Cary Fowler, right, executive director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust, talks with a television crew during a tour of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. The facility inside a mountain consists primarily of a 130-meter tunnel leading to three spartan storage rooms lined with metal shelves. But portraits of a far more sophisticated and devious place are being painted by writers, filmmakers and other architects of pop culture.

'Doomsday' for fun, profit

From novels to video games, science gets sinister in Svalbard

It seems the Forces Of Evil, when not forging Obama's birth documents and creating more film of the false moon landing, are busy these days plotting the apocalypse in secretive research facilities in the Norwegian Arctic.

Just ask a child heroine drawn "into a savage struggle among armoured bears and witch clans of the Arctic, and lead her to a scientific research centre where experiments too horrible to talk about are being carried out." Or villains motivated by the theory "control food and you control all the people of the world."

End-of-the-world and out-of-this-world

Supreme leader: U.N. Secretary-General Ban ki-moon to visit Svalbard next month
Details at www.icepeople.net

tales are being spun in one of the summer's best-selling books, an upcoming TV series, a major film coming next year and an assortment of other pop culture. Much of it centers around a place bearing remarkable resemblance to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault - when it's not named directly - and some isn't

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Airport traffic down sharply so far in '09

25.7 percent drop in flights has Longyearbyen officials looking at cost cutting, parking fees

Flights at Longyearbyen Airport, after surging in 2008, are down sharply for the first half of 2009, including a 37.1 percent drop in cargo and route charter flights that provide most of the airport's income.

The 25.7 percent drop in overall traffic from Jan. 1 to June 30 includes a relatively small 8 percent drop in passengers, all totals roughly matching levels from 2007. The global economic recession is cited as part of the reason for the drop, but tourism and government officials have also noted traffic in 2008 got a boost from landmark events such as the International Polar Year and the opening of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

Svalbard's decline is the largest among the 46 Norwegian airports operated by Avinor, which issues the flight reports. The agency reported a 4.5 percent drop nationwide during the first half of 2009 with wide variations defying size and region. Oslo, for instance, dropped 10 percent, Bergen 1.3 percent and the small Arctic city of Kirkenes 2.5 percent.

Most of the airport's income comes from movement-related activity such as takeoff fees, **See AIRPORT, page 3**

Total flights in Longyearbyen	
2000.....	4,882
2001.....	5,890
2002.....	5,532
2003.....	5,963
2004.....	6,268
2005.....	6,062
2006.....	6,521
2007.....	7,064
2008.....	8,911
2009*.....	7,080

*Estimate based on Jan.-June comparison from 2008

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A 17-day trek with a mid-trip gig

EXCLUSIVE: Download the jazz album *Improvisaties Piano Solo* by Maarten Regtien **FREE** at www.icepeople.net

Runners hardly expect to post record times during the North Pole Marathon, so Maarten Regtien deserves some slack if he wasn't at his peak coming straight to the piano after an eight-day trek in the Arctic cold.

With sports tape wrapped around his fingers while crossing glaciers and his mind on alert for polar bears, improvising a two-hour

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Maarten Regtien performs a solo jazz concert July 22 at Galleri Svalbard.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.



Two scientists trying to get to an Arctic seed vault after a nuclear war prepare for battle with a team of commandos in the 2008 movie "Frozen Seed," a nine-minute Canadian project awarded best film at the Hamilton Cinematic Festival.

Some vault tales based on real concerns

DOOMSDAY, from page 1

entirely in jest.

Maybe it's due to one of the vault's nicknames.

"When opening it a year ago there was a bit of a joke in the science press: 'Ha, ha - they are opening a doomsday vault,'" said Roland von Bothmer, a professor at the Nordic Genetic Resource Center who manages public relations for the seed vault. The scientists actually involved with the facility, he added, "were very careful not to call it a doomsday vault."

The seed vault, despite opening only 17 months ago, is perhaps the best-known of 1,400 such facilities worldwide for storing spare seeds deposited by countries and institutions for emergency use. The "exotic" location captured and continues receiving widespread global media interest, as does its exclusive status as the "backup" for other gene banks with its record capacity of 2.25 billion seeds.

Another nickname for the Svalbard facility burrowed more than 100 meters into a mountainside is the "new Noah's Ark," a concept used by two independent filmmakers whose

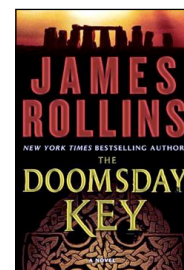
short movies fictionalize concerns some have raised about the vault. Among the issues are whether seed banks give governments and/or agribusiness excessive control of the world potential future food supply and if vaults distract attention from preparing farmers at the local level to deal with problems such as disasters and climate change.

While some voice concerns about the consequences of misguided thinking, others see as a conspiracy by control-hungry powermongers. The latter group of skeptics in particular isn't something some supporters of the vault are thrilled about discussing.

"It just gives credence to it," said Cary Fowler, executive director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust. He said news articles about the vault "must be running 1,000 to 1" in favor and no governments have formally criticized it.

"Last month we had the anniversary of the Apollo moon landing," he said. "Six percent believe it was a conspiracy. We're much lower than that."

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.



The survival/horror game "Cryostasis: Sleep of Reason," left, and James Rollins' novel "The Doomsday Key" are among current projects involving Arctic scientists and the surreal.

Summertime...and the weather is cheezy



A light dusting of snow covers Longyearbyen at about 5 a.m. July 22. Temperatures hovered around 0°C overnight, with winds above 10 km/h dropping the windchill factor below freezing. The snow melted within a couple of hours and temperatures warmed gradually to a high of about 7°C by the weekend. The average temperature for Longyearbyen in July is about 6°C.

Air traffic down, but flights harder to get

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handling and deicing services rather than passenger-related charges such as terminal and security fees, said Ole M. Rambech, the airport's manager.

"What's interesting is when it comes to income is route charter and freight," he said. "Those are the movements that are giving us income."

The drop in traffic, combined with an abundance of cars parked in the lot for long stretches while local residents are on vacation, has Rambech suggesting fees may be necessary starting this fall or next spring.

"We are the only one in Norway with a (free) system," he told *Svalbardposten*. "It is partly a curiosity and also nice, but we cannot use several million kroner to expand the parking lot."

Rambech, in a follow-up e-mail, stated there won't be any cutbacks in safety measures at the airport, but "we are reducing costs where possible."

Scandinavian Airlines reported a 14.1 percent drop in passenger traffic in June compared to a year ago due to the recession, although the ratio of seats filled remains largely unchanged after numerous cost-cutting measures. One of

those was eliminating one of two daily flights between Tromsø and Longyearbyen in May, causing delays in mail and other services. Tourism officials have said available flights this year are both more expensive and harder to find due to reduced capacity, which is also due to Norwegian Airlines' decision not to fly to Svalbard this year.

Rambech noted he does not have specific data for how full flights have been.

"We do not have and do not try to calculate the load factors," he wrote. "That is the airlines' domain. There have been periods when it was difficult to get tickets for Svalbard this year and of course in-demand ticket price is always a factor. Last year there was competition on Svalbard with both SAS and Norwegian flying."

There are signs the economy may be bottoming out or improving, including forecasts by economic experts that Norway's kroner will fare the strongest of 48 currencies against the Euro during the next year. But Rambech isn't predicting when airport traffic might reverse its decline.

"My crystal ball is not quite clear on that," he wrote. "Most likely the trend will follow the general trends of the financial recession."

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM
SVALBARDPOSTEN
VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

New flight crew rules causing air ambulance difficulties

New European Union rules limiting flight crews to 12 hours of a work per day are making it much harder to get air ambulance service to Longyearbyen, officials said. "We fear that patients who need rapid transport to the mainland will not get it before it's too late," said Kari Schröder Hansen, a surgeon at Longyearbyen Hospital. "We have seen that we have to call all the way at the start of a shift to get an ambulance. If we are calling later and the plane is on another mission, they prefer not to come here." She said a temporary fix is needed quickly while a longer-term remedy is sought.

Permission for survey of new Store Norske coal sites OK'd

Store Norske has received approval from the Svalbard governor's office to conduct geological surveys of four Lunckefjellet sites. The company originally applied to study 11 potential coal sites, including five in Nordenskiöld Land National Park, but the revised request does not include park land. Store Norske hopes to begin surveys in August.

Rock festival runs deficit, but planners looking to next year

The inaugural Spitsbergen Rock festival ran up a 20,000 kroner deficit due to unexpected expenses, but organizers are already planning next year's event. Among the expenses were extra rooms for band members not wanting to share and airplane tickets that could only be ordered a few days in advance.

Bird-watching site in dispute

The new LoFF-huset bird observatory is located too far out on the beach, according to Longyearbyen municipal officials after an inspection. Members of the Longyearbyen Field Biology Society are objecting, saying work by the city's utility division have ruined the plot around the observatory. The two sides are determining if the building must be moved.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy, rain and drizzle. SE winds at 9 km/h. High 8C (8C wind chill), low 6C (6C wind chill).	Cloudy with spotty showers. WSW winds at 9 km/h. High 8C (8C wind chill), low 6C (6C wind chill).	Cloudy and calm winds. High 9C (9C wind chill), low 5C (5C wind chill).	Cloudy. ESE winds at 8 km/h. High 7C (7C wind chill), low 4C (1C wind chill).

Extended forecast: Sunday, considerable cloudiness, 4C (2C), 2C (-1C); Monday, cloudy and showers, 7C (3C), 3C (0C); Tuesday, cloudy with a shower, 8C (6C), 7C (3C); Wednesday, cloudy with late rain, 8C (4C), 6C (1C).

Data provided by AccuWeather.com



Maarten Regtien traverses a glacier during an eight-day trek on Spitsbergen, after which the pianist played an evening concert in Longyearbyen followed by another nine-day trek. He wrapped sports tape around his fingers to protect them during the trips. Photo by Gert Van Es.

Coming in from the cold to compose

PIANIST, from page 1

solo jazz concert on a less-than-perfect grand at Galleri Svalbard in Longyearbyen was more about wish fulfillment than virtuosity.

"I'm a collector of things about the Arctic," he said, adding one of those was claiming bragging rights to playing the world's farthest-north piano. "I knew there was a governor here and I figured if they had a governor they had a piano."

Actually there's more than one piano on Svalbard, including an ancient model he played in the abandoned Russian mining settlement of Pyramiden that may well be the world's northernmost (Regtien said its playability was lousy, hardly unexpected or a foremost consideration). More proper was his July 22 Longyearbyen concert in a room-filling audience of about 50 people, including a large number of fellow trekkers, during the few hours he spent indoors before heading to a campsite and another nine days in the wild.

Wearing a simple orange pullover and other casual attire, Regtien sat down and without a word launched into an opening half consisting of variations on common compositions from Beethoven's "Für Elise" to Miles Davis' "All Blues."

"I always play to warm you up," he told the audience after his first song, talking them through the rest of the pieces ranging from personal longtime favorites to requests from his expedition group for something familiar. He returned after intermission minus the pullover and, while the audience was still taking their seats, launched into a 30-minute continuous free improvisation.

"Even I don't know what I'm going to play and we all have to pray to God I sound nice," he told the audience.

Regtien concluded the concert with a variation on "Memories of Tomorrow" by his mentor Keith Jarrett (trivia: the only winner of the Polar Music Prize not sharing the Swedish

honor with another artist). Regtien showed the range of Jarrett's forays into jazz, classical, blues and beyond if not quite his edge - although the legend's habit of grunting while playing was also mercifully absent.

To the casual ear there was little indication of a struggle in Regtien's evening-long mix of moody and playful sketches anchored by left-hand vamps and colored by dense chords, rapid stabs and right-hand note runs. The ambiance was also fitting, with black-and-white Arctic landscape photos lining the walls and strong winds outside permeating quieter passages.

But Regtien was a harsher critic than his audience, saying he could feel the lack of practice after more than a week of traversing hills and ice fields. Plus the gallery's piano was a bit off despite some last-minute tuning he gave it.

"It's not responsive to my quickness," he said in an interview during intermission.

Plenty of those in audience apparently didn't notice or care, lining up to buy copies of - and get autographs on - Regtien's most recent album *Improvisaties Piano Solo*. The 2007 recording is his second unaccompanied project, coming 14 years after the similarly titled *Piano Solo*.

He said years of improvising means certain concepts are always in his head, hence the ability to perform an audience-pleasing concert after more than a week in the wild. But a description of his style at his Web site (<http://www.regtien.info>) indicates it's not an overly contemplative process.

"I have a distinctive style, but it is no longer my brain or my fantasy which stipulates what to play," he wrote. "For me it is as if my heart has a direct connection with my hands and commands these without intermediate."

Free recordings of Regtien in numerous other settings, including ensembles and electronic experimental, are also at his site.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

What's up

July 28

8 p.m.: Movie: "Star Trek," U.S. science fiction, ages 11 and up. Huset.

Aug. 2

8 p.m.: Movie: "Transformers," U.S. action/adventure, ages 11 and up. Huset.

Aug. 9

8 p.m.: Movie: "Knowing," U.S. action/drama, ages 15 and up. Huset.

Aug. 14-20

Northern Traveling Film Festival in Barentsburg and Pyramiden. Movies, tours and discussions about history, politics and science. More information at www.norfest.ru.

Aug. 16

8 p.m.: Movie: "Drag Me To Hell," U.S. horror/thriller, ages 15 and up. Huset.

Aug. 23

6 p.m.: Movie: "Coraline And The Secret Door," U.S. animated fantasy, ages 11 and up. Huset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Last Chance Harvey," U.S. drama, all ages. Huset.

Aug. 27

2 p.m.: Meeting of cultural and leisure enterprise board. Næringsbygget 1, "Tundra" room.

Aug. 28

9 a.m.: Meeting of the board of enterprise growth. Næringsbygget 1, "Tundra" room.

Aug. 30

7 p.m.: Movie: "Harry And The Half-Blood Prince," British adventure/family, ages 11 and up. Huset.

Sept. 3

6 p.m.: Activity Fair. Information about activities offered for kids, students and adults by various organizations in Longyearbyen. Coffee and waffles will also be sold. Svalbardhallen.

What's online

Icepeople.net provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world's polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- *NASA exploring ocean from Ny-Ålesund*
- *Making ice melt at minus 180 Celsius*
- *Russians looking forward to warming?*
- *The Arctic's 'canary in a coal mine'*
- *Arctic exploration in 'The Polar Pumpkin'*