

Weber Woman's Wrevenge

Volume 3, Number 2 September 1983

Registered by Australia Post, Publication No NBH4389



WEBERWOMAN'S WREVENGE FOURTEEN

(Volume 3, Number 2, September 1983)

CONTENTS

The Rubbish Bin, an editorial of sorts. 1

Frost vs. the Beauty Queens, by Terry Frost. 2

Kids!!(?), by various correspondents 4

Power Points, by some of the same correspondents and
a whole lot of others. 7

Natter & Anti-Natter, the letter column.12
(divided into responses to "So What's It Got to Do With SF",
Joy Window's Trip Report, and Miscellaneous)

Art Credits, Contributors' Addresses, official stuff, etc.18

THE RUBBISH BIN

by Jean Weber

This issue of Wrevenge is very much a "catch-up" issue, containing lots of letters I've been collecting on topics discussed in several issues. I usually try to hold letters on articles until my overseas correspondents have a chance to comment, which puts everything several months out of phase, but I think it makes for a more interesting discussion in the long term. I hope you agree.

At home, my health seems to be good, and I've acquired contact lenses to overcome the most annoying after-effect of my operation: a nose that would not tolerate wearing glasses for any length of time. Eric's been trekking down to Canberra to visit me (including a two-week trip during his holidays in August), so I haven't had to brave the rigours of the drive to Faulconbridge since I've been back (my turn comes this weekend). His car died on the first trip down here, so he's riding the trains. We talk about being a two-house, one-car family. It says a lot for my work-mates that no one seems to think this is more than a little unusual.

To ease a crowding problem in my house, I'm finally getting a two-car garage built, to house the printery and office, as well as the woodworking shop. (The car's used to living outdoors; it needn't expect to get a share of a garage.) And just this week, after a lot of soul-searching, I've agreed to get another cat (someone's going overseas and must find a home for a year-old, spayed female tabby, and I'm a sucker).

Work in general's going fairly well, though there was a time about six weeks ago when I was tempted to quit. My boss-plus-one was interfering far too much in my work, which was extremely insulting as well as a pain in the neck. Both I, and my immediate boss, told the other fellow what we thought about that, and things seem to be back to some semblance of normal. (He's basically a nice guy, but has these moments...) So I'm feeling quite cheerful, and positive about life in general. Now if I could just get to the bottom of the fanzines-and-letters pile, and write a couple articles for other people, and... work really does interfere with fanac, far too much.



FROST VS THE BEAUTY QUEENS

by Terry Frost

One of the annual rogue's gallery of beauty pagents is on the tube at the moment. I don't like it, but something good is on after it, and I've lost my watch, and so I'm groaning my way through this stuff . . . enduring this beauty pagent which is as tacky as an acre of elastoplast.

The level of sincerity and honour working in these things is such that none of those performing plains-apes on the show could convince the dumbest person I know that day is bright and playing russian roulette can result in damage to your eardrums. There are a lot of tits and legs and teeth showing, and cheekbones as high as an elephant's eye, and a constancy of pale blue eyes in all the contestants.

The MC, who has more wattles than Kurringai-Chase National Park, is about as sincere as a used-car salesman with a criminal record for fraud, and the woman introducing it all looks like she just stepped from a cheap gothic romance's front cover illo.

The mean part of me hopes that these women fall madly in love with farting, symphilitic, boring, sado-masochistic hunchbacks with bad teeth and crabs, and faces like Charles Laughton. Then get rejected by them.

I can imagine lonely and dim blokes, a la Lenny in Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men, sitting before this display and wanking their dicks off. Shit, I think I did it myself . . . when I was thirteen. I can see men married to women whom they've emotionally crippled over the years dreaming boozily of pinning one or more of those grimacing mannikins to a mattress. But any bloke who's ever held a true and honest conversation with an intelligent woman can only sit before the dubious spectacle and be grateful that it is on well after dinner time. The word emetic comes to mind to describe this kind of drivel.

Some woman is, with a totally humourless voice, rabbiting on about how this pageant encourages peace, justice and regional understanding (whatever the latter means). It sounds like the spruik at the beginning of the old Superman show, doesn't it?

The thing that intrigues me is that not one of the women, ostensibly intelligent, gets up there, is asked the facile questions, smiles sweetly then buggers the whole show by saying just how fugginawful the whole thing is. Maybe they give them IQ tests and only take the ones who flunk. If that's the case then the whole thing is a bit like having a TV show which consists of putting a child into a pair of thumbcuffs, telling the poor little rugrat that there is a key hidden somewhere in the room and filming the results. It's obvious that they don't realise how bizarre and dehumanizing the whole thing is. (I shouldn't bitch, I've done the same thing to a lesser degree by conning disco-dancing female friends into boogie-ing to Dave Brubeck's Take Five, then explaining when they fail that nothing on two legs can dance to that tune's time-signature. My motives, however, are honourable. I am encouraging them to widen their musical tastes and give up disco cold-turkey.)

But the beauty pageant organisers think that they're doing the world good by spending hundreds of thousands of oxfords to let a bunch of dumb sheilas from all over a large and capitalistic foreign country (no names, no pack-drill) get to know one another. Then the one that actually wins gets to act dumb again later on in a bigger pageant! It's a geek-show with a shallow and cliched idea of beauty substituting for the biting off of a chook's head.

I just had a great idea. Why not spend all that money giving a randomly selected bunch of poor people an annuity that'll rake them a few thousand a year for life. A sort of ticketless lottery! (Yeah, these forked-meat markets raise money for charities, but there are other ways.) Then, once a year, when the contest is usually on, they can run a bunch of old private eye television shows instead. The Lennys and the wife-bashers will watch them for the car chases and fisticuffs, and I'll watch them to see some favourite character actors or scripting or good acting. The brain-mangled girls could then live lives of blissful and invisible ignorance being receptionists or dental assistants or PR girls giving out cigarettes at shopping centres if you can putt the golfball into the hole over there and be coy in bed and read Virginia Andrews novels and eat spinach quiche for din-dins if they aren't half-karked with anorexia nervosa and stuff like that.

Qouldn't that be nice, eh?

(Footnote: feminists in Melbourne are now getting up the Spastic Society of Victoria because that society, ostensibly in the business of aiding disabled people, is running a Miss Victoria contest, thereby holding up paragons of physical perfection to the disabled people they're supposed to be helping!)

JEAN WEBER (That's me, folks!)

FOR GUFF!

KIDS!!(?)

Some of my correspondents, including Lorraine Tutihasi, Maia Cowan and I, have made various throw-away remarks about "can't understand why people want to have children". These have elicited a quite unexpected (to me) response from several readers, as you'll see below.

I can't speak for any of my correspondents, but for myself I can say that, certainly, I can intellectually comprehend why people want children, but emotionally it's all a mystery. I think I summed up my attitude fairly concisely in a book review in #9 (which may not have been seen by some of those who wrote in below). I'll quote my remarks here:

'...one woman's "reasons" for wanting or not wanting children, though of vital importance to her, are quite irrelevant or even negative "reasons" to another woman... I don't really think "reason" has a great deal to do with it. Although people now are seeing that child-bearing is a choice, not an inevitable thing, the choice itself is based upon desires and feelings that don't translate well into verbalised "reasons". At least not ones that have any meaning for someone who doesn't already agree with them.'

Therefore I accept what the following writers say, but only on the level of rational thought, not on the 'gut level'. I'll also mention that sometimes I deliberately come on a little strong in my protestations of lack of comprehension, only because I get a bit tired of people telling me how they can't imagine why anyone would not want kids, unless they were mentally a bit off. I figure turnabout's fair play.

Enough preamble. Let's hear from my readers.

LINDA S BLANCHARD
23509 Hedlund Avenue
Mountlake Terrace, WA 98043
USA

25 June 1983

Coming in on the middle of a conversation is tough ...not knowing just what you said that drew the response that I'm reacting to, but ...

I find it hard to understand people (yourself and Maia Cowan?) who find it hard to understand why people want to have children -- and yes, even from their own genes.

First I should say that I have no children of my own, though sometime in the next ten years or so I would like to have one or two, or possibly three if I were not to be ostracized for that extravagance. I have, however, lived for extended periods with infants, toddlers and kids from four to ten. Living-with is not the same as being-committed-through-adulthood-to-raising children, but it does give one experience beyond mere theory.

Living with any child over a period of time gives you all kinds of insights into human growth. Through

babies one can discover the world anew, watching them encounter feet and fingers and toes, other people, other babies, animals. Their sense of wonder is fresher than any you can get from skiffy. As time goes by and a child grows, you see pieces come to fit, begin to get a clearer insight into how we learn what we learn, a process that we are (hopefully) as adults still going through, but often the method is by now transparent to us.

If you are taking part in raising a child, you learn a lot about yourself, what your priorities a morals are. Often you learn quite a bit about your parents, also, seeing yourself in their position, and that, too, can give you greater understanding of why you are who you are now... and why your parents are as they are, were as they were.

And what about wanting to experience another form of love? Is it irrational for me to want to see what it's like to feel mother-love for a child?

All that's true of raising any child, even adopted children. So why have your own? Unless you consider yourself nothing special, unless you think you have nothing of value as an individual, why would you not want to pass some of that on? Or do you not believe traits are passed on through genes, only through environment?

Raising a child of your own flesh allows you to see more accurately what you were like as you grew up --both in physical characteristics if the child takes after you, and (since I believe some temperament is passed on through genes as well as environment), emotionally, also.

Then there's wanting to leave a part of myself for the future. My writing is done in part for this reason, as well, but it's not truly a piece of me, merely of my intellect.

If you don't have the desire to have children, please don't dismiss those who do as feeling so 'without reason.' Or is all the above emotional outpouring without any logic? I don't think so.

((Linda, I can quite understand much of what you say. The fascinating and delight of watching a child develop appeals to me, too -- but a few hours a week is quite enough for me. Hardly enough for a proper parenthood orientation.

((The other points you've made were ones that were once important to me, until I realised that for me (I hasten to point out that I am not suggesting this applies to you or anyone else), my reasons were quite self-oriented. I would benefit from this association. I had little feeling for the child at all. At that point I decided that I definitely wasn't parent material -- an intellectual or rational conclusion that supported my emotional feelings since I was a child.

((I dealt with the other points in the preamble, except for your question about heredity vs environment, which I shall skip for now.--JHW))

GLEN CRAWFORD
6/57 Henry Parry Drive
Gosford, NSW 2250
USA

August 1983

I am a practicing parent; my practice has so far brought three children into this world, and a fourth is due in November. We haven't finished yet either. I guess this sort of gives me the right to speak up on the positive side of parenthood, but please do not think I'm trying to ram my ideas down your gullets. Your decisions are your own, as are mine.

There are as many bad reasons for having children as there are good ones for not having them, and I am forced to admit that my first two daughters (by my first marriage) were both conceived for the wrong reasons: the first, Rebecca, was a direct result of a mother-in-law overeager to become a grandmother. The fact that I couldn't afford to provide for her was incidental; she twisted my wife's arm until she convinced me to start a family. The second, Larissa, was conceived in a futile attempt to put some interest back into a marriage that was doomed anyway -- probably the most idiotic excuse anyone could think of to bring a child into the world, but it is also a common one. I couldn't relate to those children: I was too young, too inexperienced, too jealous of the time they took just to be looked after. They imposed on me and I resented it.

When Debbie (current wife) and I discussed the possibility of starting a family, we went about it in a rather cold-blooded manner, but when the time came, we both knew we were ready, and that our child would be a benefit to our relationship, and not a burden. Our two priorities were emotional and financial readiness, as I had already been through the trauma of losing two children through not being able to provide for them either love or comfort, and neither of us wanted a repeat session of that disaster. Our daughter, Alicia, is an extremely well-balanced child, the result of a balanced relationship, where both parties give equally to her (and spoil her rotten!), but we are both proud parents and feel she deserves the best start in life we can give her.

Life to me wouldn't feel complete without children, although I will admit that finding oneself sharing a pillow with a wet-napped bum at 3 am in winter isn't exactly welcome! The 'problems' some people spout about, dirty bums etc, are minor; the real challenge in raising children is to create a balanced personality, devoid of major hangups, and with the right approach to life. (Being an SF fan, for example.) To my mind, children have unlimited potential for learning, and this idea seems to be catching on in 'learned' circles. We try to introduce Alicia to as many experiences as possible, and particularly those involving animals, books, other children and music. She knows most of her 'c'atters' by name, handles books with care and fascination, enjoys the company of others wber own age (and doesn't get jealous when they touch her toys), and bops along to the stereo like a real rock 'n roller. She is also a devoted Dr Who fan! (Alicia is 19 months old, early August.)

((Glen included some more comments, on child-birth etc, which I'll hold over till another time. Glen, you've really summed up why I don't want children (uninterested in giving them the time and attention they deserve as well as need), but I'm so glad there are those like yourself who really enjoy the experience. The unfortunate thing is that so many people -- like yourself in the earlier marriage -- get 'trapped' before they're ready for it. Some of us are never ready.

((Here's some words from another parent. --JHW))

DEBBY KEAN
84A Norfolk St
Ponsonby, Auckland
New Zealand

25 May 1983

Doubtless, my experience of motherhood is anomalous, since I have legally lost both of my sons. Thomas when he was 6 weeks old, and Gerard when he was three. I have had only the merest scraps of news of Thomas, in those 11 years, but I am now lucky enough to be having access visits from Gerard (Jed), which work out to every 3 months (should be monthly).

I've just had a 10-day visit from Jed, ending a week ago. His visits are very special to me; I tend to freak out for days when they end. The freak out was worse, and lasted longer, this time, because Bill ((her then lover)) was away, and I was on my own. It is the first time that I've been on my own when Jed left. Generally, I feel guilty about any small happiness when he goes, as if it's a betrayal of him. I cry every time I'm reminded -- just as I was eleven years ago, when Thomas was adopted.

I think having children and losing them, is torture. I've always wanted children. Seven years after Thomas' adoption, I read Joss Shawyer's Death by Adoption. It expressed my feelings amazingly. Feelings I had not been permitted by my family to express. I am amazingly sensitive to the really stupid things¹ come across in the media, about adoption/custody. People who write and say that adoption records should continue to be sealed. Such people want, they say, to protect birth mothers, who gave away their children because they didn't want them. Did they heck! I gave Thomas away because (a) I had no show of supporting him (no solo benefits then) and no child care, (b) family pressure, (c) I was psyched into it, with the argument "If you love him, you'll do the best thing for him, and give him to respectable people." I knew personally a couple who divorced, and threw their adopted daughter back to the 'orphanage' they got her from.

If Thomas' parents divorced and decided they didn't want him, I'd have him back, without a second's hesitation. Better than having him put in care, too.

As a Christian, I believe in the immortality of the soul. (I did, even in my non-Christian teen years, also.) That being the case, I am unimpressed by the argument that children are one's 'immortality.' That was never a reason for my wanting children.

I have four younger sibs. I liked them as babies. I helped my mother, who was ill, and in her 40s and 50s when they were young, to care for them. I like children -- that's why I wanted children of my own.

As a child, I wanted 4 or 5 kids, like Mum. With Thomas adopted when Jed was born, I've never had more than one at a time. Working at Bean House (a hostel for intellectually handicapped children) and caring for 4-5 at a time, has shown me that ideally I'd like one, or at most two children, myself.

When Les and I were together 3 years ago, he was 21, I was 26. He wanted a baby. I'm not at all sure why -- we were very intense together, obsessed with each other -- and that may have had a lot to do with it. We tried, possibly didn't give it long enough, only 6 months; but towards the end, my failure to conceive was driving me banny, and he was edgy about it too. Only after we split, did I realise how unrealistic we were, in view of his youth, and my legal situation.

But even now, I'm nearly 30, if I was to achieve a stable relationship, I'd hop along to the infertility clinic, and find out what's wrong. If it is something

that could be corrected, I'd happily have a baby. If the problem was not something easily correctable, I would do nothing. No adoption. I am totally against the damn practice. From the point of view of all concerned. But especially the birth mother, and the child. Birth fathers, in my experience, rarely give a curse, so I don't tend to consider their feelings. I'd be happy to come across a man whose child had been adopted, and who did care. How refreshing!

Well, Jean, I hope you can use some of this tirade. I wanted to answer the question as to why people want kids, and find instead that I've given the story of my last 11 years. I could only answer for myself, anyway.

((Thank you, Debby. One question on the adoption issue, though: what about genuine orphans (both parents dead, or mother dead and father unknown, for example)?--JHW))

PAMELA BOAL
(address at end of zine)

The love and sheer fascination of watching human beings develop into adult people I like outweighed the responsibility burden as far as our 3 children are concerned.

JOY HIBBERT
(address at end of zine)

Pete Preford ignores the reasonable belief that the best thing you can do for children is not to have any -- if you are not suitable parent material, or feel that you might not be under the wrong circumstances.

BUCK COULSON
(address at end of zine)

I can't say I ever loved any children. Some children I rather like; our son Bruce was one of them (fortunately). Matter of fact, now that he's married and on his own I still like him, and, as far as I know, vice versa. I restrict my love to a very few people. Am I afraid of loving? I don't think so; I just don't find many people very lovable. Of course, I believe in a strict division between liking and loving, as between a friendly acquaintance and a friend. Actually, child-raising didn't involve a frightening amount of responsibility anyway, as far as I was concerned. There were things I suddenly had to do differently, but so what? That's happened all my life; raising a kid was just one more time. (Of course, Juanita might have a different opinion.)

((Funny thing, Buck-- you're the third or fourth of my male correspondents with adult children who've said they didn't find raising kids all that big a deal -- and then added that their wives might feel differently about it. Says a lot, I think.--JHW))

SAM WAGAR
(address at end of zine)

I'll probably be called a cold and heartless person for agreeing with Paul Skelton's remarks. Quality of life is obviously the problem, and whether moral absolutes (that ind even those people who do not believe in them) should -- or do -- exist.

What is human life? Is it a quantity or a quality? If a quality, of what type? If a quantity, of what substances, of what amount? I think in terms of quanta -- an accumulation of quantitative differ

ences that reaches a threshold and then changes quality, into a different thing. Like, around the age of one month when *snap* there's a personality there, or a certain level of intelligence when the same *snap* occurs. I don't think that fetuses have personalities, I don't think dogs have personalities, so it doesn't bother me to kill them in the way that it would to kill a person. If life itself is the quality that should be cherished, then humans are no different from all of the other plants and animals, which is obviously an absurd position.

BEV CLARK
(address at end of zine)

I rather agree with Paul Skelton that there is more to consider in the case of malformed children than the 'gift' of life itself; if the 'gift' turns out to be a Trojan horse, was it worth receiving in the first place? As an extension of his comments: there are even more insidious forces at work. That is, with the advent of fetal surgery -- surgery on the fetus to correct severe problems before it's born -- we start to run into problems where the mother's rights come into direct conflict with the fetus's, especially in cases where there is no guarantee that the surgery is going to repair whatever is wrong or could, possibly, cause the death of fetus, mother, or both.

Already there has been a case in this country (USA) in which a pregnant woman was ordered by a court to have a Caesarian section, against her religious principles, which forbade surgery (she'd already rejected this option), because the opinion of the doctors in the hospital was that the baby would die during birth because of certain medical complications ... The mother's wishes were overruled by the court in favor of the fetus's 'right' to be born alive. A lawyer commenting on this case said that he could see this sort of thing becoming more common; he also thought that the day would come that a pregnant woman would be forced by court order to give up anything her doctor thought might be potentially harmful to the fetus, on pain of being charged with child abuse or even manslaughter should the fetus be harmed by her refusing to do these things.

What I see as dangerous in these ideas is that the woman is being regarded as only a carrier for the fetus, and that the fetus's dubious 'right' to life is held to supersede all the woman's rights (even, in the case of potentially dangerous fetal surgery, her own right to continued life). I don't know if this is genuinely prompted by concern for the unborn child or if it's a subtle way of putting women back into what some men regard as their place and keeping them there.

((When a fetus can be brought to term 'in vitro' -- outside a woman's body, in an artificial womb -- these questions could be resolved to both parties' benefit; then we would no doubt start hearing a lot more about the importance of the 'maternal bond' during 'natural' pregnancy, especially from those who are (deliberately or not) wanting to 'keep women in their place'. The genuine concerns involved ('for' the fetus versus 'women's role') might then come into sharper focus -- even if they are no more easily resolved. Like you, I am very suspicious of the motives of some fetus-lovers -- of both sexes, I might add. -- JHW))



POWER

POINTS

For some time I've been ~~threatening~~ promising to devote some space to the topic of power in human relationships. I've received several letters on the subject, but haven't published them in order to give overseas readers a chance to get their comments in. I've got enough now to present a selection of different viewpoints.

I'm tempted to start off this column with a light bulb joke, even though I warned people -- especially smartasses like Eric Lindsay -- that that sort of 'power' was not the topic of conversation. Oh, well, why not --

Q: How many Real Men does it take to change a light bulb?

A: None. Real Men aren't afraid of the dark.

Q: How many Real Women does it take to change a light bulb?

A: None. Real Women accept them for what they are.

These two 'jokes' have a serious side, though: as silly as they are, they do illustrate the sorts of communications problems that exist between men and women (who would change a light bulb in the home of a Real Man and Real Woman, eh?) -- and communications problems (between men and men, and women and women, as well as between the sexes) are one of the bases of power games. (I consider that communications problems are a symptom, rather than a cause -- the 'causes' have to do with personal insecurity.) But I don't want to preface this column with too much sociological bullshit. Let's let my readers speak for themselves ...

How can I Talk About Power? by Sam Wagar

A little while ago I came home in the rain from a night of drinking with my friends. It was cold, the weather had turned nasty in another twist in the transition between winter and spring, and it had been raining for hours.

There was a man, wrapped in rags, unshaven, and with a cut over his right eye, sheltered in the doorway alcove. He was still awake, though he had obviously chosen this alcove, out of the direct rain but not the cold damp, to sleep in.

I didn't know what to do. He got out of my way as I went in, fitted my key into the lock and opened the door. After I closed the door I stood for a long time listening to the sounds of the man shuffling about, settling down again.

I felt thousands of virtuous ghosts around me telling me that what I must do is invite the man in, feed him, give him some of my old clothing and a bed for the night ...

It sounds like such a petty crime to confess that I walked up the stairs into my apartment where it was warm and dry, and left this man below sheltering from the cold in the doorway.

I felt so wealthy. I felt so privileged. I felt so guilty. When, at last, I went down the stairs to give him some money so that he could shelter in a coffeeshop, he was gone.

I remember that it rained until the morning.

I don't know if that has anything to do with power relationships -- I sure as hell didn't and don't feel powerful about the incident. I could have shared my apartment with this man, but I'd been ripped off too much, too recently, to dare.

Jean asks me for some thoughts about power, but all that comes to me are these individual scenes. What can I say about that poor fellow sheltering in my doorway, or about all of the things that were done by him and to him to lead him to that place? Nothing.

There are so many kinds of power - personal, interpersonal, institutional, group -- and each has its value and problems. I think I'd focus on inherent and assigned power and authority. Inherent power is like the power that parents have over their children; assigned power is like the power that society has over the parents' raising of their children. Inherent power is like my personal feeling of being strong and good, and assigned power is when I make someone my hero, and say that in being like them I am strong and good.

When I act from my inner power I do not oppress others. When I act from the external power I sometimes do. Even if I am doing the same action there is a difference -- someone who acts from themselves is more likely to empower others.

What is Power for Me? by Julie Vaux

Honoring the light that shone before the stars were made or angels first sang, knowing that a person is part of an infinite source of love and splendour and JOY!!! Power is in dreaming, in visions of the Tree of Life where the sepiroth are the singers hidden in the intricate light-catching web of its branches. Visions of one's motherline stretching back to Arthur and ancient Tvitonis.

Power is knowing that there is a world greater and larger than our own, that one can reach without drugs with the wings of the spirit. Power is control of one's body and mind, knowing that we are all slaves to finite reality, and in that knowing being able to choose one's way or cage. Power is having friends who care and listen. True knowledge is powerful and liberating. Power is in dreams of magic, to the desire to powers to serve. Power, the longing to have powers of ... flight, healing, mind, singing!!! Reality is knowing growth can be a slow progress and that some dreams of power are dangerous.

Power can be a drunkenness or a strength. The power goes with the glory, true power is from the holding of the way of light and knowing that it is only those lost in shadow who delude themselves that shadow is strong and not merely part of the light. Love is power. Faith is power. Blessing is power. Hope is power. The green grass holds power and the mountain tall. The silent dark crow, the stalking cat, the tiny sparrow and the mighty elephant all have power.

Thoughts About Power, by Pete Presford

You want to know about POWER eh! You've made me think on this one. I'm not a power mad person (I don't think!), whether the power be a sexual one/sphere of work/sport etc. I suppose all of us must have a grab somewhere along the line. Like to be moderate in all things I do ... jack of all; master of none. The more things I can do, the more pleasure I get. But looking outside now, with dusk approaching and a soft breeze pushing through the trees. Nature is all and one thing you can't have power over, and in truth I'd just like to master a few of her secrets. It is at this point that I wonder what folk like Joy Window are really looking for? Nature is something you take as it comes, no day is the same and there is no way you can fight it and win. Nature has far longer to work at things than we mere mortals do. Have you ever tried 'divining'? I tried it a few times, and it works. A rather uncanny feeling to feel those rods twist in your hands ... which only relates to the power of the Stones shown on your cover. We all want power of some kind; but the pure power of nature or the mind I don't think anyone could handle. But as SF readers, I would think that the power of the mind is something we often read about but would never contemplate having. And I would be surprised if any other of your readers wrote in and mentioned it. Perhaps it would be worth keeping a tally of the various powers that people want/require.

Power in One's Personal Life, by Dave Locke

An anecdote about power in one's personal life? Well, power games is an interesting enough topic. They all stem from the fact that most everyone is a missionary for his own viewpoint. Did you know that? This is why someone else's power game creates toxicity when played upon your head, but playing your own power game upon someone else's head is natural and just part of doing your own thing. Of course, if you've read Eric Berne and Games People Play, you know that most of these games have already been scrutinized and labelled with such intriguing titles as "now I've got you, you son of a bitch," "see what you made me do," "I'm only trying to help you," "if it weren't for me," "look how hard I've tried," to name a few. In fandom "now I've got you, you son of a bitch" seems to be a big favorite and is rivalled only by stud poker, hanging out the Do Not Disturb sign, and pubbing your ish.

I'm trying to think of a personal anecdote about power... Perhaps I could tell you about the time I acquired a new supervisor, who was Chinese and had half the IQ of this sheet of paper. He called me into his office, waved one of my memos at me, and confided that he had personal power over me because he knew graphoanalysis and therefore knew more about me from my handwriting than I knew about myself. He then proceeded to study my memo and to tell me about myself. He did this to each of his middle managers that day, most of whom were aghast and uncertain what stance should be adopted in the face of his inscrutability. My response was to confide that I, too, had studied graphoanalysis, after which I picked up a notepad he'd been scribbling on and proceeded to tell him about himself based on his handwriting. He was ecstatic. Joyful, even. Then he asked me how it was I had come to study such a thing, and I blew it by responding that at one stage of my diletantism I had been moved to study most all of the crackpot psychic sciences, at which point our conference was abruptly ended though it took him another five years or so before he was able to have me fired. From this I learned that it's acceptable to tell people that you share their power, provided you don't jerk down their pants right after doing so.

Power Games and Leadership, by Andy Andruschak

Power games...well, I never was very good at them. I am not a leader. I do not have any kind of leadership ability. That is why, in 1973, I had to leave the US Navy. I had served ten years -- ten godamn very long years, with Vietnam thrown in -- but I had zilch leadership ability. I was kicked out. O well, I had an honourable discharge at least. So I wandered around a few months, and tried to find a job, and wound up at JPL (Jet Propulsion Laboratories). Odd. Had I been able to play power games, I would now be retired from the Navy. I would not be working at JPL. So today, well, I am just a computer tech. I doubt if I'll ever climb higher. No leadership ability. No talent at power games. But it is JPL. It is the planetary exploration program. And I am the only fan doing it. Nobody else. Because I do not have the ability to play power games.

The Power (Without the Glory) by Glen Crawford

In 1977 my first wife packed up my two daughters, our furniture, my money and a charge account disk and cleared out. By the time I got the disk cancelled, she'd booked up nearly \$1000 worth of junk in my name, and, as she'd also cleaned out my cash, I couldn't get a decent solicitor to defend me in the maintenance and property settlement cases. Her uncle's company solicitor represented her, and they really nailed me to the wall. All I managed to keep was the bed and the fridge I was still paying off, one plate, knife, fork, spoon, teacup, glass etc, and my clothes. I also got skinned for a third of my wages for life, and still had to pay back the debt she had accrued!

I was living alone, surviving on Weetbix and potatoes, mentally stuffed and totally disillusioned with life, when along came a glimmer of hope ... a friend I hadn't seen for years turned up on the doorstep one day, and I welcomed him with open arms (metaphorically you perverts!). I had never been 'one of the boys' and had still not adjusted to the idea of mixing with a group of other males, but he insisted I go to the pub with him and get into the 'in crowd'.

It didn't take long before I became just another face on the disco floor, drinking too much cheap plonk, smoking too much dope, and gauging the quality of life on the number of one-night-stands I could 'score'. This just wasn't my lifestyle; I knew somewhere deep down inside there was a hellava lot of SF to be written, and a bloke who really needed a partner to share his dreams with, but I just couldn't make the necessary break with the only human contacts I had outside work. Let's face it, we all need to belong to someone or something, and the loneliness I'd felt between the loss of my children and the arrival of this 'friend' was something I just couldn't bear to face again, even though I hated the life I was living.

Respite came temporarily when he went interstate for a couple of months. I simply stopped going out, just like that. No reasons given to the other 'mates' at the pub or anything; I disappeared. While I was at work one day, a vaguely familiar female about my own age started a casual conversation with me, and ended up castigating me for the lifestyle I had been leading. Unknown to me, she'd been watching me for some time (with lustful intent it turned out), and before I knew it, we had a dinner date. It was one of those relationships you only read about in Mills & Boon novels ... the quiet, shy beauty, divorced with a son desperate for a father-figure, and the equally shy man, still reeling from a vicious gut-blow dealt by a heartless female, thrust together by chance, each feeling their way carefully, eager to love but unwilling to trust ...

When Darrell came back. If ever anybody fucked up somebody's life, then this supposed mate of mine fucked mine well and truly! I still can't think about what he did to me without wishing I could get my hands around his throat and choke him to death. I simply didn't have the strength of character necessary to tell him to get lost,



and I literally sat back and let him screw up my relationship with this girl to the point where we couldn't even speak to one another, let alone relate.

Darrell had money, heaps of it, and he used it purely to impress Ruth. Fancy car, fancy clothes, presents, food. You name it, he owned it. At one stage, he had two V8 Valiants and three motorbikes! I tried my best to compete with his outrageous style and money, but I wasn't in the same ball game.

I was like an outsider, looking in on my own life and unable to interfere. I could see what was happening, but was powerless to stop it. Finally, Ruth and I split up, but even then it haunted me. Darrell still spent weekends at my home, and so did his friends, and therefore so did Ruth. She never slept with him, I'm sure of that; he stuffed it for himself as well, but that didn't make me feel any better. I found myself drinking more and more, smoking far too much dope, and becoming totally introverted. I finally broke this deadly spiral almost a year later, after some considerable help from the Mental Health people and a few good friends I'd somehow managed to keep hold of during the nightmare.

Looking back on the situation after six years, I'm almost glad it happened. Ruth had a nasty streak the same as my first wife, and I simply am not the sort of person who can handle power games in a personal relationship. This doesn't alter the fact that I still feel unable to trust a male as a friend, and all my close friends are female. I'm very fortunate that Debbie (wife No. 2) is not only my best friend, but as big a softy as I am, and also totally devoid of jealousy with regard to other females. Our marriage is a balanced relationship, and we treat one another as close friends, rather than as husband and wife. All decisions are made jointly, except money matters, which are Deb's responsibility. Funny that -- I can successfully control buying, selling, advertising and wages budgets for five million dollars worth of retail business a year, but can't keep control of a cheque book and bankcard!

Power Games, by Gerald Smith

It is true that power games of one sort or another do pervade our lives. It seems that such power games cannot be avoided, a rather sad indictment on the social conditioning most people are subjected to from an early age. So many things seem based on a hierarchical structure, with movement toward the top, that many see all aspects of their lives in the same way.

One of the most impressive points about my relationship with Womble is the lack of such power games. Until I read your editorial I hadn't realised what it was that was so different in our relationship. I hadn't before realised how pervasive such power plays are. Now I can appreciate what it is that is missing, and be thankful for it.

My present occupation as a public servant unfortunately exposes me to numerous examples of this. The very structure of the Public Service encourages such games, of course, with its rigid hierarchy of power. It is unfortunate, but true, that such games spill over into so many public servants' private lives as well.

The most blatant example of this that I can think of still goes on where I used to work... There is a man there (a Class 5 Clerk) who resents the fact that he was overlooked for the position of head of the branch about two and a half years ago. Not only does he resent it, he also, in some ways, has refused to accept it. He tries giving orders to people in the branch over whom he has no responsibility. When I worked there he even tried to tell me things to do without clearing them with my boss -- sometimes things that were not part of my duties and which had the potential to interfere with my true duties. This sort of behaviour has made him a very disliked member of the staff. What is worse, though, is the way he tries to interfere with one of the staff's private lives. His motives behind this lie in another sort of power play. Shortly after this other staff member (female) began with the Department, the Class 5 asked her out and was refused. So now he takes particular delight in upsetting her, and pressuring her even more in her work. He also tries to tell her what she should do in her private life -- such as that she should not be going out with her boyfriend of two years because he's a 'surfie' (she too likes to surf).

I cannot understand why anyone would want to exercise power in these ways. This probably means that I won't get along all that well in the Public Service -- so be it. I don't really want to anyway, and if to get anywhere means resorting to power games, then that is another incentive for wanting to get out... My past membership of organisations like ((political parties and clubs)) has exposed me to some rather bitter and cruel power games. Each time they have furthered my resolve to avoid them myself where possible.



Some Definitions of Power, by Mary Gentle

Mine tend to be very pragmatic. Can I get what I want, and if not, who or what is stopping me? Which can vary from the basic scarce-resources argument (there isn't enough to go around -- but then who says who gets what?) to the more complex questions of why do I want that, whatever it is, and not something else. Power means control of things -- money, food, time, other people. It also involves manipulation -- of desires, thought processes, the way in which people perceive the world. And on a different level it means power over the self: the power to analyse one's own thought processes and goals, the power to resist being manipulated. No one is ultimately possessed of total power, no one is totally powerless -- though a lot of people come very close to that latter state.

Regarding the respective conditions of the sexes, I think power is involved on all those levels. The way in which resources are allocated -- money, jobs, education, etc -- is fairly obvious; social conditioning less so. What really seems to me essential is how it is that one person perceives the world-view as 'natural' and right, and another person sees it as a social construct, and wrong; when both have been born and brought up in the same kind of society.

((from a later letter)) A few thoughts ((on power))... One is that the mechanism by which it operates, in personal life, is guilt. And that this starts very early on. I don't really have a single anecdote to pin-point this, but it becomes apparent to me that most of my teenage years were subject to guilt: one didn't disagree, behave in certain ways, say certain things, because that meant "you don't love us" to one's parents. Not that that was ever said. I see it now with my friends bringing up their kids: as soon as it gets past the quick smack stage, punishment progresses on to withdrawal of affection -- "you've done that (whatever it was), so now I don't like you". It seems very wrong that what needs to be most honest, the emotional life, is so early on made a thing of distrust and manipulation. Particularly if one takes the view that relationships in later life are conditioned by relationships with the parents. I don't entirely believe that view; but I do think it inclines people to be dishonest. It's an effort to be truthful, then, in any area of life.

Power ... a tricky word, that. The first definition in my Merriam Webster dictionary is "a position of ascendancy over others: authority", and that seems to be the most common use of the word.

In some circles, such as many feminist groups, "power" in that sense is a Dirty Word. Because many women feel (or have felt) powerless, and don't feel comfortable playing "power games" (which they see as a male way of maintaining a form of hierarchy that doesn't give women a fair chance), or for whatever other reasons they may have, they tend to reject legitimate leadership (authority) along with other aspects of "power" and hierarchy. Any use of the word "power" produces a negative reaction: we don't want anything to do with that.

(Before I go on, I wish to emphasize my use of the word "some" in the paragraph above. What I said applies to some groups, some feminists. I do not believe, nor am I suggesting, that it applies to all. But that's where I got interested in the subject of "power": while discussing the topic with feminists who did oppose it -- and others who didn't.)

Other feminists are trying to look at the positive aspects of power: using one's personal strength (especially when combined voluntarily with the strength of others) to give one more control -- more "power" -- over one's own life. The dictionary even allows for that: "mental or moral vigor" it says, down there in definition #4. And that's the way I prefer to use the word: to mean the sort of personal strength that does not depend on "ascendancy over others" for a feeling of being powerful.

I'm not rejecting the other sort of power; that would be silly. It exists; I deal with it when I have to; I try not to incorporate it into my own life. I try to recognize when someone else is pulling a power game on me; but I try to reject that, not by using a contrary power game, but simply by being strong enough in myself (assertive) to resist the other person's ploy. I believe it is possible to win without someone else having to lose. I will also get very nasty if pushed too far.

But I digress. To return to power-as-inner-strength, I believe that most human misery is due, directly or indirectly, to personal insecurities, especially of those people in positions of "power" over others. I'm not going to get all theoretical here, but rather look at a few examples on a very personal scale: my own life. More specifically, I'm going to talk about one-to-one relationships between lovers. Since my experience has been with a male as the other half, that's what I'll talk about; but I suspect the sorts of relationships are independent of the sex of the people involved.

One of the saddest aspects of my marriage was the way my husband reacted to our different earning abilities. The disparity was obvious before we got married, but he assured me that it didn't matter. After a couple of years, though, it obviously did matter to him that I had a university degree and he didn't, and that I could earn more, and expect to earn more, because of that. This problem infected our whole lives. For awhile, we were both students, and both employed part time, and I assumed that we would therefore share the household chores. His attitude was then revealed: running the house was my responsibility, and he would "help"; earning a cash income was his responsibility, and I could help with that. The fact that we could not have paid

the rent, much less bought food, without my income, was quite irrelevant to his theory.

I wasn't very skilled at drawing people out in those days; when confronted with what I considered such a glaring absurdity, my response was to proclaim "you've got to be joking" and insist that he see reason. In retrospect, this was obviously not the way to handle the situation. By the time that I'd figured out that what we were really talking about was his personal insecurity, it was too late. He summed it up as "you don't need me" and was apparently very hurt.

He was right: I didn't "need" him. To me, however, that lack of need was a positive thing -- but society (in 1968) was telling us both that needing each other was good. To me, a healthy attitude is: I don't "need" this other person -- but my life is richer, fuller, more enjoyable, etc with the other person as part of it. That's what I could never explain to my husband. One day, I finally woke up to the fact that it was no longer true -- my life wasn't richer, fuller, etc with him in it -- quite the contrary. So I left. I think we've both benefitted. (In case anyone's interested, I was 22 when I married and 26 when we separated.)

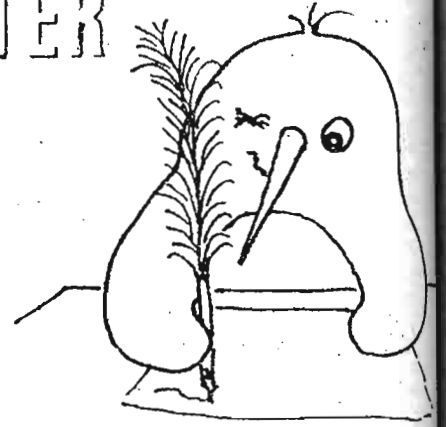
A good relationship is very difficult, I think, unless both parties are secure in themselves, so they do not feel the necessity to manipulate the other person in order to make themselves feel strong. A good relationship cannot be based on one person's being consistently inferior to the other. Obviously people's strengths can be in different areas, and they can thus complement each other. But if you've grown up with the idea that personal strength is shown by ordering other people (spouse or children, for example) around, you're not likely to have a good relationship. At least, not by my standards.

First there must be trust between the two people. If you think the other one is out to get you, or will use your insecurities against you as soon as he or she gets the chance, you're in for real trouble. That was the stage my marriage reached, and we could not recover from it (some people do, I understand). Both parties need a certain inner strength. Each person must believe or accept what the other says, or question the other to bring out what he or she means, rather than outwardly accepting the words but inwardly rejecting them because you "know" they mean something else.

An example. I want Eric to move to Canberra. I told him I want him to move. He does not want to move. He told me all sorts of reasons which I considered frivolous. I questioned and argued. Finally I understood. The "reasons" were frivolous -- but he doesn't need a reason that has any meaning for me. His only mistake was in trying to give "reasons" where none (of meaning to me) existed. I must accept his desires, as he must accept mine. Now I do, because now I have come to understand this. In exchange, I think he understands that I am not trying to bully or force him into doing something he doesn't want to do. I am not trying to tell him that I am taking it personally that he will not move to Canberra to live with me; that is playing the game called "If you really loved me" and is a wonderful way to kill a relationship. But I must be able to express my own desires and needs; and he can now see them for what they are, rather than as part of that game. Fifteen years ago, I probably would have been playing the game.

I believe that if you think you are powerless, you're probably right. But if you think you do have some control over your own life, you at least have a chance. Even if it's an illusion, it can be a very useful one. Sometimes you really can accomplish a lot -- despite all the odds of reality -- if you think you can. And thereby hangs a whole 'nother essay.

MATTER & ANTI-MATTER



PART ONE: Responses to "So What's It Got To Do With Science Fiction"

I received quite a few letters on my article in Wrevenge #11 (Vol.2, No.5), and offer here a selection of them. I've grouped the responses into more or less the same three 'categories' of my article: (a) castration/vasectomy/female sterilization/related reproductive issues; (b) illness vs handicap, and choices for these people and their relatives; (c) circumcision/genital mutilation.

REPRODUCTIVE ISSUES

On castration, Diane Fox suggests Kingsley Amis' The Alteration, 'set in an alternate world which is mostly Roman Catholic (not very sympathetic depiction). The main character is a superb singer in his early teens, who is likely to lose his vital statistics so that he can keep his voice.'

That made me think of 'chemical castration' in Songmaster by Orson Scott Card, where the main character is also a singer who would lose his voice at puberty; his physical development is long delayed by drugs, and there is some question whether he will ever develop full sexual function and desire afterwards -- the experience obviously affects his whole approach to life, though it's by no means the only serious influence.

I had skipped the topic of homosexuality, not because I don't consider it an important social issue (I do), but because it hadn't been a topic of the foregoing discussion in Wrevenge. But Joy Hibbert, in a long letter of which more will be quoted later, brought it up anyway (fair enough!): 'Homosexuality as a form of contraception, encouraged or enforced by society, e.g. Solution 3 by Naomi Mitchison, The Wanting Seed by Anthony Burgess, and a few other shock/horror approaches to the topic -- i.e. approaches which don't consider the reality of compulsory heterosexuality, and don't think that turnabout is fair play. In The Wanting Seed, children are confined to one per woman in civilized parts of the country (i.e. London), and eunuchs and homosexuals get preferential treatment jobwise. The noticeable thing about books like this is the continuation of gay stereotypes -- the only lesbian couple (and couple is a stereotype anyway!) are butch and femme, and the gay man most mentioned is very swish.'

ILLNESS VS HANDICAP: ATTITUDES AND CHOICES

Both Sally Beasley and Frank Macskasy Jr wrote about a classic story on mental retardation: Daniel Keyes' Flowers for Algernon (also published as Charlie and made into a film of the same name). Frank writes, 'The story is about a retarded adult who undergoes an experiment which gives him a normal, then genius, level of intelligence. However, the rat (called Algernon) which first undertook the experiment has started to revert to a more normal "rattish" intelligence. The significance of this is true for the hero.'

Sally also mentioned Poul Anderson's Brainwave but didn't give any specifics.

Julie Vaux wrote about 'March of the Morons' (author?), where the intelligentsia are slaves to the low intellect masses, a rather biased story with a strong point.'

Glen Crawford wrote about organ transplanting 'In Jonathan Fast's Mortal Gods, each person has a cloned duplicate from which organs are taken and used as needed by the original. The duplicate is never allowed to gain consciousness, and spends its "life" comatose. However, the cloned duplicate of the hero is brought to life near the end of the novel and we learn that (through a psychic link) it has a functional mind, awareness, and a deep hatred of its original. Perhaps a further example of technology presenting moral/ethical/social dilemmas for humanity to overcome?

'Physically handicapped' people often show up as the mutated byproducts of Armageddon (The Crystals, A Canticle for Liebowitz, etc.), and generally as the antagonists, but one was the hero in The Wizard of Linn (author forgotten), and I've read another fascinating story where the entire planet's population is deliberately sick or deformed. They were a healthy race, and had eliminated illness totally, but their population grew to such an extent that they virtually shouldered to shoulder, and their super-efficient bodies gave off clouds of marsh gas as they digested the dwindling food supplies. Release came in the form of solar flares, which ignited the gas, decimating the world and slaughtering the healthy people. The philosophers therefore

decided that "Healthy was dangerous, therefore longevity relied on sickness."

'The classic tale of spare parts recycling would have to be With the Eentfin Boomer Boys on Good Ol' N'Alabama. The bodies of soldiers killed in space battles were gathered, sewn together in slapdash fashion, and re-awakened to fight again by the use of tiny creatures implanted in the skull.'

Buck Coulson's contribution on this topic is: 'Michael Coney has an absolutely horrific future world where the wealthy hire "retainers" who are in effect living organ banks; they are well fed, kept healthy, required to do only minor tasks for their patrons, on condition that when necessary they give up an organ. (In Coney's books, this can be a hand or an arm as well as internal organs.) He's written several stories and at least one novel in that setting; quite grisly stories, mostly due to the complacency of the characters. That's the way the world is, and they've adapted to it.'

Here's Joy Hibbert again: 'Your category (b) misses out the reader's attitude toward stories about people who have altered their bodies in ways which we wouldn't like. John Varley is the writer who immediately springs to mind, with his mentions of numerous ways of changing your body, both in appearance or function, or both; for example in The Ophiuchi Hotline (I think) there's a character called Crystal who to all intents and purposes has only half a body, having only one arm and leg, the leg having a hand on the end, to make her more efficient in zero gravity, where she spends most of her time. Surprisingly, though sex changes are the normal thing to have at various points in one's life in his books, there is no mention of hermaphroditism.'

'However, to speak of actual handicaps as we know them, something missing in many stories is the possibility of prenatal screening and termination of defective fetuses. Or the possibility of children developing in utero after being genetically perfected -- I would imagine that in a society where gene mapping is a more accurate science, couples, could ensure that their children would avoid even minor things that were likely to come out in them, by slight alterations.'

'Please distinguish between mentally handicapped and mentally ill.* The mentally ill don't do too bad, sometimes even being used for a twist ending in which it's shown that they are right. For example, Varley's Manikins and another whose name I forget, where a nutter believes himself to be on a spaceship, and is being treated by a doctor who is trying to remove this delusion, until the doctor tries to shock him out of it by opening the door that the nutter believes is an airlock...'

((Mental handicap vs illness was a hot topic of debate in Wrevenge a year or so ago, and I don't intend to repeat it here. Any new readers who are really keen to see those issues can write and I'll photocopy the relevant pages for them.--JHW))

Kathleen Glancy comments on mentally handicapped: 'Mother to the World (author forgotten), a novella in one of the Nebula winners collections. This is a post-holocaust story where, somehow, the world is still habitable but the only two survivors are the protagonist, a man, and a mentally retarded girl. He has to decide whether to let the race die (so far as he knows) or risk fathering children by a defective mother. (I'd rather like to see a similar story with the sex roles reversed.) The story was a cop-out in that (1) the girl was physically beautiful and sweet-natured; it's a fallacy that all mentally handicapped people have nice natures, they can be just as nasty as us normals; (2) the children turned out intelligent; and of course (3) the supposedly intelligent hero never considered that a gene pool of two, one defective, isn't very good odds for the future even if nothing goes wrong in the first generation.'

'The other example was The King of Eolim, wherein a mentally sub-normal boy turns out to be the only person on Earth who can communicate with the aliens when they come.'

Vicky Rosenzweig continues on cloning: 'Melisa Michaels' story In the Country of the Blind, No One Can See, is about a future in which clones are routinely killed. The protagonist is saved because she might have been an esper. Clones are often thought of as "cargo". The story takes place in the aftermath of a plane crash, and there are interesting parallels with identical twins. The story is in Terry Carr's Best SF of the Year #9.

'The story with women-as-cattle is Piers Anthony's In the Barn, from Again Dangerous Visions. Niches for the subnormal in utopias reminds me of Le Guin's The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas, in a rather odd way.'

Sue Thomason suggests, 'The other "handicapped society excludes normals" story you were thinking of is (probably) Mother and Child by Joan D Vinge. ((You're right.--JHW))

'I think possibly the best SF treatment of death that I've read recently is Elizabeth A Lynn's novel, A Different Light, in which a young artist who suffers from incurable but controllable cancer deliberately refuses a potentially long but planet-bound life and instead chooses to pursue his artistic vision into space and beyond medical help, knowing that he will probably die within a year. Although this sounds very melodramatic, the book isn't -- it's about facing facts, making hard choices, and confronting the fear of death, principally in the other characters' reactions to the central figure.'

On the same topic, but not exactly sf: Andy Andruschak sends a quote from Henry S F Cooper Jr's A House in Space, about Skylab -- 'The astronaut's legs were such a nuisance in space, where they not only caused cardiovascular and muscular problems but were also something of a hindrance to an astronaut's mobility, that later one doctor at the Skylab Life Science Symposium, Dr Robert P Heaney of Creighton University in

Omaha, Nebraska, quite seriously proposed that amputees be considered for future space missions.' He is then quoted as saying, 'We have seen that ((the legs)) are nearly useless. Their tissue requires food and consumes oxygen, and if we exercise them, they consume even more. The ultimate fuel cost of legs on long missions must be really staggering.'

Andy continues, 'Now with the shuttle, amputees may have a problem getting aboard. Even more of a problem if a fast getaway was required. However, once on board, his wheelchair could be taken off the shuttle, and he allowed to just rest in his couch. Once in space he has no problems, and the wheelchair can await him on return to Earth. However, I can honestly say that NASA may never consider such an option until a long duration space station is built.'

'Who would go? Most likely a payload specialist or science specialist working on a specific experiment. Perhaps, as with Skylab, an astronomer to zero a sun camera onto significant events. Or a biologist to monitor an on-going experiment, or a chemist working on zero-g materials processing. In other words, a very good specialist who cannot be easily replaced.'

'Which brings up a very good point. Since women are lighter than men, it follows that they use less water and oxygen on long trips in space. As with amputees, a good case can be made for sending small women on long trips, to Mars for example. The ultimate, of course, is female amputees.'

'One area where surgical operation may help is "Space Adaptation Syndrome", vulgarly known as space sickness. Perhaps modifications to the inner ear, responsible for the balance of the body, may help overcome the problem. But of course it cannot be permanent, or else the person could not walk in normal gravity. Then again, some people may want to live their entire lives in zero-G. Who can say?'

GENITAL MUTILATION

Joy Hibbert writes, 'I can only think of 3 books which mention genital mutilation and none which mention male circumcision. A Feast Unknown by Philip Jose Farmer is one of the stories which is described as being full of sex and violence, but is really only violence. At one part of the story, there is a meeting of a secret society of superpeople that the protagonists belong to. At each meeting, a man and a woman of the group have to submit to mutilation as part of the rites. For the man this involves having one of his testicles cut into bits and eaten by the others; for the woman this involves the biting off of her clitoris during oral sex, as she reaches orgasm. This is fairly daft, since the organ is supposed to retreat inside the body at the point of orgasm. I remember this particular book as it mentions that the man regenerates, but doesn't emphasize the woman's regeneration.'

'The second book is James Tiptree Jnr's Up The Walls of the World. Aliens approaching the Earth cause slight telepathy between some of the people at a particular project. A man on the project, while talking to a woman, suddenly receives an image of his father castrating him, and when the image goes away, realizes that it came from the woman, that it was she who had suffered in this way. I don't know how effective this would be to the average reader, who would undoubtedly be relieved that nothing "important" had really happened, or would assume that the woman had been a man until that point.'

'The third book was Cage A Man by F M Eusby. The protagonist, after being captured by crab-like aliens, meets a woman from another planet very similar to ours, and after various incidents, including her being surgically altered to look like one of the aliens, escapes with her and some other people. He and the woman love each other, but he can't manage to sleep with her while she looks like an alien, so they discuss the possibility of plastic surgery for her when they get back to Earth. Her people are very similar to us; the only differences being that their breasts are lower down, their front hairline is further back, they have more teeth, and they can control ovulation mentally. The operation to make her like an alien removed a lot of bits: breasts, teeth, lips, part of the tongue, hair, fingers (which were replaced with pincers), her external genitalia having been removed on the woman's own planet. She said she didn't want them back, and despite this she is shown enjoying sex with the protagonist later in the book when she's got most of her body back again (the surgeon on Earth refused to mess with things that are different in her species, and she refused to make herself look like an Earthwoman just to please the bloke). Even more surprisingly, in the sequel, the ways of life on her planet seem remarkably civilized from the sex viewpoint, not what one would expect from a species which castrates women!'

Glen Crawford talks about books including genital mutilation: 'Theodore Sturgeon's Venus Plus X. The entire story revolves around a group of humans surgically altered to give them both sexes. The story is viewed through the eyes of a "Control Natural" who is enchanted by these evolved people, until he discovers that they are not natural, but surgically created. His reaction then is total disgust and revulsion.'

'Hermaphrodites appear again in Alfred Bester's Extro as the result of an experiment on astronauts by the Extrocomputer which backfires, but these are naturally created rather than surgically. They also show up briefly at the finale of Hughes Cooper's Sexmax, rather as props than anything else.'

((Contributors' addresses will be given at the end of the 'Natter & Anti-Natter' column. -- 'HW'))

PART TWO: Responses to
Joy Window's Trip Report

In issues number 10, 11 & 12, I published three installments of a 'Trip Report' by Joy Window, covering England/Scotland, Ireland, and the USA, respectively. I've been saving the LoCs to publish all at once, and now the time has come.

Diane Fox, who always has interesting things to say about almost anything, writes: 'Joy Window's comment on Sheila-na-gig reminded me of an article I'd read about early Christianity and paganism. Apparently they weren't at first very hostile. People appear to have regarded the two religions as fairly compatible and to have practiced both, up until about the 14th century, when there were more cities and social stress due to wars, bubonic plague, etc. There would probably have always been Christian fanatics who regarded paganism as the Devil's work, but this would probably have been more of an exception than the rule. But apparently violent peasant uprisings (often militantly Christian, incidentally) so worried the rulers of the time that they used pagans (and of course Jews) as scapegoats -- it succeeded all too well, and people became paranoid on the subject of "black magic". (Incidentally the Black Mass itself was probably invented in the 17th or 18th century by decadent aristocrats!)

Julie Vaux wonders: 'She neglected to say if they saw any thing or one as a result of their rituals, any visions of time past or any of the little people, who yet linger. I hope their group leader or guide had the good sense to tell them not to try calling anything, lest they get more than they sung for. With the ley line power grid broken or twisted, and those who guarded it gone, they could have found themselves some surprises -- not nice.'

Stonehenge is the classic example of the disalignment of the ancient pattern of power flow. With the original tumuli and stone and ditch arrangements either ploughed under or scattered, one can feel the threads of power past tangled around an empty greyness. Stonehenge would have been an interesting place to meditate, but there were too many guards and tourists to do a proper Time Scanning experiment. I think, although, that Stonehenge, apart from its use as an astronomical calendar and ceremony place, was once a major vortex, for there is a kind of shimmering in the air, a steeliness, a stillness waiting for the storm to return, a feeling of sleeping giants -- well, in short, as usual I'm trying to describe that which is as much seen as felt, and not with the body.'

Rev Clark writes: 'Though I'm not a practitioner of Wicca or magic, and in fact tend to be skeptical of them, Joy's experiences in Great



Britain and Ireland are both similar to mine and sufficiently different to make very interesting reading. I had never even heard of a magical tour of Ireland, though I've heard of some others -- a friend of mine went on a folk music tour in which she visited probably every folk pub in Eire, and another friend went on a science fiction tour of England for which she received college credit. (Imagine receiving college credit for attending WorldCon, which was the culmination of the "tour"!)

And I envy Joy her chance to see the Book of Kells, presumably without any pressure to pass on down the line and let the others behind one have a chance at it. I was able to see the Book briefly about five years ago during the American tour of some of the treasures, literary and artistic, of Ireland; unfortunately, it was arranged in a glass case at the exit of the exhibit and the guards were very efficient at keeping the line moving, so that one didn't have a chance to more than glance at the Book of Kells and the other books on display. But someday I will visit Ireland and see the Book of Kells, Tara, and the other historical sites for myself.'

Mary Gentle says: 'Do clothes really seem cheap here??? I'd like to know how wages compare, if that's so. And English pubs are "civilised", are they? Well, yes, it's a long time since I got an odd look for going in a pub, but this is a fairly recent change (about 15-20 years, I should think). To be briefly pedantic, by the way, "Downs" derives from the same old English word that "dunes" does -- I didn't know this, but you got me to thinking about it. Not that that's what the country people used to say when asked: they're called Downs (I used to be told) on account of when you're on top of one, there ain't no place to go but down... And the reason that Stonehenge invariably looks "smaller" is that all publicity photos, without exception, are taken with the stones standing up against the horizon; whereas they are in fact in a shallow depression, so that you first see them against hills. And when you get up close, once again they're the biggest things in sight: hence the psychological effect. (Having been a frequenter of the place before it was roped off -- as a kid, I'd visit cousins near there -- I well remember scrambling about over the fallen stones, and playing "sacrifices" on the altar stone. Enough to give any honest pagan the screaming fits, I should think.)

'About the only thing that made me wince was the throwaway remark that "the whole of England is picturesque, as if someone had designed it specially for the tourists". It doesn't, and it wasn't! Day trips to London and Stonehenge do not make for a typical view of England -- but then what tourist trip makes for a typical view of anywhere? Typical, that is, of the inhabitants' life there. England is: miles of two-storey suburban houses with dogshit on the pavements; identical shopping precincts plonked down in place of old market town centres; housing estates made up of identikit rabbit-hutches separated by postage-stamp-sized pieces of grass; hills divided by motorways; monster fields made by grubbing up hedges; lorries; office blocks; oil-rigs... I could go on (and frequently do!). Against that, the more Ruritanian and pagan historical aspects take a back place. But I do tire of the country being seen as some vast kind of Disneyland -- some of us poor buggers have to live here.'

Leslie David adds: 'I think I enjoyed Joy's trip report even more because of its lack of fannishness, which comes from my own love/hate relationship with fandom. We were spared the "I met (fill in the blank)" Being a literature major and history buff, I enjoyed reading about the places she visited and her reactions to them. Joy sounds like the kind of person I'd like to meet and tour with while I'm in Korea.'

Joni Skopa concludes with: 'I thoroughly enjoyed Joy Window's trip report. When we went over to Season in 1979, we hit a lot of the same sights. I don't think the British had to get a new perspective to grab Australia, though -- they already had grabbed America and we are not exactly small potatoes. They couldn't keep us though.'

'The British Museum is simply enormous -- one can't quite take it all in on one day. The same is true of Kew Gardens if one is a serious gardener. I was trying to take note of all the plants,

especially those in the rockery, for use in my garden at home. Jon just commented that it would take a week or more to see it all (The Museum) and I would hazard that the same is true of Kew. Joy makes no mention of the fact most of the English homes have large flower gardens. Makes America look plain. Are the Aussies as keen on gardening? I can't think of why she didn't mention all those lovely gardens.'

'She mentioned that Stonehenge underwhelmed her at first. The route we took to it approached it from below, so we did not have that experience. We had seen Avebury the previous day and had been suitably impressed. Jon did a no-no, he climbed Silbury Hill. We did see the Horse of Uffington, and that isn't easy to do. You have to drive 3/4 of the way up a down (!) and walk the rest of the way up. Then you look across the way and there it is. We saw some of the modern horses as well. We also saw West Kennet Long Barrow and Weyland's Smithy. The latter had a rather eerie feel to it. Not the Barrow itself, but the woods around it. It was a calm day and hardly a breeze stirring while we walked to the Smithy, but the trees surrounding it were in a turmoil.'

'I don't know how the various stones "felt" to Joy, but they had a very cool feeling to me, sort of detached and almost scientific. Avebury caused Jon to yell "Yea, God!" and had a warmer more religious feeling and a kind of playfulness as well. We went on to see the Rollright stones next; they felt evil and menacing. We both felt they were moving and trying to get us. It seems funny to say those things about mere stones, but that is how it felt.'

Sue Thomason comments: 'It was interesting to read Joy Window's account of England: always fascinating to see which are the details that catch other people's eyes. Oh yes, Sunday transport: there are no trains in Wales (where I'm studying) on Sundays, and the pubs don't open either. Tell Joy not to worry about the beers. With probably a couple of hundred brewers in Britain, some countrywide, some local concerns, nobody knows them all. So long as she understands the difference between mild and bitter, she'll do fine. Not all of Scotland is treeless and barren, though it does specialise in treeless "forests", which are areas of originally forested upland grazed by deer. "Forest" = deer-hunting area. usually a royal game preserve. In the south, some forests have kept their trees (like Epping Forest, and the New Forest). But it's a comparatively recent introduction as a word; it came over with the Normans. "Wood" is Anglosaxon, and older, and "Coed" is Celtic (Welsh) and older still. What a shame she didn't make it to the West. Successive waves of invaders (Celts, Romans, Anglosaxons, Vikings, Normans) came from the east across the channel, driving the previous inhabitants west. Old traditions die hard in the west. Cornwall, Wales, Scotland still speak Celtic languages. Loads of prehistoric sites.'

'I'm interested in the neo-Paganism ideas because I think I may turn out to be a neo-pagan myself. That is, I can't cope with the nastiness of Christianity which seems to be anti-life, anti-sex and anti-woman at heart, and I find myself responding strongly to pre-Christian

symbolism. I have a deep sympathy for some aspects of Zen and Taoism, but I don't think it's easy to transplant such ideas from one culture to another. I know my feelings are strongly affected by things like the weather, and my physical location; I sometimes (rarely) have intuitive insights about other people that I don't know how I know, and I am a dab hand with the Tarot (well, shouldn't take the credit: it's the cards that do the work, not me). However, I find a lot of "occult" belief and practice hard to take seriously: a lot of the time it seems to involve people desiring or pretending to power/charisma that they just haven't got. And I don't (for example) believe in life after death ... it seems so unnecessary. Isn't it enough to have this life and then to return your borrowed atoms back to the Great Chain of Being? (Though if there's reincarnation, I wouldn't mind coming back as a cat...)

((from a later letter)) 'The only contact I've had with neopagans in Britain is that I know of a group who publish a magazine called "The Coming Age" -- a magazine of the Goddess religion. It made me re-examine my own beliefs, but I couldn't go along with what they were saying entirely; a lot of it seemed to me to be too patently "made-up". Also, the magazine concentrated very much on the detail of particular ritual, which I couldn't make interlock into a coherent system of belief.'

PART THREE:

Miscellaneous

(more next time; not enough space here for all the letters)

These comments from Pamela Boal should have been in with the letters on sf books: 'One problem many disabled couples face is society's reluctance to allow them the right to have children (one example: a wife with blocked Fallopian tubes, for which there are various solutions, could get no help; her husband is registered blind), and though we might think of SF as about the future, it actually reflects the problems, attitudes and preoccupations of the author's era. It's a while since I read *The Ship Who Sang* (very much one of my favourites), but I do believe that there is a question of choice postulated when the "brains" are being trained/conditioned for their future life, and certainly the whole essence of the book is that the machinery is secondary, it is the means by which the personality is allowed to live and grow. Still one of my favourite books dealing with the subject of disability and at the same time extraordinary ability (which also puts people at a disadvantage in a society that worships the norm) is John Brunner's *Telepathist*. John manages to make the book not about disability or even extraordinary ability, but about the growth and development of a person, and shows a deal of compassionate understanding of humanity's lot.'

Pamela then continues: 'I wish that it were true that physical handicaps were increasingly meaningless in modern society. Certainly we have the technology to make them so, but we are still a long way from a society that makes the technology available to those who need it, even less to truly accepting those who need visible aids as part of society. In fact some physically disabled people are beginning to complain (at least in Britain) that awareness of and sympathy with the problems of mentally handicapped people is moving forward at such a pace as to exclude physically handicapped people in the allocation of both public and voluntary resources used to combat their problems. I won't go into the pros and cons of that argument now.'

'I only hope "Disabled Lib" moves a little faster than "Women's Lib": no one thinks it odd that a woman should edit and publish a national magazine of quality (though most people would still expect such a magazine to be for the "women's" market), but it still does not occur to people that an editor of a magazine giving information to people who are disabled might be a disabled person. Even less does it seem obvious to people organising conferences on subjects pertaining to disability that disabled people would wish to attend. Every week I receive invites to product launches, conferences, symposiums, pertinent literary luncheons; every time there is a great flutter in the PR dovecots when I ask if the venue has access and facilities for a wheelchair user. In fact the only one not to strike out this year is a "Publishing Services Exhibition" -- the only one not pertinent to disabled people.'

'Buck Coulson struck a sympathetic chord with me. To put it another way, Buck: if your upbringing inclines you to disregard the concept of inferiority or superiority as important to relationships, then the other person's attitude to such matters is no barrier to getting acquainted. A corny but telling quote doing the rounds some time ago was: If you said to a woman, "The problem with women is that they take everything from the general to the particular", she would reply, "I don't". As many people writers present their readers with stereotypes rather than people, men and women are equally inclined to approach people with a preconceived image as to what that person is like and what their attitudes will be. The approach is all too often "I" centred, so seldom "other"-centred: "I know what he/she is going to think of me because he/she is that type", rather than Here is a brand new person, I wonder what experiences, knowledge, interests he/she has to share." I have found many feminists ultra "I" centred, who approach men with the attitude that because they are men, they are bound to be egotistical, domineering, chauvanistic, etc, etc. With such an approach it is hardly surprising that they find evidence to bolster their preconceptions. Unlike Mary Gentle I would say thinking women are liable to end up "peoplists", because -- as you realise -- many men also need liberating. As you say in answer to Pete Presford, though: to each their own, and naturally we give priority where we are most affected and where we feel we can be effective. For some it's women; for me it is people with disabilities.'

WEBER WOMAN'S WREVENGE FOURTEEN

(Volume 3, Number 2, September 1983)

Registered by Australia Post, Publication No. NBH 4389. ISSN 0728-3792.

Copyright 1983 by Jean Weber; all rights revert to contributors upon publication. Weberwoman's Wrevenge is published by Jean Weber, who is resident at 13 Myall Street, O'Connor ACT 2601, Australia, but who prefers to receive fanzine-type mail (and other large stuff) at her new Post Office Box.

Jean Weber, P.O. Box 42, Lyneham, ACT 2602, Australia.

Weberwoman's Wrevenge is available for trade, contribution, letter of comment, artwork, editorial whim, or \$A1.00, US\$1.50, or equivalent per issue. I accept uncanceled postage stamps from Canada, UK or USA in payment, as well as money. I prefer personal response, however.

Electrostencils by Ron L. Clarke, Faulconbridge. Cover printed on a photocopier; other pages on Isopress, my aging Gestetner.

Publication dates are January, March, May, July, September & November.

THE COVER

Peter Lempert depicts a pair of seahorses, and comments on their reproductive behaviour, where the male incubates the fertilized eggs until the hatch, in a pouch; then he expells them. One of several examples from the animals where the male is responsible for "child care", rather than the female. (Of course, once the young are expelled, they are totally on their own, so it's hardly an exact analogy, but it seemed appropriate as a cover for an issue with several items on people's feelings about children.)

ART CREDITS

Sheryl Birkhead, 7; Margaret Sanders, 12; Julie Vaux, 2, 9, 10, 15;
Peter Lempert, Cover.

CONTRIBUTORS' ADDRESSES

Andy Andruschak, PO Box 606, La Canada-Flintridge, CA 91011, USA

Sally Beasley, 21 Gold St, Sth Fremantle WA6162

Sheryl Birkhead, 23629 Woodfield Rd, Gaithersburg, MD 20879, USA

Linda Blanchard, 23509 Hedlund Ave, mountlake Terrace, WA 98043, USA

Pamela Boal, 4 Westfield Way, Charlton Hts, Wantage, Oxon, OX12 7EW, U.K.

Bev Clark, 744 Belmont Place E #203, Seattle WA 98102, USA

Buck Coulson, 7682N-100W, Hartford City, IN 47348, USA

Glen Crawford, 6/57 Henry Parry Dr, Gosford NSW 2250

Leslie David, PO Box 5057, Ft Lee VA 23801, USA

Diane Fox, PO Box 129, Lakemba NSW 2195

Terry Frost, 77 Railway PlW, Flemington Vic3031

Mary Gentle, Flat 1, 11 Alumhurst Rd, Westbourne

Bournemouth, Dorset, England

Kathleen Glancy, 21 Barony St, Edingurgh EH3 6PD, Scotland

Joy Hibbert, 11 Rutland St, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staff. ST1 5JG, U.K.

Debby Kean, 84A Norfolk St, Ponsonby, Auckland, New Zealand

Peter Lempert, PO Box 310, Smithfield NSW 2164

Dave Locke, 6822 Alpine Ave #4, Cincinnati OH 45236, USA

Frank Macskasy Jnr, PO Box 27274, Wellington, New Zealand (* recently moved to UK, I think*)

Pete Presford, 'Ty Gwyn', Maxwell Close, Buckley, Clwyd, Nth Wales, U.K.

Vicky Rosenzweig, 21-25 34 Ave 9-C, Astoria, NY 11106, USA 2088

Margaret Sanders, 3/34A Belmont Rd, Mosman NSW

Gerald Smith, 8 Frawley St, Fransston, Vic 3199

Joni Stopa, Box 177, Wilmot WI 53102, USA

Sue Thomason, 9 Friars Lane, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria LA13 9NP, U.K.

Julie Vaux, 14 Zara Rd, Willoughby NSW 2068

Sam Wagar, 861A Danforth Ave, Toronto, Ontario

Canada M4J 1L8

I hope I didn't leave anyone out. If I did, it wasn't deliberate, just disorganised.