

A Canadian “emperor” has claimed a slice of Melbourne’s south-east as his own. MELINDA MARSHALL reports

No joke, we’re a micronation

A FRESH-faced Canadian medical student has claimed parts of Dandenong, Springvale and Chelsea as colonies of his own private empire.

“Emperor” Eric Lis, 24, calls the territory “Psyche,” and though he’s not entirely sure of its borders, he has installed a senator from Craigieburn to represent local interests.

No, Mr Lis (or should that be Emperor Eric?) is not insane.

But neither is the “Aerican Empire” a joke, although its leader has a well-developed sense of humour.

Asked if the residents of Psyche have any special duties to the Empire, he replies:

“Were they to ever be given special duties, these would probably involve ritualistically destroying copies of Bing Crosby singing *White Christmas*”.

The Aerican Empire is one of hundreds of eccentric experiments in statehood around the world.

They are known as micronations, and have even inspired a *Lonely Planet* travel guide.

Some, like the Hutt River Province Principality in Western Australia, started in earnest, often in protest of a law or as a tax dodge.

Many have their own flag, currency, passports, and citizenry of thousands.

Others, like Aerica, are light-hearted, but nonetheless have an arguably legal claim to statehood.

According to *Lonely Planet*, micronations can claim legitimacy based on the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States.

The convention says states exist if they meet four criteria: permanent population; defined territory; government; and capacity to enter into relations with other states.

It also claims that a state can exist legally even if unrecognised by any other state.

Yes, it really is that easy to start your own country.

Eric Lis did it when he was aged five by claiming 2.5sq m of Montreal and naming it Aerica (pronounced like America without the M).

In June 2000 the residents of Dandenong, Springvale and Chelsea unwittingly joined the empire when someone filled out a brief form on a website.

“I’ve personally never been to any part of Australia, although I’m told that Dandenong is quite beautiful,” the Emperor said.

Having lost touch with the people who filled out the form, “these days simple political inertia, combined with nostalgia, have kept our claims there,” he said.



Shaun Tiernan, self declared senator.

Picture: JANE OLLERENSHAW. N25OS403

Psyche is ruled by a Raven

SENATOR Raven, aka Craigieburn IT support manager Shaun Tiernan, is an enthusiastic, if unusual, political representative.

“When you join the empire you get to choose what part of the colony you want to get involved with. That’s why I chose Psyche. I thought, hey, I could actually drive there,” the 43-year-old father said.

Psyche is the term given to the Aerican Empire’s antipodean colony, made up of vaguely defined areas of Dandenong, Springvale and Chelsea.

Mr Tiernan is considering extending the territory to the Western Ring Rd, Eastern Freeway, Doncaster Rd and Springvale Rd, so he can drive from home through his own land.

“We promise we won’t charge any tolls on that,” he laughed. So what does an Aerican senator actually do? Very very little, just like a real politician.

“The best part of being a senator is it gives you a really nifty thing to put on your email signature. I did fleetingly consider standing in the state election that’s just gone, but then I discovered I couldn’t do that as a foreign senator.”

It took some prying to get the modest politician (surely an oxymoron in any other context) to admit to having once saved Psyche from invasion by a rival colony.

“I almost declared war. North Plutopia threatened to take over using their bubble guns,” he said.



Emperor Eric Lis of Aerica.

Aerican Life

■ **Location:** 2.3sq m of Montreal, Canada and tracts of Melbourne’s south-eastern suburbs, among other colonies

■ **Population:** More than 200 formal citizens

■ **Flag:** Like the Canadian flag but with a yellow smiley-face in place of the maple leaf

■ **Faith:** Silinism, a “disorganised religion” that worships Forsteri, the Great Penguin

■ **Laws:** Upholds the Geneva Convention and other international laws, has also passed Murphy’s Law

■ **Holidays:** Aericans celebrate many holidays. In January alone they mark: Procrastinator’s Day (January 2), to recover from New Year’s Day; Snappy Comeback Day (January 3); Peculiar People Day (January 10); and Idiots Day (January 29)