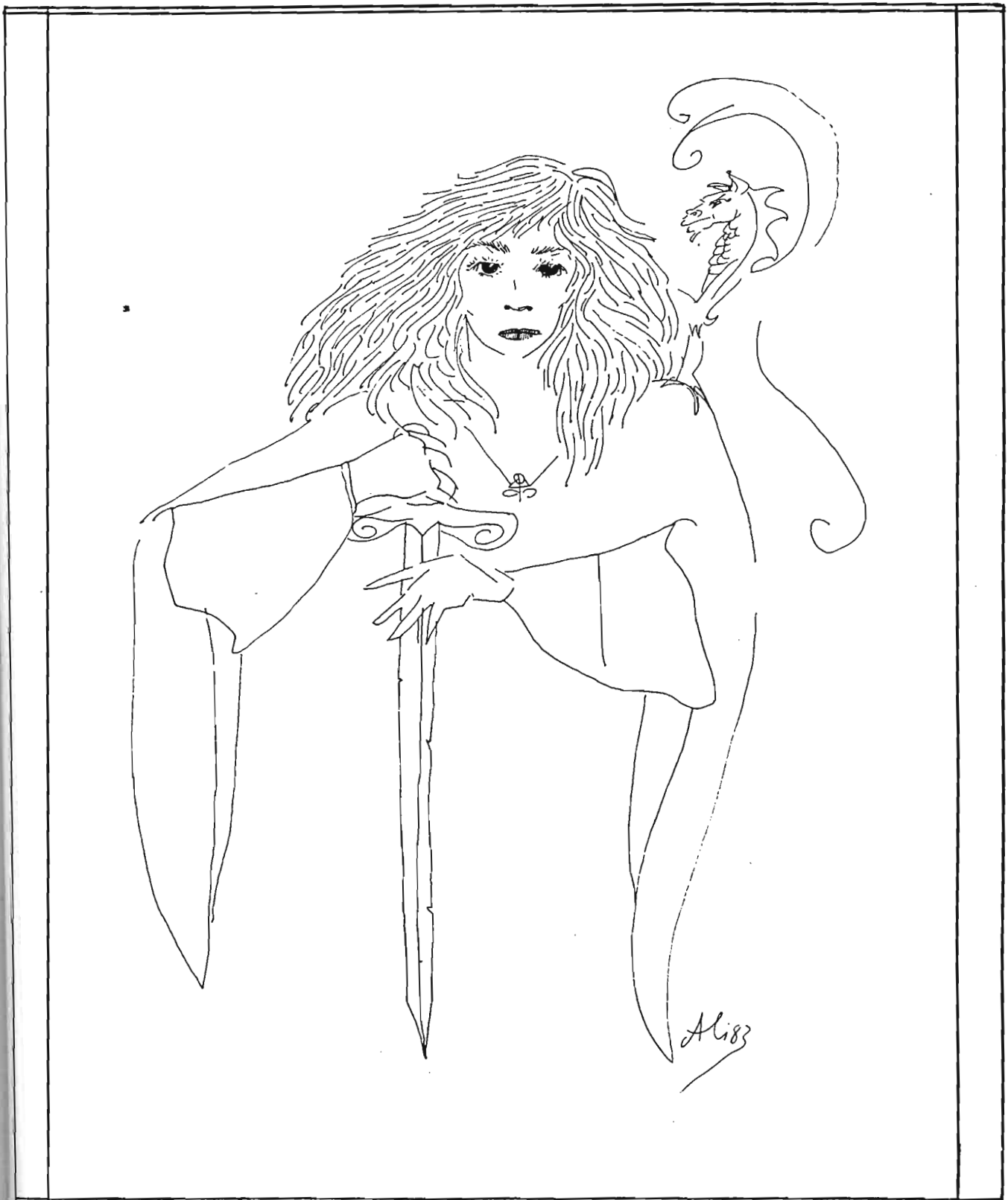


# Weber Woman's Wrevenge

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# WEBER WOMAN'S WREVENGE SIXTEEN

(Volume 3, Number 4, January 1984)

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# PRE-MENSTRUAL SYNDROME - A DIALOGUE

EVE HARVEY

and

JEAN WEBER



A new topic for a New Year, and perhaps a bit closer to home for many of my readers. Men don't suffer from their own pre-menstrual syndrome symptoms, but they often do have to cope with women who have it, either at work or at home. So it may be a bit closer to everyday life than some of the topics we've discussed in the past. No one admitted to being castrated, though quite a few (of both sexes) have been sterilized; and only one writer (anonymous and DNO) confessed to actually wanting to rape women. (On the other hand, most people have feelings about parenting or not, or the use and abuse of power -- not to mention that many of my readers said they'd been raped -- so my 'serious' topics haven't been all that removed from my readers' lives.)

This particular topic has been fermenting in the back of my mind for some time now. A Women's Apa has been discussing PMS; it's a problem I suffer from; and then I read a quite good article on the topic by Eve Harvey, which sent me to the typer to reply to her, and I decided I'd like to try to get a conversation going with other readers as well.

Once again, I'm mostly interested in how the problem affects people's feelings -- about themselves, about their close friends, about the world in general. It's by no means clear what the 'facts' are: some women get PMS, others don't; some medical personnel don't accept it as a valid syndrome at all; the symptoms vary greatly; numerous cures are touted, which may work for some women but not at all for others, and may or may not be safe. There are also legal ramifications: is 'being under the influence' of PMS a mitigating factor in violent crime, as being drunk may sometimes be? And if so, should this be the case? Many feminists would prefer not to acknowledge the existence of PMS, because men (and other women) may choose to use it as another excuse to deny women full participation in all walks of life. Yet, by not acknowledging PMS, those women who suffer from it are left believing that it's a personal problem, usually of a psychological rather than physiological nature, and get little support or understanding, much less medical attention.

I do not propose to write a factual essay on the topic. The facts, such as they are, in all their contradictory glory, are available in many women's magazines and other sources. I'll just define what I'm talking about and start the dialogue with Eve.

Pre-menstrual Syndrome is a collection of symptoms (including but not limited to, grouchiness, depression, water retention, soreness of muscles and breasts, headaches etc) which affects many women for several days (typically a week) before their menstrual period begins, and which typically cease during menstruation.

(That wasn't copied from any authoritative source, but distilled from my reading on the subject.) Over to you, Eve...

## A Fragile Female Adrift on a Chrome and Resin Sea

by Eve Harvey

I find it exciting to be a woman in the 1980's -- given a modicum of intelligence, lashings of determination and a certain amount of moral support, there is nothing I can't achieve if I want it enough. But I also find it terrifying and hanker after the safe, secure existence led by my predecessors in the less-enlightened past. Thus I find myself drifting from the crest of a wave of exhilaration to a trough of abject fear and paranoia.

These sentiments are probably anathema to many women, but I'm not talking about equality and the problems and fears connected with having to prove oneself in a man's world; they are controllable and surmountable if you're determined enough. I'm talking on a more personal, psychological level where I feel stranded, pushed into situations by today's liberated society and the aspirations that freedom has given me,

without being provided with the tools to maintain my sanity and cope with the unexpected pressures this enlightenment CRUISES.

My particular bete noir is what is euphemistically called 'pre-menstrual tension' but which is, for me, more accurately described as 'the curse'. Yes, I know we're lucky today in that much more is understood about the problem; no longer should teenagers have to suffer the sinecure 'it'll get better when you have children' when they approach their GP for help from the agony endured each month. Christ, I was only 14 at the time so it wasn't even legal for another 2 years! No, the physical side-effects of having the bad planning to be born a woman are adequately catered for by stuffing oneself full of man-made solutions to nature's mismanagement until you rattle. The mental problems are another matter completely however and here, perversely enough, today's enlightenment has made matters worse for me. The old adage 'ignorance is bliss' has much to offer at times.

I suffer from two main problems in the week before my period is due. Firstly I become unbearably intolerant; everyone around is getting at me, being argumentative or incredibly dense, intolerant, stupid, blind etc. Secondly I feel fat - my stomach expands until only the loosest dresses hide the unsightly bulge; my clothes look shabby, my hair lank and my skin covered in blemishes. In short, I feel like an overweight, dowdy frump.

Before my mother very kindly enlightened me on the former, and women's magazines and John alerted me to the latter, I was comparatively happy. OK, so people got intolerant at times - Jesus they could be slow witted and needed a kick up the backside to get them moving, but they weren't like that for long. And yes, my continuous diet was constantly failing, but this would only spur me on to try harder and, hey presto, I would soon start losing weight again and looking better. It was just one of those things, exacerbated by my slightly intolerant nature and complete lack of perseverance; but next time I'd do better.

Now, however, modern science has kindly alerted me to the fact that I can't do better next time -- the matter has been taken completely out of my hands because these things are not the result of my own (correctable) personality defects, rather the effects of hormonal imbalances which are quite usual at this time and nothing to be afraid of. There's nothing to worry about, I tell myself; I know it's me that's being unreasonable and I know I'm not really looking that bad. I know all my senses are wrong and cannot be trusted and no matter what I feel, I'm mistaken. I know I've no control over my own mind. Thanks a lot, modern science!

Can you imagine what it feels like to have it drummed home that you aren't in control of yourself? I have to ask John if I'm being unreasonable or if I really have a valid case when we're arguing. I have to ask him if I really look fat, or if this outfit looks OK because the one thing I can't trust are my own senses. That's frightening. The thought that something else is controlling me is terrifying because it underlines my complete inability to do anything about it. To understand fully you must experience it - no matter how much the sane part of the mind tells you it's OK, you should be able to overcome this problem now you know what it is, there is no help. And I've got this to look forward to for another 20 years; another 240 monthly cycles; another 720+ days of insanity.

I could go to my GP or a specialist and get the hormonal imbalance rectified, but is that a valid solution, to be reliant on drugs for the rest of my fertile life? Or will it 'get better when you have children'? Neither of those are solutions I relish.

This is why I sometimes hanker after what looks like the 'good old days' when, in my ignorance I would have been happy to overcome these minor irritations and would, in fact, have had more success. Last century 'women's problems' were a closed book to the male population and the ladies were left to solve their own idiosyncracies. If their wives were unusually critical, husbands merely kept out of the way in their studies or their clubs; servants would be more diligent because the mistress was 'in one of those moods' and the children learned, if they were quick-witted, not only to be not heard, but not seen as well. In their ignorance, everyone did what was best for the situation -- they kept out of the way and thereby lessened the very irritations that 'pre-menstrual tension' exaggerates and therefore the aggravations for the woman were kept to a minimum until such time as the status quo was restored. The woman in question would most probably not even have noticed.

In today's world, however, working women are forced into situations which only aggravate matters because they contain all the factors which exacerbate the problem; but these women cannot and do not expect to be excused for their failings. If I want equality in my career I intend to earn it; I intend to be equal to the men and don't want to be constantly excused for my mistakes because it's 'that time of the month' -- that's equality by default. I cannot expect them to overlook rudeness, intolerance, slovenly appearance and a general inability to carry out the simplest tasks. In the world of international banking, appearances and diplomacy are of paramount importance, but these are just the areas in which I suffer most.

More problems arise on the domestic scene as a result of living in today's enlightened society. Equality in the home means that instead of each partner having their own areas into which they can retreat, they are continually thrown together and, believe me, John gives as much as he gets in the ensuing arguments. No matter how much he understands me, his sympathy and love can only stretch so far under continual, unreasonable attack. Thus not only does modern life aggravate the problems, it brings them into frightening relief and the woman is stripped of her ability to shrug them off as 'just my period starting' by the desire to be equal that society has instilled in her.

It might seem that I'm making a mountain out of a mole hill and, to be honest, the problem has only arisen since I've been aware of what is happening to me -- but that is my point. Before I knew that I was being unreasonable I was happy because I thought I could do something about it. Now I know that there is nothing that I alone can do; a female who has been taught self-reliance and had it pressed home that anything is possible if she tries hard enough, is told in the following breath that her mind is subservient to her female body and only pills can help. But I don't believe in continually taking pills, so what help does society give me? Plenty of understanding and sympathy, but what practical help? Pills.

At times like this I feel completely lost, tossed and rudderless on a sea of the conflicting demands modern society inflicts on me -- more often than not drowning under the deluge because it causes the waves but doesn't provide a life raft. This is when I would gladly surrender the bright chrome, easy-to-clean, plastic resin of life in the 1980s for a dull oak and ever tarnishing, constrained copper of yesteryear.

P. S. Yes, you guessed right, whilst writing this I am undergoing that metamorphosis which would satisfy the most discerning of werewolves that I know is only premenstrual tension, but which feels like insanity thanks to the insights modern science has provided me.

((First published in RAA 4, edited by Martyn Taylor, Flat 2, 17 Hutchinson Square, Douglas, Isle of Man. Available for the usual. —JHW))

I can't find a copy of the letter I wrote to Eve when I asked her for permission to reprint that article, but I know approximately what I said, as follows;

## RESPONSE TO EVE

by Jean Weber

I was fascinated by Eve's article because my response, upon learning about PMS, was so different. To me it came as a great relief to learn that there was a physical reason for my periodic weirdness. I was not insane (well, maybe I was, but that was insufficient evidence). Rather than feeling it meant there was nothing I could do about my weirdness, it meant that it was not my fault.

A bit of background might help explain that statement, because I do not mean that I promptly abdicated all responsibility (I'll talk more about that later). The thing is, I had been becoming more and more convinced that I was, if not 'insane' exactly, at least desperately unhappy. I was quite suicidal at one stage, because I so often felt that there was no hope, that life wasn't worth living, that everybody else was utterly impossible to share the world with, and so on and so forth. This only lasted a week or so at a time, but it was very intense and overwhelming. The fact that nothing I did seemed to help, only made me feel like an abject failure. I suspect that at the time all this was going on, I was older than Eve is now, so it had been tormenting me for quite awhile.

Then I found out that it was a chemical imbalance, a hormonal thing, and that it was cyclical. Somehow I'd never quite figured that out before. I kept a chart for awhile and confirmed that yes, my bouts of insanity coincided with certain stages of my cycle, and most importantly, that they went away. Ah, a ray of hope! I made a sign for myself: hang in there, it will go away in two weeks. To remind myself when I was feeling paranoid that it wasn't my mind that was going, and that it really would get better if I'd only hang on long enough. This helped.

That was the first step. The next step was to search for some relief. Now that I knew what was happening, I could attempt to modify my life to remove stress at certain times, or at least remove myself from the presence of other people insofar as possible (if not at work, then after work). No parties at 'that time of the month'.

Sure, it doesn't always work, and it's true I have more control over my work environment these days than some people do, and perhaps taking Vitamin B6 plus magnesium plus whatever that other stuff is, is being dependent on pills (no hormones for me, thank you; I got off the pill because of what it did to me and don't need to risk other things). But I feel like I have more control, that I can actually do something about the situation. It may be an illusion, but for me it's a great help.

Mind you, on certain days, I'd probably echo Eve's comments more closely. (That's why I make signs to remind myself that I really do have control over my mind, even if sometimes it doesn't seem like it.)

I'm not knocking Eve's reactions; they're hers and they're honest. They just startled me, because they were so different from mine. Neither of us is 'right' or 'wrong', because we are different people, and our bodies (as well as our minds) react differently to things.

On the matter of responsibility, I distinguish between how I feel, and how I act. Although I feel greatly relieved to know that my grouchiness and other anti-social feelings are not my fault, I still accept the responsibility for how I act during those times, just as I do at any other time. Thus, if I snarl at someone (whether they deserve it or not), it's no more forgivable (or unforgivable) whether I'm in PMS or not. I've just transferred my responsibility slightly; to anyone else it amounts to no change at all. That's why I try to disappear as much as possible, so I won't inflict myself on others.

## EVE'S REPLY TO ME

((Eve replied to that letter, the contents of which I've elaborated upon greatly here, by writing:))

Since the article has appeared, I've had lots of sympathetic advice from women about taking vitamin B6, hiding myself away as you do, re-arranging my workload to avoid decision-making situations etc, but that wasn't why I wrote the article. If I'm honest with myself, it was merely a cry of self-pity, not a cry for help, since the main point of the article was the confusion in my own mind -- society has educated me to believe in equality of opportunity, but I only want it if I've earned it, no special favours, thanks.

However, how can I ask for equality, if I'm unfit to perform at work at 100% performance for between 5 and 7 days a month?... If only I hadn't been educated to feel I should be equal, I could happily accept the fact that I have to re-organize my work at certain times and avoid certain situations, and then I'd just get on and succeed in my career.

## AS EDITOR, I GET THE LAST WORD (for this issue anyway)

((I wrote back as follows;))

How many people, of either sex, have you met who "perform at 100% efficiency" at work every working day? Specifically, how many men? Men have off days, too; they've got a low-level illness; they're hung over; or they're just "having a bad day". If anything, men's inefficient days are less predictable than ours, and thus more likely to adversely affect their performance. If we know we'll be in bad shape on a certain day, we at least have a chance of planning for it, so as to minimize its effects. "Equal" doesn't mean "identical", and I don't consider it a "special favour" to acknowledge PMS.

((I'll now add the following thoughts to that:))

I think it's part of the way "society" manipulates people through guilt, that teaches you or I to consider that a physical handicap (which is about what PMS amount to) makes us "unequal". Is it a "special favour" to provide wheelchair access to an otherwise-qualified worker? Is my demand for a chair suitable for my bad back a demand for "special favours"? No, I think not. People should not have to modify themselves to fit the job; the job should be modified to fit the people (insofar as this does not decrease overall efficiency) -- good worker morale usually increases efficiency immensely. Recognising individual differences and problems, and making allowances for them, is good business sense, not "special favours"; pity so many management types don't recognise that.

\*\*\*\*\*



# HIGHLIGHTS OF)

## A DAY IN THE

### LIFE OF...

by Giulia de Cesare

Out of my neon-lit, windowless concrete cubicle, files and test into the boot of the car. Back off grass verge, roll down to main road with one wheel on the gravel to avoid a van. Right turn, looking out for locals who drive as observantly as they walk into their bathrooms at home. Onto open road, and I put on a tape, Elo's Time.

The countryside's a lot greener now. We've had a drought and it looked like the Kalahari: colours of brown, ochre, dust; sheep starved. Now it looks lush, light green on the flat land. Some distant hills are still dry, and if you look closer at the pasture you can see the deception of distance -- it's just a green fuzz and the soil shows between the blades of grass like the scalp of an old woman's head through her thinning hair.

A little later, on my right, winding worm-like between the hills, is a carrion-train of logs being taken to a sawmill. Each wagon has eight or nine dead trees clutched between the steel uprights that form its skeletal sides. It drags itself along at a fittingly solemn pace and I leave it behind in a moment.

Open road, tame, cleared land. Less than a hundred k.s west of here are still places where no man has trod, unless some adventurous aboriginal hacked his way through the horizontal scrub. My brother is a bushwalker; he's been places, to mountain tops where he knows for a fact that maybe three or four people have been before him in all the time those mountains have stood. And I, a little way east, slide through manicured farmland cleared less than two centuries ago and little changed since then. Barbed wire is more recent but the posts that it's nailed to, that flicker by in a subliminal blur, may have been planted by hand, men on horses, at a rate of, what, forty a day? Eighty? I pass them in a moment, unseeing, in my self-contained, totally enclosed 20th century bubble. Glass and steel encasing warm air shoots through the whistling wind, tyres roar against bitumen and gravel, and Jeff Lynne singing,

"I've got a ticket to the moon,  
I'll be flying high above the Earth so soon ..."

A dark lump on the road ahead. It moves. Big crow, tearing at scattered lumps of glistening red meat that last night may have been still a possum or a wallaby. He steps casually to one side, knowing through experience that this car will miss him. Robust, glossy black, sleek feathers, purple-green iridescent. In the rear-view mirror he steps back to continue his meal, intrusion forgotten.

\*\*\*\*\*



Slowing, slowing, past the stone churches, brown gravel edging the road. Pull up outside the school gate, collect gear. With all their good intentions and all their great inventions, here I stay.

The entrance to the school has what look like tank tracks pressed into the yellow clay, part of the steel fence is on the ground. The massive old tree I used to park under is gone. What was it, oak? I remember dark, cracked bark, thick, lumpy roots bumping under the tyres. Acorns? No, pine needles on the ground.

Inside the school is a tall lady with dark hair. Not sure whether I should remember her, but she's in fact new, a relief teacher. We chat a bit; she'd spent her holidays in Canberra. Another teacher from Outlands had also been in Sydney while I was there, stayed up the road from the Shore Inn, and never knew the con was happening. We're a well-travelled lot, but we still manage to stay in our own little circles.

The principal returns from lunch and I ask him about the tree. He says it was dangerous, might have dropped branches on kids' heads. Besides, the roots were getting under their netball court. The tracks in the clay were made by a bulldozer. I give him a couple of reports and we arrange for him to send some kids down for maths tests. I work in the town hall since there's no room in the school.

The first kid he wants me to see is called Jasson. "Jasson?" I say. "Jasson?" "No, Jason," he replies. "That's just how his parents spell it." Catching my expression, he adds, "They

won't let him go on excursions either, or get free medical or dental treatment."

I walk down to the town hall to await "Jasson". The council chambers are at the front, and I go round the side to the back entrance where they built on a weatherboard kitchen. The knob on the door is broken but it's unlocked. My footsteps echo across the warped floorboards, the still air is musty. Dust and stale disinfectant and maybe also the smell of whatever the disinfectant was meant to combat. The building is divided down the middle into two large rooms. I work in the "supper room" and, leaving my things on a trestle table I turn on the lights and go through the other half to a small back room where the fusebox is located. I close three heavy black bakelite switches labelled 'supper room heaters'. They look like they came off the set of Metropolis.

"Jasson" turns out to be a nice little boy with blue eyes and black lashes, clean and well cared-for. Nervous, clutching his biro. I tell him we won't need it for awhile, but he hangs onto it tightly as we start the questions.

We get to the part where Jason can use his biro for more than emotional support, and I leave him writing answers and wander about the huge room so my presence at his elbow won't make him more nervous than he already is.

Outside, it's sunny, the sky is clear, icy blue. Soft grass and clumps of weed are rolled by gusts of wind on this side of the grey paling fence. On the other side is the school oval, the grass has been razed flat. I wander into the other room again, thick-soled boots thumping across the floor. Through the door the air is chill. The stage at one end is half-shrouded by curtains, watched intently by rows of stacked chairs. On one wall, a black and white photo of the queen, opposite, a cracked and blurred oil landscape entitled "Cabarah" by one Godfrey Rivers. It looks better from a distance.

I go back to check on Jason, calculating industriously, engrossed. I feel relaxed and bored, next to me he is at high key doing an exam. I sit down again, trying not to breathe too deeply of that dead air. Ever notice how country schools, country homes are a lot stiffer than city ones? As if they don't like opening their windows, in case the "rheumy and unpurged air" gets them.

"Well, that's it, we've finished. You worked well, Jason. Could you ask Mr Peters to send the next person down now?" His footsteps echo across the floor, he fumbles with the knob and is gone. A moment later, I look up to see him running up the slope to the school. Another hard road.

Then running feet pounding the gravel. The door rattles and bangs. This one's eager. Clatter across the hall and the next child appears, breathless, in the doorway. I smile, and she comes in. "Hi, Mr Peters sent you down, did he?" She nods happily. "What's your name?"

"Kylie."  
"Well, Kylie, I hope you like doing sums..."  
"Oh, yes," she replies.

I set up the easel again and repeat my spiel about how they'll start easy and get harder, she's not to worry because I don't expect her to know all of them. Et cetera. She nods happily.

"How many dots go in the red box?"  
"Read me this number rounded to the nearest hundred."

I can look at her and see the adult she will become, untidy hair now windblown, later just busy-housewife

untidy. Wide eyes, plain, broad face, ready, open smile. I can see her twenty years later coming to school anxiously in reply to a letter from the guidance officer who wants to discuss her child's progress in reading. I see in her pale face now the face to be, more lined, hands a little redder but gentle with the toddler she holds as she will talk to me then...

We get to a hard one, and she looks tearful but manages to work it out. I reassure her automatically, she smiles again and we go on. After we finish she goes out as happily as she came in, the minor annoyance of a test in the past and forgotten.

I pack up, switch off, fumble with the broken knob and finally get out. I'd been longing to take a deep breath of that crystal air, but it has a glacial bite to it so I doh't. Breathing shallow, I go back up to the school, exchange a few more pleasantries with the principal. I'll bring reports on Jason and Kylie next week. He hasn't read the last lot yet. I comment on the cold. We have a running joke here.

"Cold?" he says. "It hasn't started to get cold yet!" Spare me. I leave, breathing shallow.

#####

A few words of explanation for the essay: I am a school psychologist, in this state (Tasmania) called a Guidance Officer. I am based at a district school in the midlands and travel regularly to about 10 other schools, many of them very small. While I am supposed to be a therapist or counsellor, I usually spend most of my time giving tests, such being the demand in these schools. You know those dreaded IQ tests? We're the villains who give them!

I wrote the essay the day after Syncon, after a week in Sydney, and the first con I'd ever been to. On that day, I just stepped back into the usual routine of work as though I'd never left, back in rural Tasmania. I wrote it in an effort to express some of my feelings about the numbing boredom this represented in contrast to the place I'd been in a little over 24 hours previously. Don't know how well that comes across.

--Giulla de Cesare



# MATTER



# ANTI-MATTER

(The lettercolumn)



(The volume of mail which has found its way to my letterboxes since the strike ended is quite clogging. I shall only be able to share a small portion of it with you here. I shall probably also save the Australian responses to #15 until the overseas readers have had time to write.--JHW))

PETE PRESFORD  
'Ty Gwyn!  
Maxwell Close  
Bwcle, Clwyd.  
North Wales  
2 Oct 1983

I was really pissed off by Joy Hibbert's comments on the way she thinks I run my family. And I must say Jean, that in the fifteen years I've been in fhandom I've never had anyone comment on my personal life as

this person does. I should suggest that it is Ms Hibbert that gets civilized; either that or grow up. I have never yet attacked anyone at personal level in any of my fhanzines, but this person is pushing me close to it.

(I just went back and re-read what Joy said, and I must admit I didn't find it all that much of a personal attack -- more of a smartass remark -- but then she wasn't talking about me. I have been trying to edit personal attacks out of letters, and I apologize for not seeing her remark in that category, or I would not have printed it. I can't decide whether I would have felt it a personal attack if it had been directed to me; can't tell because the subject matter is too far removed from my actual life. It does strike me that your response is just a wee bit defensive, Pete.--JHW))

GARTH SPENCER  
1296 Richardson St  
Victoria, B. C.  
Canada V8V 3E1  
9 Oct 1983

I was struck by LynC's story about the former boyfriend who couldn't deal with his girlfriend being as good as or better than he at automotive maintenance, computing, or what you will.

As though everyone else with the same skill was automatically a competitor.

This seemed foreign and bizarre to me, in a way I'm not sure I can convey ... until I thought, well, I define myself by what I do. And I'm insecure enough to feel threatened if someone (who?) does better. If my self-esteem depends on my activities and skills, maybe it follows from that, in my emotional set-up, that a more skilled person is a superior, and I am an inferior. I think we have a premise in Anglo-Saxon societies -- meaning, in millions of Anglo-Saxon minds -- that superiors (genuine or spurious) are potential threats, enemies.

That men should define their self-worth almost exclusively by their skill at their livelihoods might be a

premise that dates right back to the Proto-Indo-Europeans. I'm preoccupied with that sort of thing right now.

(I was going to argue that 'team spirit' and cooperation are as much a part of our heritage as is competition, and that a more-skilled person could be a teacher, someone one respects for his or her knowledge. Then I realised that respected teachers are usually older, and often become rivals later on anyway. And of course male 'team spirit' has tended to exclude females in the past. So I decided to pass by that interesting speculation.--JHW))

JONATHAN SCOTT  
Box 292 Wentworth Bldg  
University of Sydney  
NSW 2006, Australia  
9 Oct 1983

The one enormous facet I noticed in 'Power Points' was that your commentators were almost to a clause negative about the stuff.

Sexual, fateful, careerwise, if it isn't in the imagination (that odd definition #4 of yours) it was 'evil' or at least to be regarded as untrustworthy. Why? Well I guess because if it is not in the imagination, there is a dominated party, a done-to. How come you got no people from the other side?

((No one wrote on 'the other side' till I got this letter from you, Jon.--JHW))

I would have to immediately divide 'power' into the concrete (practical or real manifestation of one person's will overriding another's) and the abstract (one sided mental exhilaration). I note that you 'prefer to use the word in the latter sense', which I take to mean you approve of that type, rather than the former. I like the former, myself; in the losing I learn, in the winning I glory. One has to be careful not to seriously engage persons classified as friends, for obvious reasons, but I am not averse to a bit of peasant-bashing when the sport is in season. It's no fun when there's no contest, such as when fate puts one person in a losing position (cf Sam Wagar's situation), but doing somebody is good fun. When our sharehouse broke up, one (female) ex-flatmate said to me, 'The one thing living with you has really taught me is not to be ashamed of enjoying violence.' I suspect the most eager to comment on power in a place such as Wrevenge are those who have been mentally stamped with the losing edge in power plays. Well, I am the reverse... so far.

((Power plays can be enjoyable for the winner, but I find them abhorrent unless both parties are willing participants. That is why games can be very cathartic; you can enjoy the hunt & kill without actually hurting



someone. I have nothing against competition per se -- in fact I enjoy it immensely at times, but again, all participants must be willing ones for it to be an enjoyable experience for me. When competition (for power, money, whatever) is voluntary, it can be an invaluable spur to excellent performance. When you feel you have to (whether you in fact do 'have to' or not) it can be oppressive. I've been in both positions at different times. I enjoy the one and loathe the other. --JHW))



GIULIA DE CESARE  
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I noticed an area (re power) that was skated over by the various writers, a sort of forbidden subject that we are reluctant to talk about:

money is power. I was going to qualify that by adding 'in our present society' but this is not true. Money has always been power. Before everyone jumps up and down and calls me a mercenary capitalist (and if I am, that's my business), I'd like to point out that even in the discussion printed, a common source of feelings of powerlessness was having to earn one's living and thus kowtow to all manner of undesirables. It's a lot worse for the unemployed.

Re amputee astronauts: the main red blood cell factories are in the marrow of the long thigh bones. Would the astronauts need the extra hassle of transfusions? Or would they need fewer red blood cells, having a lower volume of blood?

JOAN DICK  
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Australia  
12 Oct 1984

Sam Wagar may be the most wonderful guy in the whole world but anyone who says he doesn't think dogs have personalities is out as far as I am concerned. Kids & dogs & cats go

together, like eggs & bacon, and if you love one, you love all. My six children and my two grandchildren loved my fuzzy black 'Tramp' till the day he had to be put to sleep. Even now, three years later, we can't bear to talk about him. We loved him and he loved us completely. Sam Wagar I feel sorry for. In not knowing the complete unwavering love of a small dog he has missed out on one of the best things in life.

((Well, I like cats but am not too fond of dogs and children. Then again, I don't like bacon much either, though I love eggs. So much for analogies, eh? I wrote back to Joan as follows: I'm with Sam, and I can't agree that dogs and cats and children can be equated. Most dogs I've ever known were emotionally dependent nuisances, whilst cats typically are very independent and don't work themselves into a state if you leave them for a weekend or a week. However, that's just my bias. --JHW))

I received more love in 15 years from my dear 'Tramp' than I did in 32 years of marriage from my husband. But perhaps that's not so much a praise of the dog as a condemnation of the husband. But I could never have left the dog while he was alive. He is thereason I stayed those extra two years. Perhaps one day you will be fortunate enough to find out what I mean. I hope you do.

Regarding kids, I have six. I love all six. I'd go to war for them. But I didn't plan any of them. Over the years, at various times I have felt very brief homicidal tendencies towards each of them, but let anyone else say that and they would have had a fight on their hands.

There is only one reason to have a child these days and that is because both partners want the child. In these days of birth control there is no excuse for it to be otherwise. No one should have children because someone wants to be a grandmother.

LYN McCONCHIE  
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New Zealand  
28 Sept 1983

I was badly injured in an accident early 1977. The Dr said I was on crutches for good (unless they amputated my right leg and gave me a fake one as an alternative). Not

liking either idea, I put my foot down (while I still had it), went home on crutches and waited. Eight months or so later I discovered that I could put some weight on the leg. My GP shot me off to a different specialist and after a lot of discussion, bush beating, and delay, he operated (mid-August '79) and in another 7-8 months I was walking again. And the moral of the story is ... don't believe everything you Dr tells you. So, I can't run, walk too far/fast, I have scars, and a slightly thinner leg, but all that is still in my opinion, better than not having 3/4 of my leg!

SAM WAGAR  
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Your comments about worship, paganism, et al, sounds very like some feelings I had once, when I was beginning my Witchy stuff. I don't know if

I'd use 'worship' to describe my ritual activities, other pagan's activities. That word has these associations I don't like of 'appealing to higher forces "Out There"', whereas I do things to evoke the forces within me, or connect myself to natural forces, to bring out things that are within me already.

The Goddess is my creation, insofar as She is one personification of creation and fertility, wisdom and mystery, which are ideas peculiar to myself, filtered through my needs and desires. But solipcism does not suffice -- there are these great forces of creation and destruction, there are real connections that can be made.

I guess that 'worship' is doing things to affirm my identity with the great elemental forces, that name them and find them in me. Trying to tune into the movements of nature, cycles of the seasons, etc.

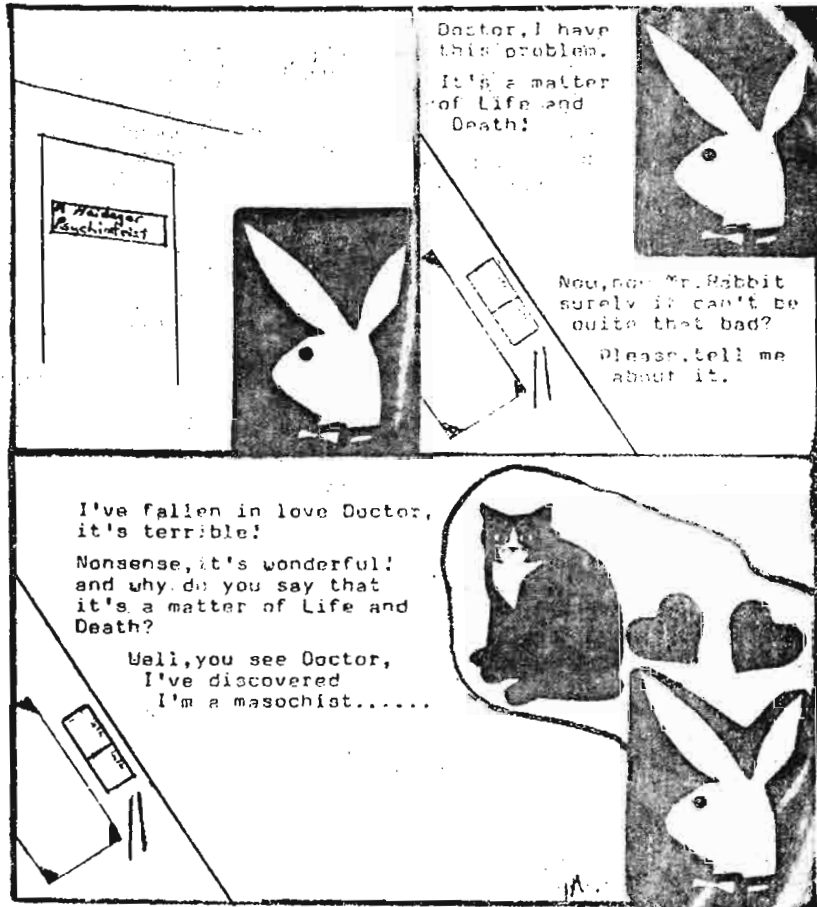
I like ritual because ritual intensifies and makes particular my vague feelings and ideas about my connections to nature, other people, within myself.

((See also Sam's piece "Some Thoughts on Ritual", elsewhere in this zine. It comes a bit closer to explaining to me what Sam's trying to say... though it's all still a bit hard for me to understand. Sounds like a good example of the difficulty to explaining certain concepts (philosophy, etc) to someone who doesn't already agree. I must thank Sam for trying, though. And since I know the value of one technique, meditation, for me, and how hard it is to explain just what wonderful things meditation does, I can appreciate the difficulty in explaining ritual. --JHW))

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*  
\* HAPPY NEW YEAR !  
\*  
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**THE RABBIT'S PROGRESS**

By Lyn McConchie



SKEL  
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19 Nov 1983

It strikes me (\*Clunk\*) that a diary zine is ideally suited to your writing style -- it seems to me that, in your writing you've always written as if you were making an entry in your 'diary'. You never

use the piece you're writing to achieve an effect -- there is no choice of words or phrases in order to present the happenings you are reporting in a particular light. In fact 'reporting' seems the perfect description of your approach. To paraphrase a character in a Frank Sinatra film, 'Just give us the facts, ma'am.' Everything is laid before us in the same even tone, whether it be a harrowing operation or the purchase of a ream of paper, moving in and sharing a house and lifestyle with someone, or deciding which garage to pick -- wondering how a relationship will work out, or wondering how much a tv-repair will cost... all are presented on the same emotional/emotionless level. If you wish to express say, your anger over a particular turn of events you do not present them in angry words, letting the language and choice of phrase convey your emotional state, and even to induce in us a similar, supportive reaction, but instead recount the events in a flat emotional tone, and then tell us, 'This really made me angry.' This is a really weird experience for me because I try to write in just the opposite manner, using emotive language in an attempt to convey my feelings without having to stop and explain my reactions to the reader -- if something struck me as funny I try to make the reader laugh or smile at the event with me, thus leaving them with an intuitive understanding of my emotional responses to the events I narrate.

I think that it is this element in your writing (and oddly, in the writing that your readers sent to you for WWW) that Ted White was referring to as 'impersonal'

-- you, and your correspondents, write about highly emotional experiences in a 'stepped back from the subject' manner, as if they've deliberately stripped their emotional responses to events from their reporting of them. Like I said, I find it weird, but I'm not knocking it -- it would be an awfully boring world if we all took the same approaches to living -- but I am intrigued as to whether it is deliberate or not. My own view is that you've never even considered the matter, and that your style is completely natural for you. I'd go even further and say that you were unaware of the concept of deliberately writing in a more emotional manner, feeling that other people's styles were simply their 'natural' way of writing.

((Actually, Skel, I've been aware for several years of my 'just the facts, ma'am' writing style, and I think I know where it comes from. I've been trained to write -- and spend my professional life editing -- scientific and technical papers, where anything other than 'just the facts' is generally considered padding -- and has to be cut out. In fact, when I leave the 'padding' in some of the things I publish at work, I usually get my hand slapped. But as it's a semi-popular magazine rather than a 'stuffy' journal, I defend leaving in the more personal touches.

I digress. But yes, I'm aware of my 'style', and don't often make much effort to overcome it. When I do, it tends not to work -- or no one notices! To a certain extent, the 'just the facts' style is deliberate, at times anyway -- it's called understatement. Thought you Brits were supposed to be the master of understatement! Evidently a case of no one noticing when I do something deliberately. (Probably because the effect is no different from the usual, \*sigh\* )

Dunno why my correspondents seem to write the same way. And thanks for the analysis; fascinating. --JHW))

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4 Nov 1983

bricks for lining blast furnaces, electric arc furnaces and that sort of thing.

I don't doubt that having spent 5 years doing research in universities, where attitudes are generally (but not always) reasonably enlightened, I have got some way out of step from the attitudes encountered in industry and among working people. I did a spell in industry prior to going into research and remember being quite appalled by the way the people I worked with regarded and spoke of women. The all-male environment undoubtedly brings out a certain streak, probably more bravado than anything.

As well as myself, two other people have started work in the same department as me, one of them a woman -- the first researcher the firm have employed. It's been quite an education to see the way Ruth has been treated -- and not simply by the male staff. At the start the other women at work, who are secretaries, didn't take to her, though it's better now. It was almost as if they, as much as men, have rigid ideas about where each sex should work and in defying this convention Ruth was unsettling them as much as any of the men who believe a woman's place is in the home.

None of the more sexist personnel have told her that -- after all some of them hired her -- but the rumour mill has it that certain other people don't believe women should be employed in "serious" jobs in industry. The only person to actually say anything to her to this effect was a fellow who was only 19. I naively thought that kind of attitude was confined to older people, not the young, but I'm wrong. There are more subtle differences which Ruth perceives between the way she is treated and the way the other two of us are treated, and you wonder sometimes whether there's a sort of feedback effect going on, where she expects a certain type of treatment and sees the way people behave in a way they don't mean. Or else they discriminate without realising. Our attitudes are often more ingrained than we realise.

DEBI KEAN  
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16 Nov 1983

Your question after my letter, about adoption... well, yes, if the children concerned are genuinely orphaned, have no other care-givers, of course that's okay. The whole question is really very complex.

Among Maoris, and probably other Polynesians, it is quite common for intra-family adoption to take place. If a woman (or a man) cannot produce children, it is customary for a sibling to give one of her/his own children to the sterile couple. This usually works very well, because it is not secret. The child has two sets of parents, knows them all, has double the love and attention, and what child wouldn't love that? I knew a woman who had had a series of miscarriages and so had adopted, I think it was three children, but although she wasn't Polynesian, kept in contact with the original mothers of all of them, exchanged birthday cards, even visits. This worked wonderfully well.

So many adoptive parents say they couldn't cope with this, that they feel like long term foster parents, or that they even feel exploited, and I feel this is because they feel that children are possessions. That they have to be exclusive owners. That they have to lie to themselves and the whole world, that they conceived and gave birth to this child. As if their self-image depends on fertility.

JOY HIBBERT  
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24 Nov 1983

Something I've found very annoying since I met Dave and we agreed on an open marriage, is the number of men who don't take a proposition seriously. Not that there have been that many, she adds hastily, but there are enough that I can see

some sort of 'norm'. Firstly, they assume that any flirting is just a joke. When you get slightly more subtle, they start looking nervously at Dave and suggest you stop before he comes and beats them up. When you get totally unsubtle, they start by assuming it's a proposal rather than a proposition i.e. that you want to leave Dave and want someone to go to. Failing that they decide that there is definitely something wrong with the relationship and they ought to keep out of it. Then, when you've blown their mind completely with the idea of a nonmonogamous relationship, they start thinking about it.

((Have you ever had the reaction that assumes Dave wants to be part of the group, and/or watch? If you want to totally terrify some man, ask Dave to come over and explain the situation! If the other man does not flee instantly in terror at this weird perversion, he may be well worth knowing. Or perhaps too weird to be considered. Seriously though, I've had exactly the same sorts of experiences, especially when I was married, but then so did my husband. I think people tend to be very respectful of what they perceive as other people's 'property rights'. That annoys the hell out of me, as apparently it does you. -- JHW))

I would ask Kevin McKaw to drop his 'mask' occasionally, so that any other decent men he comes into contact with will know they're not the only ones. It's so widely accepted that all men are sexist, and that is 'natural' to them, that the isolated antisexist men (I mean isolated from other antisexist men) must be quite depressed. Kevin would have to know every member of a women's group quite well for them not to fear his turning into an ordinary man. Also, sexist husbands etc of a woman in a women's group would be less inclined to let her go to a mixed antisexist group. Also, the tendency to defer to men is difficult to get out of -- Kevin might be a quiet enough bloke, but it would be necessary to keep him out of the group rather than risk women deferring. While his letter is very interesting, there are some phrases which would be better clarified, 'Male instincts', for example; does he mean the desire to have heterosexual sex? Or something worse. I would differ with his use of the word 'instincts', probably.

I suspect Glen ((Crawford)) assumes that a successful feminist is one who has become masculine enough to succeed in a man's world, and radical feminists merely want to change it so that people who don't want to leave their humanity behind can also succeed. Not meaning any offense to you or Sue, I was referring to those successes such as our Prime Minister.

((The above paragraphs were excerpted from a very long and interesting letter from Joy -- one of several I've received recently -- and aren't really representative of all her comments. She fares a bit better than Diane Fox these days though -- Diane writes equally long letters, but I tend to print even less of them. I much appreciate receiving and reading them, though! -- JHW))

DIANE FOX  
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28 Nov 1983

Power? I don't have any in my job (which is dead-end) or in any of my relationships -- that is, power to be of much constructive help.

I have the power to be a nuisance, but who wants to use that? (Unless people annoy me seriously.)

Inner power -- normally I don't have much of this either. Especially when I consider the many shallow,

irresponsible remarks I continually make without thinking. I want to apologise for that stupid remark, "fools who lacked both compassion and practical experience of the cruelty of oppression." Sigh. Shows I'm a fool myself.

At other times I surprise not only myself but everyone around me, by doing or saying something intelligent. This isn't all that rare, but often I feel that it isn't 'me' doing the intelligent thing, but part of me I don't know all that well and would like more contact with. Not exactly an alien force, it is more like "letting the force flow through me". What I consider to be me is only a section of me, my conscious personality, and it isn't very interesting or creative compared with the things that don't often seem to get to the surface. Very frustrating.

((Perhaps you spend too much time putting yourself down for the stupid things you do, and not enough time praising yourself for the good stuff. At least, I don't think you give yourself enough credit when credit is due. The power of positive thinking. --JHW))



BUCK COULSON  
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29 Nov 1983

I don't mind how superior anyone else feels, as long as he/she doesn't condescend to me. Unless, of course, they're a genuine expert in a field I recognize; I'll happily admit that

others know more about specific fields than I do. Some of the fields -- like magic and mysticism -- I don't consider valid, and say so -- which usually aborts the getting-acquainted process. But mostly I don't seem to have much trouble. (Should I say that some of my best friends are feminists? No, probably not; not being serious about another person's intense interests is another way to abort acquaintance.) The only feminists I know are the ones in fandom, and they usually seem willing to be polite to me, mere male though I am. Possibly that's because fans as a whole are more tolerant than people in general; possibly not, but mostly I've found less "I" centredness among feminists than I have among the average mundane of either sex. Or maybe I'm so self-centred that I just don't notice it..

((I think it's often how one handles one's lack of seriousness about someone else's intense interests. If one ridicules them, it's certainly likely to be a barrier to getting acquainted. But if one says, in effect, I accept that it's important to you, but it isn't high on my priority list, it may not be a problem. --JHW))

GLEN CRAWFORD  
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I feel quite a bit for Debby Kean. We have shared an experience, and I can safely say it's one of the worst you could imagine. I know what I went through losing my two children; as a mother, her pain would have been ten times worse.

Adoption in the case of death of both parents should be compulsory, and no way should children left this way be handed over to grandparents to be raised. The age difference is too great, and children need to grow with their parents, as both go through life together. The idea of children being raised in orphanages or homes is horrifying to me, and should be totally unnecessary, as there are hundreds of deserving and capable homes out there, unfulfilled because the couple can't produce their own children. My younger brother and his wife recently adopted a Vietnamese baby, as Monica had several miscarriages in a row, and her health was thought to be in danger. She fell pregnant again not long after, and has carried it full term. Her baby is due within days of ours.

((Glen, please explain to me the difference between a child being raised by its 40-year-old grandparents, and a child being raised by its 40-year-old parents, as both situations are quite common these days. Those who 'started a family' early are young grandparents, those who wait till the last possible minute are 'old' (?) parents. So? I don't think age, per se, should matter. In fact, it is my opinion, based on my own feelings and those of other people I know, that a person who waits till s/he feels ready to 'settle down' with the responsibility of a family, and thus enjoys the experience, would make a better parent than a younger person who isn't ready for that responsibility. In fact, your own statements in past issues seem to fit that category. --JHW))

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29 Nov 1983

Many thanks for the reviews! It is always refreshing to find readers who got out of a book just what you as author put in: it reassures

authors that they are managing to present their ideas clearly. You read *Frostflower & Thorn* very perceptively. I wish you'd done the cover blurb, instead of whoever made 'a wasteland that was once a world' and *Thorn* as indiscriminate slaughterer out of it.

You'll be sorry, I fear, to learn that almost everything I've been writing for the past two or three years is mystery. I enjoy murder mysteries because - except in the 'toughboiled dick' school which I do not enjoy -- a single death, even of a very unpleasant character, means so much, causes such a stir, is so important. In much SES, SF and even standard adventure historical or otherwise, life is cheap and corpses litter the pages or film clips wholesale. In whodunits, each death -- and therefore every life -- means something: individual characters are important, not mere fodder for some superhero's flashing sword or belching firearm. Murder mysteries, paradoxically, seem to be one of a writer's last refuges from editors and publishers who demand ever more sex and violence (all the while piously pretending they aren't demanding such elements at all). *Idylls of the Queen*, of course, is full of sex and violence -- but that's because of Malory and the French romancers.

((Hmmm... I never thought of murder mysteries that way. I distinctly dislike novels in which, as you put it, 'corpses litter the pages', so perhaps I might rethink my attitude toward murder mysteries. The few that I've attempted to read simply didn't have enough character development to satisfy me. But also I must confess to not liking to have to think too much about what's happening in fiction. Ideas, yes; sequences of events, no. --JHW))



# SOME THOUGHTS ON RITUAL

by Sam Wagar

Ritual is a way of reinserting meaning into life, of re-awakening sensawonder, and re-connecting with the underlying bases of experience and knowledge. So, one can do whatever works for them (since the changes experienced are interior and subjective, one must do what works for oneself) -- everything from five-hour ceremonies complete with ritual weapons, robes, incense rising in clouds, cleansing baths, ringing invocations and chants to a dozen gods, etc. or down to standing in the forest, breathing deeply and really seeing the wind move the branches, and the shadows cool the ground.

We re-sacralize life in ritual. It takes effort to break from our usual patterns and begin to feel how much more rich and deep our experience could be, how much more meaning could be contained by even mundane acts.

Our usual mind, conscious mind, is only the top layer of our whole sensory and evaluative apparatus, and the deeper layers are much more connected to our bodies, the earth, the seasons and so on than is our conscious mind. Logical reasoning and prose just don't reach through to involve these parts in what we do and so ritual activity appeals to kinaesthetic, sensual, emotional, intuitive, aesthetic needs and inputs, to bring these sorts of data to the surface.

It's important to feel fully safe in ritual space, to be sure and unselfconscious; it's important to do what

you feel right doing, to open up to the spontaneous flow of energy; and it's important to close off the ritual and separate it off from your everyday way of being, at least initially.

And often in ritual, things or ideas are given significance or particular meanings in order to have that power, significance or meaning handy for use in the ritual. Power and significance come from oneself, not from the objects to which they are assigned.

A useful notion is that of power or 'energy' which constantly flows through us and can be directed where we want it to go by our will, should we become conscious of it. Another is the value of Will and concentration in determining what will happen in ritual and in life -- magic being 'The Art and Science of causing changes to occur in Accordance with Will.'

Some good thoughts on ritual and exercises to develop centredness and so on are found in Starhawk's Dreaming the Dark and in Inglehart's Womanspirit (though she's too 'California' for me to be fully at home).

I'm very impressed by Starhawk's approach because she combines a basically anarchist-feminist consciousness with a strong and well-realized spirituality very akin to my own. She's gone further than me but in the same general direction.

Well, best of luck to y'all.

#####

## A FUNNY THING

Feminists being interviewed on television and radio are sometimes asked to defend the Women's Movement against the charge that it has no sense of humor. Putting aside the question of whether the charge is groundless or not, I wish, at those times, that I could ask the interviewer, "Would you have asked that question of an apartheid protestor?"

Why do people who don't seem to expect other human-rights workers to be funny seem to think that humorlessness is a legitimate charge to level at feminism? Does anyone expect Amnesty International representatives to be humorous? Are groups who work for the redressing of American Indian grievances expected to act light-heartedly? Do anti-nuclear demonstrators amuse?

Would anyone have asked Martin Luther King to tell about something funny that happened on the way to the boycott? Should the Gray Panthers take the edge off their drive against inhuman conditions in nursing homes with some preliminary jokes?

A woman writing in the Hartford Courant's Letters-to-the-Editor column said, "One would think that in order for women to be liberated, their sense of humor has to be burned along with their bras." I wonder if the Solidarity strikers' resoluteness is dismaying her, too.

((This item, by Joan Tobin, is reprinted from "The Feminist Special", a Mensa publication from the USA

I was reminded of it by reading a fanzine called Rude Bitch, by (it says here on the colophon) "man-hating killer shark-women Lucy Huntzinger and Avedon Carol, Coast-to-Coast Castrator Conspiracy, to terrorize fandom and prove that all the nasty things they say about us are True". It's a magnificent example of feminist humor, and I'll be interested to see how many people are deeply offended by some of the things they say. It's marked "Available by editorial whim only", so I hope I haven't broken some code by mentioning it. (Well, it didn't say "Do Not Review".)

This item is much cleverer than some feminist humor I've seen -- and that which I've written -- but it also reminded me of how often feminist humor isn't recognized as humor, but is taken as Deadly Serious by the reader. Avedon Carol, Joy Hibbert and I (amongst, no doubt, many others) have frequently said absolutely outrageous, tongue-in-cheek things, as a way of making a point in a humorous fashion -- and the reaction is utter outrage and a belief that we are raving man-hating castrating bitches etc, as Lucy & Avedon say in their colophon.

I suspect many who accuse feminists of being humorless simply have missed the joke at times.--JHW))



# BOOKS

## (RECENT AUSTRALIAN SF & F)

by Jean Weber



It's been 18 months or more since I last did a roundup of recent Australian SF & F, and I suspect I'll miss out on a few books this time. I usually buy anything Australian that comes out, but not unless it's in paperback (I do buy some hardcovers, but not always). I briefly 'reviewed' Damien Broderick's The Judas Mandala in Wrevenge #15, and will not repeat it here (Timescape, 1982).

Void Publications remains a prolific publisher (by Australian SF standards). David Lake's Ring of Truth (1982) was fairly enjoyable, but reminded me a lot of quite a few other books. It takes place on what turns out to be either a sphereworld or a ringworld (I think the former) with some very peculiar physics which I never quite figured out. The two main characters set off on a quest to climb the mountain at the end of the world, and meet the usual (or unusual) collection of odd species along the way. Not my favourite sort of book at all, but others might like it.

Wynne Whiteford's Thor's Hammer (Void, 1983) was more to my liking, but didn't really satisfy me either. Our Hero is sent to the asteroid belt to stop a suspected plot to divert an asteroid into a collision course with Earth. There's quite a bit of good action, but I don't really like stories that depend on one (or two) people 'saving the Earth' (or humanity) from destruction. I do, however, like Whiteford's use of both enhanced people (with computer links or other 'bionic' assets) and people we might consider 'handicapped' but who may actually be at an advantage in a space environment -- for example, a dwarf and a man without legs, both of whom do very well in a spacecraft.

Frontier Worlds (Void, 1983) is the latest in a series of short-story collections edited by Paul Collins. As with most collections, the quality of the stories varies, but there are enough in here that I liked, to make it worth the price of the volume. Bert Chandler's 'Grimes and the Odd Gods' was quite enjoyable, as all his Grimes stories are, even if this isn't one of his best. Cherry Wilder's 'Cabin Fever' was my favorite piece in this book. Wynne Whiteford's 'Sawdust Supermen' explores the theme of dealing with aliens by either understanding them or fighting them. David Lake's 'Omphalos' would have been better if he had not treated a clever idea with quite so heavy a hand.

Other authors represented are Trevor Donohue, Keith Taylor, Paul Collins, Jack Wodhams, Howard Goldsmith, and Darrell Schweitzer.

Void has also recently published Future War by Jack Wodhams, Savage Tomorrow by Trevor Donohue, and The Tempting of the Witch King by Russell Blackford, but I haven't read any of them.

Norstrilia Press offered David King's Dreamworks (1983), a short story collection by Kevin McKay, Henry Gasko, Lucy Sussex, Andrew Whitmore, Bruce Gillespie, David King, Damien Broderick, Greg Egan, Russell Blackford, Gerald Murnane, David Lake and George Turner. In general, I found this collection disappointing, though a few pieces were enjoyable, and two (Turner's 'Feedback' and Broderick's 'Drowning in Fire') were superb.

Going back to 1980, I find The Stellar Gauge, edited by Michael Tolley and Kirpal Singh, a collection of essays on science fiction writers, from Norstrilia Press; a volume which I only recently purchased and which I have not yet read. Authors discussed include Jules Verne, HG Wells, George Orwell, Alfred Bester, Arthur C Clarke, Frederick Pohl, James Blish, Brian Aldiss, JG Ballard, Philip K Dick, Robert Silverberg, and Thomas Disch. It all looks frightfully scholarly.

Another book which I have read, and which also looks frightfully scholarly, is Australian Science Fiction, edited by Van Ikin (Univ. Queensland Press, 1982). A few weeks ago, needing something boring to put me to sleep one night, I picked this book off my shelf as a likely candidate. Three hours later, I was still reading, totally engrossed. Boring it's most definitely not. Van Ikin takes the reader on a stroll through more than a century of Australian SF (loosely defined), with introductory material setting the pieces into a framework, and excerpts from selected works. Recommended.

Bert Chandler's got a new book just out from Penguin, called Kelly Country, which I haven't been able to get my hands on yet. It's an 'alternative history' -- what if Ned Kelly had precipitated the Australian Revolution -- and won? Lee Harding's also got a new book out, Waiting for the End of the World, from Hyland House, 1983. And I think I read that the third volume of George Turner's future history has appeared.

# DIARY NOTES

by Jean Weber



**Sunday, 27 November 1983.** Taking a break from demolishing the kitchen, to type a stencil and listen to the afternoon classical music program on the radio. I exaggerate about 'demolishing', but only slightly. Ever since I moved into this house (now over 6 years), I've been complaining about the height of the kitchen cabinets -- the ones on the wall above the counters. I suspect the previous 'woman of the house' was a 5-foot-tall Italian immigrant (I know the previous owners were Italian), and the cabinets were built at a convenient height for her. That's great, but they are far too low for me, and I've been intending to Do Something About It -- i.e. raise them to a suitable level. Well, I've finally taken the first step -- ripping them off the wall.

In doing so, I discovered two large holes in the wall, which were covered by the backs of the cabinets, but now won't be; and managed to accidentally bash a third hole in the wall. Nothing that can't be camouflaged with a bit of masonite and paint, mind you...

The impetus for this burst of remodelling is the necessity to have an electrician wire the new garage, and the thought that I might as well have some wiring done in the house at the same time. I want to put in some small fluorescent lights under the kitchen cabinets (amongst other things), and it was obvious that I'd better shift the cabinets first, so the lights could be put at the right height. I've been making little diagrams of the house for a year now, trying to decide where I want the new power points put, and whether to have a wall light when I replace the lounge ceiling light with a fan (or buy a pricey fan with a built-in light), and other really heavy decisions that I usually make in haste and regret later.

The worst part, of course, will be paying for the work. I'm not game to try to do it myself, even if it were legal for me to do so, which it isn't.

In the meantime, I've also done quite a bit toward the construction of the new bookcases for which I bought the lumber about 3 months ago. It's all cut, stained and estapoled, and ready to assemble. That will probably wait till Eric is here next weekend, as I've found it's a lot easier to assemble bookcases if someone holds the bits in place while the other nails or screws them together. Saves a lot of hassles.

The past 10 days have been busy, and full of visitors and visiting. On the 17th I attended a seminar on "Ethics and Scholarly Publishing", held in Sydney, to which CSIRO paid my way. I stayed the previous

night with Gordon Lingard & Joy Window, and went to dinner with them. They told me about some courses they've been taking at a place called "Transformations", which helps people get in touch with themselves and 'transform' their lives... sounds much like a dozen similar sorts of techniques I've heard of, which can do wonders for some people, and appear to delight Joy & Gordon. I'm somewhat wary of such things, though I know the value of meditation to myself and would like to expand myself even more. But too many places seem to be full of evangelistic 'converts' and/or cost a great deal of money. So I prefer to only seriously consider a place that people I know (whose interests are somewhat similar to mine) have recommended. I hope Transformations opens a Canberra course soon.

Thursday evening, after the seminar (about which I shall talk elsewhere), I wandered over to Galaxy Bookshop and surprised quite a few people who weren't expecting to see me there. Don Griffiths, a Perth fan, was in town, and we went to dinner with Tony Power, and Judy & Alan Wilson, to a favourite pub of ours. Thence to an ice cream place, on to Tony's flat (in a building which I uncharitably characterised as 'not slummy enough' for Tony's image), and finally I took a taxi to the home of Jack Herman & Cathy McDonnell. They had been on a harbour cruise with Jack's year 12 students and came in long after I'd gone to sleep, so I only had chance for a brief chat in the morning before they rushed off to work.

My next stop was the nose surgeon's office for a check-up (all seems to be going well), then back into town to have lunch with the gang at the Sydney office where I'd worked for 6 months earlier in the year, and finally onto the train out to Falconbridge and Eric's place. Lacking a car, we had a fairly quiet weekend and didn't go anywhere, though a few people did drop in. Unfortunately I had to leave Sunday afternoon, to take a train and plane home again.

I'd made somewhat unique arrangements for the cat's welfare during this trip; her previous family had returned from a two months' tour of Australia and were waiting to be able to move into a new house, staying meanwhile in somewhat uncomfortable conditions with friends. I offered to trade them 4 nights in my house for cat-sitting. They were delighted. The cat, I understand, was a bit confused.

Sally Beasley, another Perth fan, had phoned several weeks previously to say she would be in Canberra for a meeting in connection with her work, and would be arriving the weekend I was away, but would like to stay

with me part of the time. But since Don Griffiths also wanted to visit Canberra (and stay with me) the same week, this posed a slight scheduling conflict -- solved by Don's only staying until Thursday. So the evenings tended to be filled with visiting. (Wednesday eight of us went to dinner and had a pleasant time despite some differences of opinion about whether smoking should be allowed at the table).

Don was job-hunting (either Sydney or Canberra will do), and had several offers of rooms to rent with fans in Canberra -- especially after we learned he actually enjoys mowing lawns. If he plays his cards right, he should be able to negotiate a very favourable rent situation. He kindly mowed my lawn while he was here, for which I'm most grateful. That so inspired me that I managed to get the bookshelf boards cut etc, as I mentioned earlier.

Nothing much else of note has happened over the last month. My contact lenses continue to give me problems, both of wearing comfort and of vision. The optometrist (after some prodding) finally has ordered a new right lens, of a different sort which may help overcome my astigmatism. He tried very hard to convince me I didn't want to spend the time and money to do this, as it probably wouldn't work out, but I insisted.

Fannishly, finished *Wrevenge* #15 and posted it, read a bunch of fanzines, caught up on my apas, and even read a few books. Carole & Jim Nomarhas and I showed up at a much-postponed Annual General Meeting of the Canberra Science Fiction Society and thus gave them a quorum. We promptly elected Carole President and me newsletter editor, while retaining the previous secretary & treasurer. Carole then suggested a group outing to see *Return of the Jedi*, the following Saturday, and 19 people (about twice the paid membership of the club) showed up. Quite a success. I even enjoyed the film, which is more than I can say for its two predecessors.

Awhile ago, you may recall my mentioning anger at some anti-abortion activists in the local shopping centre. Yesterday I read an article in the September 1983 issue of *Ms.* which really struck home with me. It was about the Sisters of Mercy, and nuns who support women's right to choose abortion (because they know how awful the alternatives can be), while still opposing abortion per se. I quote from one of the articles;

'Those who opposed ((the nuns' stand)) took the position that it is not possible for anyone to be really against abortion without working to outlaw it. Anyone who says differently, they claimed, is either lying, hypocritical, naive or duped. . . . the anti-abortion stance has become indistinguishable from an anti-choice stance. Thus, to this mind-set, allowing choice seems to those who oppose it to be mandating -- or at least advocating -- abortion.'

The nuns' position is that they are opposed to abortion, but believed 'the responsibility for decisions in this regard resides primarily with those who are directly and personally involved.' In other words, the law should not try to define morality.

This particularly struck me because I know quite a few so-called feminists whose views are just as inflexible: you can't be a "real feminist", according to them, unless you are pro-abortion. They may say "pro-choice", but when you talk to them you realise that they cannot tell the difference either; if you are anti-abortion, you are anti-choice in their eyes. You cannot be both. I hasten to add that this is not the view of all feminists, or even of all feminists who are working on abortion law reform and related issues, but it's there, and often used to intimidate

other women. Now I personally know quite a few feminists who are both 'anti' abortion and 'pro' choice, and I've always considered that an intelligent position to take. In fact, for many years I was in the habit of saying that no one is "pro-abortion" (we'd prefer if no one needed them or wanted them), until I met a woman who actually was in favour of abortion as a primarily means of birth control, at least for some groups of women (those who had difficulties with the various types of contraception, especially those who rarely had sex), and pushed this view to try to counteract the guilt that was heaped on women who do see abortion not so much as a backup but as their main method (they are usually called 'irresponsible'). Too bad I don't still have a copy of her paper; it was quite interesting as it presented a point of view that I had never considered seriously before.

Another topic I've read about occasionally, and which turned up in *Ms* Magazine (October 1983 issue) is a form of 'dieting' called 'binge-purge' or 'bulimic'. It's where a person does not restrict his or her intake of food, but sometimes or often vomits it up again, deliberately. The first time I read of this, I thought, "What a good idea" and "bleagh" at the same time. It was a technique of weight control which had never occurred to me before. It rather reminded me of the old joke about missionaries: by warning the heathens about the sinful forms of sex, they sometimes gave them new ideas ("oh, I never thought of that; sounds like fun"). I haven't tried the vomiting idea, nor does it exactly "sound like fun", but I wonder if, by publicizing this "problem", the publicists haven't inadvertently turned a lot of people on to the technique, who might not otherwise have thought of it.

Looking at the homosexual market? A couple of months ago, I spotted an advertisement for homes for sale, headed "Dick and John Got It Together" and touting the "Home Partnership Plan" for two adults to buy a home together. The floor plan sample showed two master bedrooms, a study & the usual other rooms. The copy, of course, was quite innocuous, simply recognizing that lots of singles wish to own their own homes, and have enough money to do so, but if they want a house rather than a flat, it's easier to raise the necessary funds if they go in partnership with someone else. I wondered at the time whether the homosexual overtones were deliberate (in which case I rejoiced at this evidence of acceptance) or inadvertent (and awaited the howls of outrage from the bible-bashers).

The next ad I saw featured two adults of opposite sexes, but a careful reading showed them to be brother and sister. There was also a mother-daughter team, two female friends, and I don't know what I may have missed. So far I haven't seen one for an unrelated pair of opposite sexes (incest is okay, but cohabitation isn't? -- no, the whole tone is separate bedrooms). Anyway, I found it all amusing, and question-provoking. All in impeccable taste, but what is the underlying message (other than that AV Jennings Homes does not care who you are as long as you spend money). At least someone has recognised that 'young married couples' are not the only (or even the major) purchasers of new homes.

Recent reading: Stephen Leigh, *Dance of the Hag* (Bantam, 1983); James P Hogan, *The Two Faces of Tomorrow* (Del Rey, 1979); Joanna Russ, *The Adventures of Alex* (Timescape, 1983 -- collection of short stories & a novella); C. L. Moore, *Jirel of Joiry* (Ace, 1977 -- collection of short stories dating from the '30s); Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, *Cautionary Tales* (Warner, 1978); Jean M. Auel, *The Valley of Horses* (Bantam, 1983). This last is a sequel to *Clan of the Cave Bear*, and I found it far less satisfying than the first book, though still quite interesting to read. Some detailed and erotic sex scenes, too! (Something for everyone?) Liked the strong female lead character, though.

21 December. Ah, the Summer Solstice already. And summer itself deigned to arrive a couple days ago, only 3 weeks or so late. Everyone's been complaining about the unseasonal cold and rain for the last month; now they're complaining about the (seasonal) heat! Actually, I thought it was fairly pleasant yesterday -- as long as I stayed in the shade. The temperature was 31 C (you work it out) with only a light breeze. Once the sun goes down, however, the temperature drops quickly and is soon quite delightful, even a bit chilly. This is in contrast to Sydney, where the day-times highs are usually lower, but it stays up around 20 C overnight and is humid -- bleagh.

Last week my relatively new (2 year old) refrigerator gave me quite a fright by warming up, refusing to cycle on, and clicking and snapping in a most disconcerting manner. I was especially concerned because I was planning to go away for the weekend, and couldn't be there to pack the freezer with ice if necessary. So I called a repairman, who couldn't find anything wrong with it. After he'd taken it apart and tested everything, it ran, but 15 minutes after he left, it stopped again. I threw up my hands and went out to dinner, determined not to worry about it till the morning. I put a thermometer in the fridge to confirm the inappropriately high temperature, and when I came back, I was greeted by the \*crash\* of ice falling off the top and walls of the freezer section. Weep! Teeth gritted, I went to bed, tossed & turned, steeling myself to phone the repairpeople in the morning. Arose to find the wretched machine functioning properly, down to the proper temperature, happy as could be. I finally decided it was trying to defrost itself (it's supposed to be an automatic defroster) and just got carried away. I suppose it would help if an instruction book had come with it (it was a floor demo model, slightly damaged finish).

Machinery at work has been having problems too. The typesetter broke down and needed a part, which must be airfreighted in from the USA. The part's been held up in customs in Sydney for a week in the Christmas rush! Meanwhile, no typesetting, even proofs, can be done. Lots of people trying to get things finished before Christmas. Backlog must be ghastly. I don't envy the poor people who run the equipment, once it gets working again (it takes a day or 2 to get the output adjusted properly, and many jobs have to be re-run).

So, thinks I, an ideal time to get caught up on all that photocopying Eric's asked me to do. Right... two automatic-feed copiers in the building ... you guessed it. Both not working. The third copier is not only slow but now having to cope with all the work usually handled by three... no chance for me.

After catching up on a bunch of memos and other paperwork of little significance, I decided to go shopping. Not, I hasten to add, in the sorts of stores that tend to be overrun with people buying Christmas presents. I was off to the places that sell insulation and wall linings, preparatory to fixing up my new office. Gee, it's fun shopping at 8:30 or 9:00 am, when no one else is out. Assuming that the shopkeeper is actually there on time, and functioning, you can take the time to ask a lot of silly questions and pick up some (hopefully good) advice.

I (perhaps foolishly) offered to do the bookkeeping for the Women's Electoral Lobby until a new Treasurer can be found, so have been trying to sort out heaps of receipts, not sure what's been paid by WEL and what should be reimbursed to whoever paid the bills. Of course I reckon if someone's silly enough to give me a receipt without attaching a note saying, please reimburse me for this, they haven't much complaint if they don't get their money for a few months. Actually, except for a few items, that set of accounts

was in good order, though the membership list didn't correspond too well with my 'computerised' mailing list -- indicating that someone hadn't been passing on address changes and new memberships to me. I suspect there are some rather disgruntled new members out there... bad p.r.

Well, that was okay. Then I got a telephone call from someone in the WEL National Office, to say that WEL was responsible for the Women's Centre books this quarter, and that no one had been doing them, and would I, as the new WEL Treasurer, please take them? Eeep! The catch... total chaos; I can't sign cheques; must track down those who can; final notices abound, for rent, phone, electricity, some having been paid (by who?) but not receipted; etc etc. Sometimes I wish I weren't so conscientious, or I'd do what the last 2 or 3 people who've had these books dumped on them have done ... nothing. Great gnashings of teeth.

I think it's time Weberwoman goes into her pushy, loud-mouthed Yank act and sorts the place out.

Meanwhile, as a sort of ironic joke, but one which I don't mind at all: two days after I volunteered to do the WEL books, I got a telephone call from Gary Mason, editor of ANZAPA, saying he was ready to resign and take me up on my kind offer of six months ago, to be ANZAPA editor.

I think 1984 is going to be a very busy year. And I haven't found out yet whether I've won or lost GUFF.

One thing that won't be happening on schedule next year is my birthday party. At the last minute, a group of fans in Sydney decided to hold a Syncon on that weekend. I don't especially want to go (though Eric says he does), but whether I attend or not, I can't quite be bothered to hold my birthday party on a different weekend. It just isn't the same. \*sigh\*

22 December. Fun & games continue (summer is known in Australia as 'the silly season', and I'm beginning to appreciate why). A bit earlier I mentioned a part for the typesetting that was held up in customs. Well, it finally cleared, and arrived -- and turned out to be the wrong part. Back to square one. Heads rolled in all directions. (Fortunately I am merely a bystander.) Meanwhile someone has apparently devised a temporary substitute part so that they can get back into production, though the quality may suffer (okay for proofs but not final camera-ready copies).

And the photocopiers have been repaired. I rushed in to do my copying before they quit again, and -- much to my surprise -- succeeded.

The weather remains hot, though we did have a sudden brief thunderstorm last evening that dropped the temperature about 10 degrees in as many minutes. Guess who had left her car windows open?

Meanwhile I spent a fair amount of time and energy chasing people over those Women's Centre books, but it's all falling into place, in the sense of 'making sense out of chaos'. At least I'll get the bills paid, so we won't find ourselves without electricity (or even a roof over our heads) come early January. Of course I'll have to use WEL cheques, since so far I've only located one signatory for the account (and need two).

You may gather nothing terribly amusing has happened recently. I've been having a bit of fun, but it does not write up all that well. Ah -- I did have a bit of fun with Eric a couple weeks ago, almost equaling him at one of his favourite games. It went like this:

Eric: I'll be starting to write the book on computer languages after Christmas. Basically, I've got



all the chapters written, or the information collected -- the bits you threw out of the first book,

Me: So you'll just go forth putting together what you've got, and see what you come up with? Or just cobble something together as you usually do?

How many computer-language puns did you spot in that exchange? (There are four.) Eric was quite impressed with my comments; I usually can't think fast enough to pun.

On a topic covered in January's *Wrevenge*, pre-menstrual syndrome, I've started using a new Vitamin B6 (plus various other things) tablet and it seemed to be helpful in its first month of trial. Still, it'll have to work another few months before I'm convinced; once or twice a year I simply don't get symptoms -- just to confuse the issue! This may have been one of the times. I was feeling anti-social (and hence didn't go to the Canberra SF Society's Christmas gathering), but I wasn't greatly depressed, biting people's heads off, or any other seriously inconveniencing and/or embarrassing things.

23 December. The Sex Discrimination Bill finally passed the Senate last week (it is expected to pass the House of Reps next year with no problems because of the large majority of Labor members). I may have mentioned earlier that the sorts of arguments raised against it were very reminiscent of objection to the Equal Rights Amendment in the USA. Which to me rather indicates that one suggestion, that the ERA was not needed because legislation could take care of the same issues, was an invalid argument. In fact, listening to the less-hysterical anti-certain-provisions-of-the-bill debate made me think how much harder it is to try to overcome injustice through legislation. Having a law that says, you can't do this except in certain special circumstances, serves to encourage people to find a loophole. Even without the exceptions, there's always the matter of interpretation: just what did they mean by this clause? (and does the position of that comma make this clause mean X or Y...?)

Of course the same problem of interpretation will arise with something like the ERA, but at least the argument isn't so much about provisions of the bill, or amendment, itself, but about what may flow from it -- which is really a different matter. To me, it's important that a society make a grand gesture toward certain principles; it's equally important that certain things proceed toward making reality of those principles, but the principles need to be stated in the first place. You've got to start somewhere (assuming you want to start at all, of course). Trying to itemize all the areas of life where you can and can't do such-and-such, strikes me as a futile and frustrating way to go about it. It seems to me that it makes it so much easier to bog down in the details and not see the overall situation. Not to mention the opportunities for invasion of privacy and personal liberties -- it's very difficult sometimes to legislate to protect someone's so-called civil liberties, without invading someone else's so-called liberties.

Please note I'm not suggesting Australia shouldn't have a Sex Discrimination Bill. I'm just not at all convinced it's the best way to go about the job. In the political context of Australia, however, it may well be the most expedient way to move towards a goal I support, and that's reasonable. Putting off doing something until you can do it in the best possible manner may well not be the way to go.

There have been what I see as some good spin-offs. Lots of spokespeople against the bill have made it quite clear that they oppose it because (in the words of one letter-writer) it "attacks the conventional

family roles of husband as breadwinner, wife as homemaker, and mother as principal custodian of children." Well, if indeed it does that (by opening up more choices for both men and women, and improving education so that both sexes appreciate they do have choices), I'm all for it. A most laudable goal. Of course the letter-writer considered it offensive: the Bill "seeks to enshrine in legislation a biological falsehood", that "there is no innate difference between the roles which men and women usually perform in society."

Well, that puts it right out in the open, doesn't it? The writer objects to the bill because it won't keep women (and men) in their place.

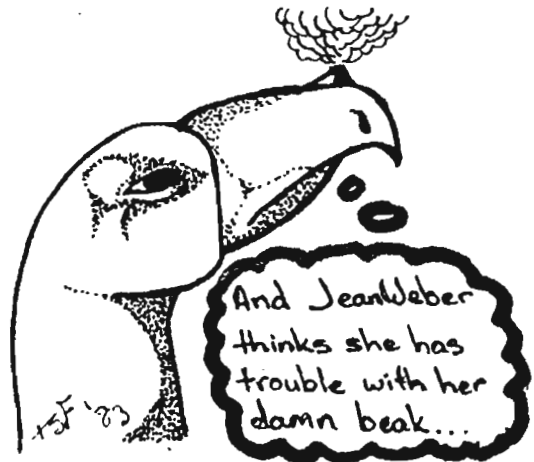
Time for a change of topic... There was a really wonderful summary in *Newsweek* recently about satellite TV "pirates" in Central America and the Caribbean who steal American TV shows, show them on local cable TV -- and then someone (the article doesn't say who) starts carrying on about US cultural imperialism -- because of all the US shows! Whee!

Statistics time... the estimated resident population of Australia was 15,336,100 at 31 March 1983, an increase of 60,000 during the quarter, according to the Bureau of Statistics. The overall net overseas migration gain was 23,600 persons. The preliminary population figure for the ACT (where Canberra is located) was 235,200. Well, someone might be interested.

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## ALSO HEARD FROM

John Alderson, Gary Barber, Pamela Boal, Alison Cowling, Leslie David (who is now in Korea and can be reached at AC of S Services, Hq 19th Spt Comd, APO San Francisco 96212 USA), Cathy Doyle, Kim Huett, Tim Jones, Peter Lempert, Lync (who has also moved; new address: 412 Albert St, West Brunswick Vic 3055, Australia), Teresa Morris, Jessica Amanda Salmonson (who sent a DND note in an envelope made of what appears to be scraps of magazine pages. It was very artistic and attractive, and I was most impressed), Sue Thomason, Marc Ortlieb, Steve Roylance, Christine Smith, and I'm sure some other whom I've missed. Oh yes, John D. Berry, Roger Weddall, and Peter Graham -- the last of whom sends packets of clippings from New Zealand newspapers.







MAY I HAVE MY RIGHTS, PLEASE ?

(when you're ready, that is!)

(if you dont mind, of course...)

(sorry!)

WE SHALL OVERTHROW

THE SIX DEMANDS REQUESTS

try and Fight racism!

Scholarship is racist