

WEBERWOMAN'S WREVENGE THIRTY-ONE

(Volume 5, Number 9, July 1988)

ISSN 0728-3792. Copyright 1988 by Jean Weber, 6 Hillcrest Avenue, Faulconbridge, NSW 2776, Australia. All rights revert to contributors upon publication. Publication dates are irregular, about 3 or 4 times a year.

This fanzine is available for contributions, letters of comments, artwork, interesting clippings, uncanceled postage stamps, arranged trades, editorial whim, or A\$1.50 or equivalent per issue (air mail extra). I prefer some sort of personal response.

You may be relieved or disappointed (possibly both) to learn that this issue does not continue the serious tone of the discussion in *Wrevenge 30*. This is not because I don't want to continue talking about serious topics, but simply because I've got a lot of other things to talk about as well, and I'd rather leave the serious stuff until I've got some letters to share with you.

However, I will point out that I made a major typo in the second paragraph on page 3, which was not discovered until after the overseas copies were mailed (Australian copies should have a handwritten correction). I said 'Is is valid to oppose a candidacy on the grounds of a person's lifestyle of which one approves?' This should, of course, have read 'of which one *dis*approves'. Oh, the embarrassment! I most definitely do *not* think it's valid if you approve: that's sheer hypocrisy. Apologies all around for such appalling proofreading.

With your copy of *Wrevenge 30* you should have received a supplementary sheet, 30.5, in which I mentioned that I'd lost my job and my access to a laser printer, and that I was trying to decide what to do with myself. You may guess from the appearance of this zine that the printer problem has been solved (I've got 'custody' of the printer I used at my last job, through the excuse of doing some contract work on their manuals).

I haven't been work-hunting very hard, since I wanted to enjoy the Australian NatCon (*Conviction*) in mid-June and the visits of various friends about that time. I did rustle up a few short-term projects and definitely plan to pursue the lure of contract writing, at least until/unless a really super job turns up, or my finances become too precarious.

Fantasies of an overseas trip were swept away when an analysis of my tax position convinced me that the thing to do with my redundancy pay was to invest it in such a way as to defer the tax on it indefinitely. Well, I wasn't all that keen on a trip anyway; if I had been, mere sensible financial considerations would hardly stand in my way.

Conviction (Syncon '88) & After

I really enjoyed *Conviction*. Jack Herman organises the kind of con that appeals to me, and having Spider and Jeanne Robinson as Guests of Honour was just icing on the cake.

Since I wasn't working, I decided to bring the car into the city, thus allowing me to cart in several boxes full of surplus fanzines to donate to FFANZ. It also came in handy for transporting various people around after the con.

Gordon Lingard arrived late on Thursday before the con, from his new home in Bellingen, on the north coast of NSW. We swapped news while taking turns with Eric blowing up the air bed with a foot pump. On Friday, Gordon ran some errands while I went to two interviews with technical writing agencies.

One agency had a small job they wanted me to do the following week (actually, they wanted it done over the weekend but I pleaded a prior commitment). The job sounded just my sort of thing, so I happily carried off the disk and some printed material, only to discover that it was 'Disk 3 of 3' and utterly useless. A quick telephone call confirmed that the perpetrator had gone home for the weekend, and nobody else knew anything about the project, so any follow-up had to be deferred until Tuesday after the con. What a pity!

(It turned out I didn't do the job after all. When I got back to them, we couldn't agree on a delivery date, so I didn't pursue it. By then I had other things I felt more like doing, as you'll read later.)

In mid-afternoon Gordon and I loaded the car and set off for the con, only a few kilometers away, but over the Sydney Harbour Bridge; I definitely did not want to get tied up in peak hour traffic. Hence we arrived some hours before con registration began, and had time to chat with various people in the bar. Eric turned up later, taking the train after work.

I won't try to give a daily account of the convention. As usual I didn't attend many of the program items, but it wasn't because they didn't sound interesting (and those I did attend *were* interesting), but simply that I had a chance to talk to so many people that I couldn't pry myself away long enough to go to panels. I'd been fairly disappointed at the last con or two I attended, that I didn't get enough chance to talk to friends: they were either absent or too busy doing other things (often *running* the con) that we had little chance.



Spider & Jeanne Robinson at Conviction
(photo by jan howard finder)

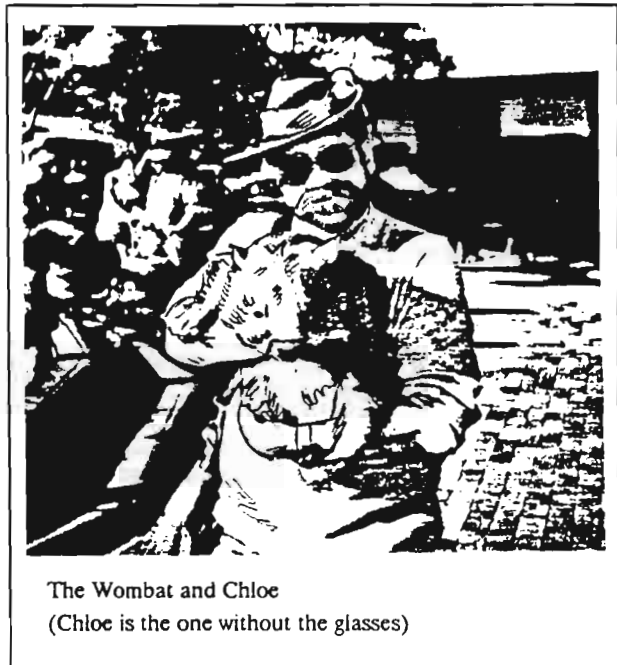
Spider and Jeanne turned out to be, not at all surprisingly, delightful and interesting people. Their first 'official' appearance was on a panel I moderated, *The Future Arts in SF*. I doubt we reached any staggering conclusions, but the audience seemed to enjoy the talk; I know I did!

Another highlight of the con for me was the chance to meet someone I've corresponded with for about 10 years now: jan howard finder. I found him quite delightful and ended up spending four days after the con as his local tour guide. He gives great backrubs, recommended by several mutual friends, and talks enough for three ordinary American men (or about 10 Australian men). But I'll tell you, if I'd met this man 15 years ago, I probably would have found him irritating rather than delightful. What an outrageous flirt!

I used to dislike flirts, largely because most men are so *bad* at it: it's perfectly obvious they are really trying to get you into bed, and I'd rather they just went ahead and *said* so. I've only met a few men who simply *flirted*, because they enjoyed it, as an end in itself, not simply a means to some other end (not, mind you, that I'm suggesting they wouldn't take advantage of an opportunity should it present itself). jan appears to be one of those men, and he is really *good* at flirting. It was a real laugh watching him pursue his hobby as we toured the city. (I now expect to receive outraged letters from women

who've found his behaviour offensive, and think I am no judge of character and/or a disgrace to the feminist cause.)

Anyhow, we had fun. One of the highlights of the post-con visit was a day at Taronga Park Zoo, during which jan managed to cuddle a wombat and I took lots of photos. (Anyone who doesn't know that jan's nickname is Wombat, and that he has quite a collection of wombat-related souvenirs, will not understand the significance of this event.) The zookeepers appreciated his 'Wombat Power' sweat-shirt and agreed that wombats are a sadly neglected native animal: kangaroos and koalas unjustly get far more press.



The Wombat and Chloe
(Chloe is the one without the glasses)

Meanwhile I picked up another 2-day writing job and tried to study spreadsheets, but kept getting seduced by the pile of fanzines and books. One thing about writing my own zine is that I can claim, with some justification, that I'm 'practicing my desktop publishing skills'. If I can find room on the hard disk to install *Ventura*, I'll have the even better excuse of learning a new program.

This fanzine supports
Roelof Goudriaan
for
GUFF

Management Styles & Personal Responsibility

The following letter was squeezed out of the last issue of *Wrevenge*.

Dave D'Ammassa
323 Dodge Street
East Providence, RI 02914
USA

4 January 1988

I recently finished performing in a local professional production of A Christmas Carol - an experience that left me frustrated and (temporarily) disgruntled with my chosen profession.

The theatre is an occupation that lends itself very conveniently to an authoritarian sort of charge and even worse. The boss in this case, the director, is by default a dictator, overseeing all aspects of a production.

The director of this show definitely subscribed to the 'actors are cattle' philosophy. He had no qualms whatsoever about keeping our cast of twenty-five, including eight-year-old children, in our theatre from six-thirty until midnight or 12:30, taking his time giving comments and hammering details that could have waited. We were all stuffed into a dressing room designed for about half our number, while the star of the show (who was also the producer) disrobed in the comfort of his office. The cast was prodded about the stage with the sensitivity of a bored postal worker loading a mail van.

It occurred to me after a few weeks of rehearsal that this man simply did not realise that his actors were human beings with feelings, physical limitations, and lives that progressed offstage.

He printed a rehearsal schedule for us, but frequently added to it with rarely more than a day's notice. This caused problems for those of us who work nights. I remember that he left Veterans' Day blank, but during rehearsal time the night before he announced that that afternoon we would be having a costume call. When a few of the actors mentioned that they had made plans to be with their families on Veterans' Day (their day off), the poor fellow went into a hollering fit.

'I've worked my schedule around you people,' he often screamed, 'and now, dammit, you'll just have to bend for me!!!'

A big problem I had with him was that he had me onstage for a dance scene, in very foppish attire down to the buckles on my shoes and the ruffles on my cuffs. Two quick scenes later - an elapse of five minutes at the most - I had to re-emerge as a different chap in a completely different suit of clothes, bearing a pile of Christmas gifts for my children. During the

first dress rehearsal, I found that I could not make the complete change in time; when I emerged without my hat and coat, the director employed his familiar technique of flailing his temper and striking terror into the hearts of his sheep. I ended up asking one of the other performers to wait for me backstage every night to help dress me - it was easier than trying to deal with the director and his bitter costume frau.

Of course, it does no good to lose your temper with any sort of employer. In professions requiring lots of interaction with important people, bosses have a very effective weapon, especially prominent in theatre: the Blackball. It is not unusual for directors to call and consult each other about actors they are thinking of casting in a show, and how co-operative your ex-director claims you are can influence whether or not you get the job. And in such a non-lucrative profession as acting, a bad reputation is extremely dangerous. Ever seen a movie called Tootsie? The myth that all actors behave according to the dictates of their reputations is born of this concern; you can be a prima donna once you're a star (and many love to take that opportunity).

I am also a believer in the team philosophy: pulling off a show with a high morale definitely requires a group effort. Being a subject can be very agonising when the leader forgets that he or she is leading people, not just capitas.

Thanks, Dave for that insight. Now here's a more recent letter on a similar issue.

Michelle Hallett
GPO Box 1808
Sydney, NSW 2001
Australia
23 April 1988

As a woman who's been in lots of jobs where I've had responsibility but rarely the authority to carry those responsibilities out, I've found that saying 'please' and 'thank you' got me better results than others' saying 'do it!'.

The only people this approach doesn't usually work with are people who have been given the title 'manager'. There's often small people in these positions who resent being even asked to do something, though I'd say this has a lot to do with working in the hotel trade where even general managers can often be badly paid (by comparison with other industries) and hence the only 'fringe benefit' from the job is the job title. Well, you also get expense accounts but they're limited to using hotel facilities. You're also overworked (you get paid 40 hours but work 60-70 hours) due to continual shortage of manpower. The industry is labour intensive but they don't like to cut into profits by hiring too many people. So I guess all this contributes to short tempers and not caring whether the job is done properly.

With regard to government I prefer a system which puts as much responsibility as possible on the individual for his/her actions. It's too easy to escape from responsibility in this society. It starts with government (we elect our representatives and if they stuff up, it's not our fault, what control do we have?) and ends in the workplace and with family and friends. We all tend to avoid responsibility for things that happen: the 'that tree hit my car' syndrome. It's all too easy to lose self-respect when constantly avoiding responsibility. I don't know how all this would work in government, but I suppose it would be along the lines of a collective/commune type system operating from local to national/international levels, maybe using a computer system to collate opinions on various issues. The abolition of a legal system which constantly attempts to clear its clients of all responsibility would also be a big step in the right direction.

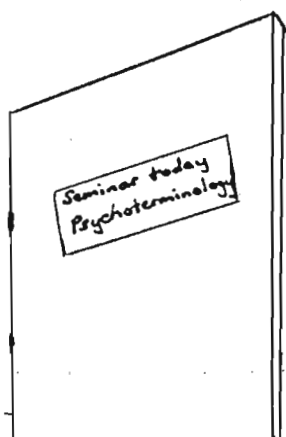


John Newman comments about authoritarian management and especially about team and cooperative work requiring everyone on the team to take

responsibility for doing their job. Many people just refuse to do this. We're brought up in an environment, starting at school, where the idea is to avoid being responsible for things and if caught doing something defined as 'wrong', to try and blame someone else. Given this upbringing, how can you expect people to come into a cooperative environment and 1) welcome responsibility; 2) accept blame for failure and realise that people aren't castigating you if you do fail. Given these things, we will always have the problems John mentions with cooperative organisation, whether in the workplace or elsewhere. People have to be given time to adapt to cooperative organisation, which the pace of business will not allow.

Well put, and what a dilemma! Fortunately some businesses can and do make time for people to learn new ways of doing things, just as they give training in other aspects of the business. Perhaps as such businesses are seen to be successful, others will follow. Not soon enough, though, I fear!

The Rabbit's Progress

by Lyn McConchie
15 Rauparaha St
Waikanae Beach
New Zealand

	<p>... and never, never, my dear friends, use mono-syllabics when evaluating a patient. We will know what you mean, and laypersons who don't will not say so, for fear of ridicule.</p> 
<p>For instance, in a recent case I described the defendent, in my confidential report to the judge, as 'a failure so abysmal as to be somewhat less than the value of a lesser elevation on a perissodactyl quadruped. You have a question, sir?</p> <p>What did the judge say to that?</p> <p>He publicly thanked me for the time and care I had put into it (while looking at it in a baffled bewilderment).</p> <p>And did you eventually enlighten him?</p> <p>No sir, I did not! To explain that I had referred to the defendent as 'less value than a horse's ass' would have been rude.</p> 	

Gender Differences?

Another letter that's been hanging around my files for far too long is the following. I kept thinking I'd turn it into an article someday, but I haven't...

Garth Spencer
#3 - 4313 Watson St
Vancouver, B.C.
Canada V5V 3S2
18 August 1987

'Often I have wished I was as tough as a woman.' (Shevek, in *The Dispossessed*, by Ursula K. LeGuin)

Recently I was re-reading *The Dispossessed*, plus an issue of *Discover*. Both have odd, slaunchwise viewpoints on gender differences.

Discover has an article about 'discoveries' which are, effectively, meaningless; such as the quantitative difference in e.g. math test results between a sample of men and a sample of women. They may be there, may be reliable and persistent, but are also persistently trivial. That, I take it, is the way to describe differences between genders.

The Dispossessed contrasts two societies, in fact two types of societies -- one which stresses egalitarianism and unanimity; and another which stresses differences, even to the point of class warfare, and a professor speaking one way about the sexes and acting another way at home.

Granting what Sam Delaney wrote about the sound of axe-grinding in the novel: still, it seems pretty clear which kind of society mass industrial civilization is. And it seems clear that we concentrate on even trivial differences, in some contexts, and blithely disregard trivial data, in others. Now why would we do that? I agree with the *Discover* writer that this reveals a bias in the observers, a motivation to determine some differences.

Some people base their identity on their gender. It seems clear that, physically, men and women are minor variations on a basically uniform model. But sociologically, or culturally, we demand gender roles and force people into them.

Either we start out assuming distinct gender differences and look for their consequences in concrete, measurable performance -- which the data does not bear out -- or some of us have not finished defining our identity and are (somewhat desperately) searching for data to direct us; or some other things are going on.

None of which has much bearing on why some men treat women contemptuously, and contemptibly, in the workplace as in person.

I suppose you will need to understand my attitude. I have been a female-dominated man. It is as appalling an experience as being a woman, and the victim of an absolutely medieval male chauvinist. I think I know what the bloody woman's problem was, psychological and physical abuse, stemming from her father's insecurity and brutalization by the British Navy. It doesn't matter; there is no excuse for not taking care of unfinished business, nor for dumping your problems on someone unrelated to them, nor for making a child feel like shit, for any reason or no reason.

I am terrified of reproducing this behaviour, of victimizing someone else. I've been forced to define my identity totally in terms of being Garth; only secondarily in terms of being a human; scarcely at all in terms of being a man. I am too close as is to defining 'woman' in terms of the bloody woman. I do not want to see myself behaving the same way, that's for sure.

Shevek saw that he had touched in these men an impersonal animosity that went very deep. Apparently they ... contained a woman, a suppressed, silenced, bestialized woman, a fury in a cage. (The Dispossessed)

*I have to think that when anyone tries to typify someone else as a whole class, *The Other Sex*, it is an attempt to shore up his or her own identity; and to do this by shoving everything he rejects onto the Other. I was not allowed to be particularly male or self-assertive for years; I had to take this treatment rather than dish it out. As it was part of someone's craven little deceptions and self-deceptions, and refusal to communicate honestly what she demanded from people, as it was part and parcel of her inconsistency, irrationality, you will understand that I wasn't much taken with this as a model of behaviour. As all this crap is neither male nor female behaviour, but both ... you will understand my dim view of humanity in general.*

But humans are generally whatever they are asked and encouraged to be. Whatever male or female roles are now, to judge from the behaviour around you, they are what people are required and allowed to be. If something other than the contemporary roles would be better, there are ways to require and encourage the necessary behaviour.

The things I hate, about men and women, are the product of values, of reinforcement, and of systems of behaviour. I am trying to find out how to attack all these components.

I can't think of anything to say in response to that which doesn't sound glib. Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us, Garth.

Garth Spencer also sent the following letter.

12 April 1988

Notice my new new address. (I've put it above.)

One idea I'm trying to work out, on a sound basis, is that all sorts of behaviours come down to the same kind of thing as this matter of differential mathematical behaviour. As Joy Hibbert points out, whether women perform differently as a class due to genetic endowment is hard to determine, and probably pursuing that questions is not profitable.

But I think the reason is that any difference in genetic endowment is subtle and slight enough to be meaningless. One day some objective research may discover what, if any genetic basis there is for human behaviour and performance. There may even be directions in which the human genome profoundly influences our behaviour. But I don't think industrialised nations in this century are likely to fund such research. Instead, we are going to ask loaded questions.

As Marc Ortlieb point out, a lot of conditioning goes into human beings; I'm betting as he does that this class of factor vastly outweighs any other component of behaviour. My own interest is, what are the patterns of behaviour that not only individuals, but interactive groups, or whole societies display - over and over? What kinds of behaviour are men and women trapped in, that damage them? What kinds of interventions are there that you can use on these patterns - quickly, cleanly, effectively, by some fairly objective and neutral criteria?

My own family was dysfunctional in ways I can't entirely blame on my mother. Part of what was wrong between us, I think was not personal; it was synergetic. And some of her patterns were not individual to her; I think they were British. And I'm beginning to take it for granted they had little if anything to do with her sex... but, oh God, it took long to find the proof of that.

(I hadn't intended to say this. It must be later than I thought. Anyway, you can see why I moved.)

The last and least factor, which I would like to point out, is choice. At least I'm betting this is the least influential factor on behaviour. How many woman can you think of, offhand, who choose over and over again to pursue a career in mathematics, despite continuing obstacles and discouragement ... or just vague, general disapprobation?

What men or women do, or how well they do it, comes from a combination of circumstances. If other things were equal, we might have developed a science of human behaviour, and education, or social policy, would be another mundane form of engineering. But other things are not equal; it pays enough people to maintain some kinds of bullshit - bullshit about what men and women are, what they can or should do - that circumstances conspire to trap us in behaviours we display. I cannot believe it's a deliberate, conscious conspiracy, but that hardly matters.

I have to conclude that in maths, and in a number of other areas, people are taught to perform differently. It is, in effect, a system for channeling people into roles - not a deliberate, conscious system, not under anyone's control, but still in operation. From my own experience I have to conclude that the system is out of joint, some roles have become traps that destroy the people channeled into them, we need a new kind of design engineer. Do you think we're going to get what we need?

Medical Matters Again

Michelle Hallett answers my question to her in Wrevenge 28.

Michelle Hallett
(address given earlier)

With regard to my medical tale about my grandmother dying of cancer and the surgeon's ban on discussing the subject with her, to explain why I obeyed him would involve boring you with a long and detailed story of the intricate politics of my family, which weren't suspended despite the fact that my grandmother was dying.

It is very hard to really believe that someone is dying; even at the funeral I found it hard to believe that she was dead... Also I wasn't sure how to broach the subject with her, and if I had been wrong about the fact that she was glad to die and I did upset her by telling her, then not only would I have the surgeon against me but also the rest of my family, which would have been bad. My family are good at making life bad for people even when I do what they ask me. My uncle is a doctor and this surgeon was his choice over my mother's objections. See the politics involved?

I made the decision I did because of the reasons above and it was my decision; I never follow directives blindly unless failing to do so will affect my income. Even then I argue first.

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

29 March 1988

Americans talk about 'my' or 'your' doctor, Britains talk about 'The' Doctor. That is indicative of the differing attitudes to the medical profession in the respective countries. From GP to specialist, medical practitioners are autocratic and didactic in Britain. One does not question their knowledge about your ailments; they are not interested in the person and in any case only recognise stereotypes.

I recall at one particularly busy period in my life consulting a doctor who could see from my notes that I was middle-aged, an airman's wife, with children away from home. He interrupted my telling him about my symptoms with the comment, 'Nothing serious Mrs Boal, what you need to do is get a few hobbies and interests'. I walked out, and no doubt my husband's service record noted that his wife was a troublemaker.

British men are even less inclined to question a doctor than are the women. These past few years there has been a fairly strong move by middle class women to assert that it is the patient's body and life and the patient has the right to know, particularly women with female problems. Unfortunately with the Nat Elf being in such an appalling state, and the few Well Women clinics that were being established closing down, progress is, to say the least, minimal.

Smoking

Debby Hodgson
P O Box 9131, Courtney Place
Wellington 1
New Zealand
2 February 1988

The issue of smoking is a rather fraught one for me at the moment. I am about to embark on my third attempt to quit... [To] sum up the way I feel about one aspect of the issue, people who nag me to quit - if they are ex-smokers, I can take it, but from someone who's never smoked - no way! I read somewhere

Cartoon by
Craig Hilton
28 Success Crescent
Manning, WA 6152
Australia



recently that cigarettes have been estimated to be 6 times more addictive than alcohol. Why don't all the furiously self-righteous non- and anti-smokers remember that alcohol kills too? (And much more surely.)

I live now in Wellington, in an area full of 'alties' (alternate lifestylers). They're all very smug about not eating meat and not smoking tobacco. Very self-righteous. 'If you had enough will-power, you could stop smoking' and 'It ought to be made illegal' and 'Raise the price to ten dollars a packet, that'll stop them' ... or most benignly, 'They ought to be educated about the dangers'. These people so full of the will-power I lack, guzzle alcohol, probably smoke dope, and in some cases, lack the will-power to keep their paws off other women's men.

I know the dangers of smoking. I used to be very self-righteous about it myself, 11 or 12 years back. What no one ever told me is: (a) it's almost instantly addictive; (b) it's very much harder to give up than anyone except my G.P. has ever admitted. (My dear old doctor in Auckland had just quit smoking himself, at the start of my first attempt to quit; he's the only one who ever encouraged me without condemning me.)

There having let off a little steam, I can add that I am dreading my 3rd attempt to stop. I don't want to stop - I want to have stopped. It's like some mid-term urgent dentistry I need done - I don't want to get my tooth fixed, I was to have got my tooth fixed. Subtle difference of tense there, and it makes all the difference.

I agree about the hypocrisy of many who nag people to quit. I rarely do that (I'll mention the exception in a minute); all I ask is that people don't smoke around me, where I have to share the air.

The only times I am tempted (and sometimes give in) to 'nagging' people is when they are pregnant or are sharing space with an infant. I figure what each of us does with her own body is her own business; but when we force others, especially those who cannot exercise a choice in the matter, to participate - then someone else needs to speak up.

I can well believe how hard it is to quit smoking, as I have several habits which I have never been successful in giving up, and an addictive substance must be so very much harder to quit. Also I really can relate to the difference between 'wanting to do something' and 'wanting to have done something'!

I Also Heard From: Brian Earl Brown, Ellen Butland, Richard Faulder, Kathleen Gallagher (several times), Kerrie Hanlon, Joy Hibbert, Lee Hoffman, Gordon Lingard, Mark Loney, Janice Murray, Joseph Nicholas, Lloyd Penney, Yvonne Rousseau, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Lucy Sussex, Sue Thomason, and no doubt others whose letters I've mislaid.

Round Robins Seek Members

Joy Hibbert is organising a series of 'Round Robins', which she describes as 'the cheap and casual way to run a multi-person communication, much like an apa in practice. But instead of everyone producing a number of copies of their contribution in time for a given deadline, each person produces one copy within a week or so of the Round Robin getting to them, removes their previous letter from the front, puts their new letter on the back, and sends the bundle off to the next person on the list.'

Joy has so far seven viable RRs, on sex/sexuality/ gender in sf; slash; writers' support; feminism in sf; current reading; religion and magic in sf; and Harlan Ellison. She also has between one and three people interested in each of the following subjects: anti-millennium fever; media fandom; Joanna Russ; sociological sf; scenario writing for RPGs; writers' workshop; time travel; crime fiction; rock music in sf; sf magazines; humour in sf; gay characters in sf; male feminist support; fanzine art; filk; celtic mythology; stopping the clause; Atlantis; Blake's Seven; sf idea generation, and language and sf.

If you are interested in any of these, please contact: Joy Hibbert, 11 Rutland Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST1 5JG, U.K., telephone (0782) 271070.

This zine was produced on a IBM AT clone using the MS Word wordprocessing and typesetting package, printed on an Impact laser printer and photocopied who-knows-where. It will be collated with the assistance of Eric Lindsay and anyone who is unlucky enough to visit at the time.

Roelof Goudriaan

for

GUFF