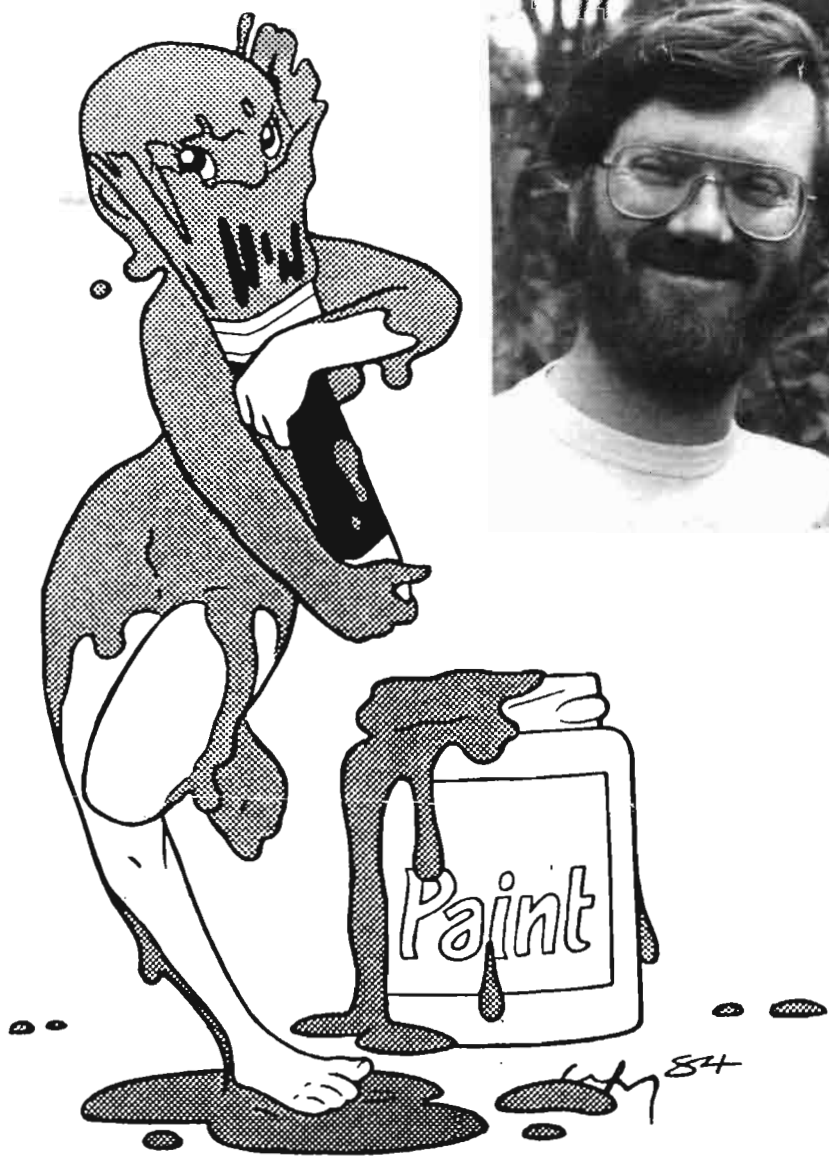


# WEBER WOMAN'S WREVENGE



## Weberwoman's Wrevenge 42

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## The Rubbish Bin

Not much has changed since the last issue. I'm still renovating the house and still working at IBM. As you'll read inside, I visited Lyn McConchie at Christmas time. I also went to Canberra at the end of January to attend the 20th anniversary meeting of the Women's Electoral Lobby, but I probably won't be writing that up for Wrevenge. It was much like a convention, really; I enjoyed myself.

This issue is longer than usual, because I wanted to get all of Lyn McConchie's trip report in, before it became ancient history, as well as catching up on letters and books, and I've been sitting on Bernie Klassen's article on garbage for far too long. Enjoy.

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## A visit to Farside Farm

by Jean Weber

Ever since Lyn McConchie moved to a farm, I've been wanting to get over to New Zealand to see her place. It was great seeing *her* in North America earlier in 1991, a meeting that encouraged me to drop in to visit her at home. Looking at my plans for 1992, however, didn't leave much hope of a relaxing escape until probably *next* summer (December, for you North-hemispherians), so when a lull in the workload between Christmas and New Year's became evident, I rushed off to my travel agent and organised a trip. That is, of course, high season for fares, but what the heck, I muttered. It's only money.

The flight to Wellington, a combined Qantas–Air New Zealand flight on a Qantas aircraft, was unremarkable and uneventful. I recall getting up about 5:30 am to drive to the Sydney international airport for an early flight, but I don't recall much else. I assume the food was up to the usual Qantas/ANZ standards, or I would have noted it in my diary.

### Show me to way to ...

I arrived about 1 pm on Friday, 27 December, in Wellington, picked up a rental car from Avis, and headed up Route 2 through Masterton.

The signs to the motorway in Wellington are hard to spot if you don't know what you're looking for (possibly even if you do know), so I missed a turn and took the scenic route through the downtown shopping area. Eventually the road I was on intersected the motorway, so I never really got 'lost', but I certainly wondered a bit as I drove past the docks. New Zealand, like much of Australia (and probably many other places), tends to have lots of signs mentioning only the next few small towns up the road, but not including a bigger place that might be recognisable to a visitor. No doubt this is more than adequate for the vast majority of drivers, but! I took a lot of unplanned tours of small towns on this trip. This was never really a problem, because I wasn't in a hurry, usually saw something interesting that I would other-



Farside Farm, as seen from the front gate.

wise have missed, and could always ask a friendly, helpful local for directions if I didn't stumble upon the right road by myself.

(I hasten to add that I wasn't surprised about the poor signposting; I merely mention this as a feature of the trip – a feature I didn't like, but wasn't overly concerned about. I get a bit annoyed with LoC-writers who assume that things I remark upon 'surprised' me, or that 'if I'd done more research, I'd have known what to expect'. Quite often I know exactly what to expect (especially if I've been to a place before, as in the case of New Zealand). Other times I might indeed be surprised, but then if nothing surprises one on a trip, one might as well have stayed home, I reckon. If I do enough research and planning, I lose the elements of adventure that I enjoy.)

### Just checking, ma'am

Anyway, there I was, having found the motorway to Masterton. As I turned into the entrance ramp, there was a uniformed policeman directing all traffic over to the side, where several police cars and quite a few officers were talking to the drivers.

'They must have introduced random breath testing,' was my first thought, 'and are having a blitz on drink drivers during this holiday.' My second thought was they were looking for an escaped criminal, drug smuggler, or the like. I was wrong on both counts, although my first guess was closer. They were checking for fastened seat belts and defects to the cars. The policeman who spoke to

me was very polite (my belt was fastened and the car was new, unlike many NZ vehicles, so was unlikely to have major defects) and sent me on my way within about 30 seconds.

### Good roads, but ...

Another fun thing about driving in New Zealand is the narrow, winding roads through scenic river gorges. If the weather turns bad, mist or fog often obscures not only the views but the roadway, and rocks fall onto the pavement, making driving quite an adventure. I could have driven up the wide, flat, busy, and boring west coast road (Route 1), but I'd been that way before (when Lyn lived on the coast), but I wasn't in a hurry and wanted to see some countryside.

Actually, I'd been up this road before too, but it was still more interesting (if more tiring to drive) than the coast road. It was also in very good condition, for all its narrowness and fallen rock. A similar road in Australia (NSW anyway) is much more likely to be in poorer condition. The little car, a Toyota Starlet hatchback (which I'd never heard of before; I assume the model name is different in Australia, if they even have them there), zoomed up the steep roads quite nicely. I stopped for a rest break, toilet stop and snack in what I knew was a very scenic spot, but could see almost nothing beyond the carpark. Later, in the towns in the valley after the gorge, I stopped a few times to do some shopping and stretch my legs, but the weather wasn't conducive to sightseeing.

## I meet the geese

Probably just as well, because I finally rolled up at Lyn's about 5:30. At that season (just after the summer solstice) at that latitude, sundown is late, and my body thought the time was two hours earlier than local time, so I could have gone on somewhat longer, but I had got up rather too early and a lot of driving tires me quickly.

The infamous 'geese alarm' (described in some of Lyn's columns in this zine) went off loudly as I opened the farm gate. Lyn came out to shoo them off while I parked the car and got my bags into the house. The geese were more protective than usual, it seems, because they had a half-dozen week-old goslings in their midst.

After I'd settled down and we were chatting, Lyn told me of the latest geese-related event at Farside Farm. One night she was awakened by a huge racket, honking of geese and sounds of things falling over near the barn. She emerged from the house to find the front gate open, but no one in sight. When she called the police, she was informed that there had been a gang of thieves stealing small farm tractors in the district. (These vehicles are not registered for road use and are thus hard to trace if stolen.) Apparently the thieves had struck Lyn's place that night. But what they hadn't known was that the geese spend the night in the barn around and under the tractor. The geese would not have been pleased to

be disturbed at any time, but with new goslings to protect – well! When the thieves crept in, the adult geese sprang into action – and the intruders probably discovered Olympic sprinting capabilities they didn't know they possessed.

I fell about laughing at the imagined scene, but found the whole thing rather less funny when the geese chased me later in my visit. I can well imagine how these poor, misguided thieves felt, in the pitch dark, attacked by banshees!

Not to mention how the cow must have felt when she wandered in to be milked, nearly stepped on a gosling, and was attacked by the gander, who attached himself by the beak to her neck and held on as she fled down the paddock some distance. Lyn says it was several days before the cow could be persuaded to go anywhere near the barn again (which didn't make milking her any easier, either).

## A tour of the farm

Saturday, 28 December was sunny and warm, though the clouds gathered during the day. Lyn took me on a tour of the farm, meeting along the way most of the animals: the two pigs, the four (five?) cattle, one with newborn calf, the numerous sheep (several of which have coloured wool), the chickens, and of course the geese! The animals (with the exception of the sheep) mostly let Lyn come up and touch them, but regarded me with understandably deep suspicion.

The farm is on mostly flat or gent-

ly-sloped land, with someone else's land in back encompassing a boggy but rich streamside. The view to the northwest includes a scenic backdrop of hills – when you can see them through the mist! I failed to take a photograph, planning to come back another day – I should know better!

Later, I baked a banana cake that was such a hit with Lyn and her neighbour Ginger (from whom we'd borrowed the pans, spices and baking powder) (the farm animals had contributed the eggs and milk) that I had to make two more later in my visit, and supply the recipe!

Then I settled down to read Lyn's published (and in press) short stories, the typescripts of volumes 1 and 2 of her fantasy trilogy, and her serious novel. This woman is a fine storyteller, even if she can't punctuate properly. Her little anecdotes in *Wrevenge* give a bit of the flavour of her work, but her stories are much more fully developed and well written.

All this reading took several days, punctuated with long conversations about this and that, and much attention paid to Lyn's Siamese cat Rasti, ecstatic about having an extra human to sit on (but disappointed that I closed the bedroom door at night, so he couldn't sleep with me).

On Sunday the 29th the weather closed in. Grey, low clouds completely obscured the ranges. Drizzle alternated with rain. We stoked up the wood stove (the object Lyn refers to as 'the Kent') and kept reading. I considered photographing the inside of Lyn's house, but decided that would be impolite. Her house is old, and needs work: she's been getting the structural stuff worked on when she has the money, but cosmetic details as, quite reasonably, at the bottom of the list. Considering that my house is in a similar state of disrepair, I felt quite comfortable there.

## Playing tourist

By Monday I'd decided to take a tour in the car (I was paying for it, after all, whether I used it or not). The weather was still uninspiring, but the forecast suggested the rain was clearing further east, which was where I wanted to go. (Lyn said that quite often they get rain where she lives, tucked under the edge of the ranges like that, but a few kilometres away it's sunny and clear.)

Lyn and the geese patrol.



So I set off about 11 am, headed for Gisborne. Got lost several times in poorly signposted towns (see comments earlier). In many cases, the only indication of where one is going is a small, white-on-black sign that says 'North' or 'South'. Considering that I was going east, I took awhile to realise that the highway went from north to south, and just happened in this area to swing east.

Napier's waterfront area looked well worth a return visit. It features lots of lovely old Victorian buildings on the flats and wandering up the hillsides, and a long park containing an aquarium, a marine museum, and other attractions. The holiday crowds were thick, so I decided to press on. I felt like seeing 'natural' scenery, not human artifacts, on this trip. By now the day was warming up considerably, and was very humid.

The coast road on to Gisborne wound through scenic farmland, pleasantly green (most of New Zealand seems extremely green to anyone from most parts of Australia) but of no particular dramatic quality. I considered taking an inland road through the hills, but decided the weather was too unpredictable; if it fined up, I'd go that way on the return trip.

Stayed overnight in Gisborne, in a pleasant if unremarkable motel. The Maori manager commented on how hot the day was. I politely agreed, but personally considered it quite pleasant. (No doubt the usual temperatures in the area are much cooler than what I consider summer temperatures.)

Tuesday the 31st I had to decide whether to take a long, potentially very interesting trip around a large peninsula to Opotiki, or a shorter route that would give me more time to explore the Bay of Plenty area. The weather was still doubtful, but I chose the long road. I'm glad I did, although I couldn't see as much as I would have liked in some areas, due to the low cloud cover.

Beautiful country, well off the main roads. No towns larger than a small village consisting of a few houses and a Maori meeting house. The road ran along the coast (just a few metres from the beach), cutting over the hills between the bays and giving good views from the summits. It was in good condition, though narrow and providing few places to stop for photos. In some areas the traffic

was so light (several minutes between cars) that I'd simply find a stretch with good visibility in both directions, and simply stop on the road.

The beaches were lined with people camping, presumably there for the fishing. These camping areas had no amenities, so each tent had a little tent a few metres away - the toilet. Posher sites had two little tents - presumably the other was the shower. There were a few small campervans among the tents, but no large 'recreational vehicles'. I assumed these were mostly local people, here for a cheap holiday by the sea, well away from the overseas tourists. I was enchanted.

It all reminded me of a lifetime ago when one could still camp like that in the USA, or more recently in Australia, before the press of overwhelming numbers of people (and increasing concern about coastal environments) had forced restrictions on beach camping. Here there were no signs forbidding camping 'except in designated areas'. No towns had sprung up to support the campground area (with a couple of exceptions), although many beaches had a small store across the road. I agree completely with the restrictions in other areas (because I understand the necessity), but it was lovely to find a place where they weren't necessary.

The rain continued intermittently through the day, getting heavier later. I stopped briefly at the town at the easternmost point of New Zealand, which featured a surfing beach, hoards of young people (many with

bizarre haircuts and clothing), and shops catering to their interests (many blaring loud music). Reminded me of some of the Maryland beaches in the 60's, when I was one of the young people, but here I felt like an interloper. My car was too new, and I was too old. I drove on. (Probably the parents of some of these young people are camped along those quiet beaches I'd passed earlier, fishing lazily.)

The northern coast of this peninsula (along the Bay of Plenty) is much steeper and has far fewer bays with beaches. Probably it's also exposed to much more violent weather. I suspect it's very scenic in a dramatic sort of way, and the steep slopes probably go up a lot higher than I could see, after they disappeared into the clouds. By now it was getting rather dark (from the weather, not the lateness of the house, which was only late afternoon), so I pressed on.

At Opotiki I headed out through the gorge on my way back to Gisborne. The gorge is dramatically scenic, even in the rain and mist (and probably a lot more scenic when you can see more). Extra drama was provided by the numerous piles of freshly-fallen rock on the winding roadway, necessitating very careful driving (especially around the corners).

Spent New Year's Eve in a mercifully quiet motel on the outskirts of Gisborne (I suspect New Zealand has its share of party motels, just as Australia does). Phoned Lyn to tell her where I was and that I'd had no

Lyn and some of the cows.



problems and expected to be back the next day. Took several tries to get through, because I misinterpreted the distance-dialling instructions in the phone book. Eventually the motel manager phoned me to tell me how to do it correctly. I then realised that the instructions were perfectly clear, but I was very tired. (I didn't dial '1' before the area code – we don't have that in Australia; North Americans would, no doubt, find it quite normal.)

New Year's Day featured heavy rain, as predicted by the television weather report the night before. Having not stayed up till midnight, I was well rested and got on my way about 9 am, hoping that any reckless drivers would still be asleep. Whether that was the case, I don't know; but at least I met little traffic, and none of it reckless, and got back to Lyn's in the early afternoon.

Linnette Horne had arrived the day before, so the three of us sat around the wood stove talking to each other and petting Rasti, who was in raptures at all this attention. Thursday was more of the same: rain and conversation. Friday I got up early and set off to drive to Wellington well before 8 am. This time I went through Palmerston North and took the coast road south. Much easier driving, despite rather more traffic, and not at all interesting. I'd allowed much more time than I needed and arrived at the airport well before the time required. Finding the place to return the rental car was difficult (I never did see any signs), but it's a small airport and had little traffic at that time, so after driving around for awhile I recognised the spot where I'd collected the car, and left it there.

I was delighted to discover that sometime in the two years since I'd last been in a New Zealand airport, that no-smoking areas had been established, so I was able to read my



book and eat my lunch in semi-comfort.

### On the plane home

On the plane (again a combined Air New Zealand–Qantas flight on a Qantas plane) I noticed a striking difference between this flight and the one I'd made on United last year: Qantas had a conspicuous lack of the sort of dictatorial announcements that United featured, presumably due to the differences in the regulations under which each airline flies. For

example, United not only required everyone to be seated before the plane backed away from the parking bay (citing US government regulations), but they worded this requirement in very unfriendly language; there were other examples, but I've forgotten the details. Qantas didn't have such an announcement, friendly or not. The safety announcements (about seat belts, life jackets, oxygen masks, and so on) are almost identical; presumably these have something to do with international agreements.

**Greg Hills for DUFF!**



by Bernie Klassen

February 18th (1991) finds me up early loading a van with gardening tools and lab equipment and heading out to a town about two hours south and west from Edmonton (Alberta, Canada). This town is small (about 6000 population), but with an average household income of about C\$45K. It is an oil town, dependent on the international economy. A town with better than a half dozen hotel/motels that are always full. The only off-season they experience is when oil prices crash (much like the last month, come to think of it...).

The town council has agreed to allow a study to be done of their landfill. Not only that, they have put up enough money to hire two research assistants for a total of four one-week 'sampling periods' over a full year (the better to assess the change in landfill use through the seasons). Enter the gardening tools and your 'umble correspondent.

A friend, Tom, is working on his masters in environmental engineering. As his thesis he is doing a project about the volume and frequencies of hazardous goods in the home and in the waste stream.

The idea is to take a sample from each of the three daily dumps from the town run, and as many private vehicles dropping off stuff as is practical. Doesn't sound too bad, does it? 'Take a sample from each of three loads.' Like pissing in a bottle, a little unusual, but basically under control.

The truck is a standard garbage truck: a large steel-sided vehicle with an attached compressor on the back. It pulls in, the compressor lifts, and a hydraulic ram shoves the contents out. Of course it is at this point that the cat comes over and flattens the pile to some sort of uniform depth (albeit one with intermittent areas of nothing).

Tom had taken lengths of 1x2 marked off in metre increments and tied two together for length for use as our grid. We threw these across the metre deep pile of garbage and spaced them about every 1-1/2 metre and Tom counted off to the random grid number he had established earlier. Then came the 'research assistants' armed with pitchforks, potato forks, and shovels and proceeded to collect the sample. Each sample required the collection of 90 to 150 kilos of compressed, mashed, flattened garbage. And yes, we carried it, weighed it, and finally with these three-tined garden cultivator/weeders, we tore it apart.

Now this was major-league fun. Dumping out garbage can after garbage can of crud and sorting through it looking for 'hazardous or toxic waste or its indicators'. Now, you'll have to trust me on this one – and cleap, voyeuristic thrill you might conceivably experience from looking through someone else's garbage wears off *very very quickly*.

What kind of stuff were we pulling from the waste stream? Oven cleaners and their containers, oil-soaked rags, household batteries (the largest source of heavy metal contamination in landfills is the cadmium and mercury leached from those duracells you just pitched in the garbage), biomedical wastes, commercial and private vehicle oil filters, hairsprays, detergents, paints, mousse, all the detritous of modern western *consumer* culture.

And all of it either posing some threat to the environment by itself, indicating the use of hazardous chemicals in the home, or producing pollutants.

Two categories were very quickly added to the study: disposable diapers by weight and count, and biomedical wastes. Of the latter

there should have been none: the law in Alberta is that NO biomedical waste of any sort is to be disposed of in a landfill. The fact that we found any at all is causing great consternation in town council. There was talk of having us sign oaths of confidentiality to prevent this news from leaking. I never signed, so now you know. (Actually, the councillors never quite got round to writing one for us to sign...)

See, if word got out that we were finding illegally disposed of wastes in the landfill, for once the shit would run uphill – right to the ministers of health and the environment. At which point it would explode outward and then down. Every landfill in the province would have to be checked, hospitals inspected, etc., and a veritable shitstorm would ensue.

Now, personally I think that this might not be a bad thing. If biomedical wastes *are* being disposed of illegally in this town (and they are), the odds are good that it is happening in other landfill sites across the province, and they *should* be inspected, as should hospitals, and their disposal programs vetted, and in general the shitstorm *should* come to pass. But the town councillors want to keep this quiet, deal with the hospital and doctors' clinics themselves, and maybe pass word on to the other municipalities. Okay, if it is actually done. But sometimes the shitstorm is more effective...

So what were we finding? Nothing too extreme. No body parts, aborted fetuses, nothing like that. Dressings, adult diapers, enema bags, IV bags, syringes, stuff like that. The total for the week probably wouldn't exceed 40 or 50 litres. But when you consider that we were supposed to find none... well, the amount becomes more significant.

What else did we see in the waste stream? Diapers, for one. Lots of 'em. The potential for water table contamination is enormous. Fecal coliform, various bacteria, and vaccination viruses. This last is a big problem. When your child is undergoing their inoculations, doctors warn you to be very careful about changing diapers – the risk from exposure to killed virus is quite high. This is particularly true of polio vaccine.

Oil. God, there was a lot of oil. Of all the items we sorted out of the stream, this was the one whose volume surprised me the most. One random residential/commercial load we sampled resulted in our taking something like 52 oil filters out of the 1m x 1-1/2m sample. This was not an anomaly in the sample – from where I was working in the load I could see dozens more in every square. One-litre polyethylene oil containers, the type you buy at the local service station, were another big item. We washed several of these in solvent to get some indication of the waste residue of oil left in one of these bottles. The figures ranged between 20 and 30 grams per container. Hundreds of these were being tossed every day. To say nothing of the residual oil in the oil filters – some of these were never drained, but were simply tossed away full of used oil. And rags. Everything from relatively minor contamination to rags dripping with oil. Motor oil is one of those things that lends itself so well to recycling, because the oil is still good. It's just loaded with contaminants. Re-refining can remove those and produce usable oil at a fraction of the investment of obtaining and refining crude. The amount of oil in one form or another going into the landfill shocked me. And I thought I had prepared myself.

We were not alone in the landfill. Working in co-operation with us were a group of people from the Pembina Institute, an environmental research and education group based in the area. They had a group doing a study of the recyclable component of the waste stream. So we would sample and sort, and then they would re-sort the sample for recyclables. Once we were done, there really wasn't much left as 'garbage'.

There were the occasional stunning examples that left all of us frustrated. Things like the fifty feet of

braided steel 1-1/4" cable. In perfect shape, it had failed a stress test, or passed its number of hours service life and been discarded. In either case it had the potential for a second long career in a less demanding environment – say, here on my farm. This was a cable whose strength surpassed anything I might do to it, and could have been used for the next couple of decades around here with no threat of it breaking. And even not being re-used, it could easily have been recycled. Or one of the few things I salvaged: a 3/8" grab hook for a chain. It had never been unpackaged. Or tubes of silicone sealant between 50% and 80% full in various colours. Wood. Solid lumber or plywood or manufactured wood. Corrugated cardboard by the tonne.

The sheer volume of reusable and recyclable stuff appalled even me. I've scavenged dumps often enough to be used to it, or so I thought. But this town of 6000 burst my little complacency bubble pretty fast. And the answers are fairly straightforward: source separation, composting. It seems too easy by half. Particularly when you see how fast we're filling up with garbage. Both Victoria and Edmonton have filled their current landfill sites. Vancouver and Toronto are trucking their garbage hundreds of miles. And New York... well, we're all familiar with the little lost barge, eh?

But there's Europe, shipping its toxic wastes to Africa for disposal. South America and Mexico with teratogens flowing in the ditches, mutagens in the water, carcinogens in the mud, and babies born with no heads. You can't eat the fish from Howe Sound, and you can't even desalinate the waters of the Persian Gulf these days. And I was standing knee-deep in the goddamn stuff, working on a project that is just starting to get a handle on the *composition* for chrissakes. Is it any wonder I'm feeling a bit apocalyptic?

The worst thing about the job was being afraid. I was afraid, and with good reason, every minute I was at the jobsite, and for hours after leaving. The temperature ranged from about -50C to +50C, which made working nice. No smells, or not much, everything reasonably stable. But there was mud. And it's not that we didn't know what we were working in, it's that we did. We were working in stuff that had at the very least the

potential to kill us. Don't touch your eyes, don't take off the dustmask, don't wipe your nose. The potential for contamination was enormous.

After work you could shower and change, but if you got back into the van to go out for dinner, well, how many times had you touched that handle with contaminated gloves? Sat on the seat with contaminated coveralls? The original plan had been to save money by eating lunch at the jobsite. You ever cook food in a dump? Or eat a sandwich there?

Coming home, I was scared to be hugged by the kids. I could just see us all coming down with hepatitis or worse (remember all that medical waste?). And yet in three months I'm going to do it again. It's not for the money (though the money is not bad). But there is an element of social usefulness that I find very attractive. I was doing something with implications for social good, and that is a powerful motivator.

When we got back to Edmonton, I asked Tom if he was the only person with such fun work. After a few minutes of thought, he mentioned one other person with a comparable project: settling rates in landfill sites. This is to be done by building large cylinders and filling them with pre-sorted garbage to watch their compaction. He offered to pass my name along, suggesting a whole new career in waste handling. I confess that I turned down this opportunity.

June, 1991. Well, I've just come back from the second sampling period at the landfill. Things have changed...

Not the real important stuff – there is still bio-hazardous waste being discarded from clinics and such – but the composition of the waste stream has altered somewhat. In the three months since we were last sampling at the landfill, the Pembina Institute for Appropriate Technology has started a recycling program for the town. This is a stop-gap measure, with part of a public parking lot being set aside for several large bins and a semi-trailer. People are expected to separate out their recyclable plastic, tin (steel) cans, glass, newspapers, and fine paper, and deliver them to the drop-off place, and place them in the appropriate bin. This does not intercept as much product as a household pick-up program, as you can well imagine. But...

Down at the landfill, the sampling



went on as before. But where in February we were seeing about 5% of the waste stream coming out as hazardous (a figure *far* higher than anyone had expected), we found that the hazardous waste component had dropped to about 2% this time. People were dropping off tons of yard waste (mostly grass clippings) this time. There were fewer loads with bags of miscellaneous junk. So when you include the yard waste figures, the amount of hazardous waste we sorted out (expressed as a percentage of the total) dropped.

What didn't drop was the amount of re-usable and recyclable material. And then there was all that compostable yard waste. The layout of the landfill had changed as well. An area that had been set aside for appliances had been changed over to accept cars. These were being salvaged for the metal content. Also in that area were tires, car batteries, and a herbicide/insecticide containment area. I had to laugh: the contractor for the area (the fellow doing the salvaging) was

complaining that someone had ripped off about fifty car batteries from the dump. Because they are recyclable, battery shops will actually pay a couple of dollars each for them, and someone had taken advantage of this before the salvager could. I find this a heartening sign.

One of the things we had to do this time was to go through a couple of the bins at the recycling drop-off area. The bins are about 1.7m x 3m x 1.7m, with lids, and are left in front of signs describing what exactly can and cannot be put in them. Because many of the items we were sorting for come in plastic containers, we had to sort through the bins to get some idea of how many items were being diverted from the landfill.

We chose the perfect time to do this - Friday evening about 6:00 pm. No lack of audience, anyway. We had glanced at the operation on Thursday, and found that there were two bins of plastics, and both were full to the top. When we arrived on Friday, a new bin had been dropped off and

was already 1/3 full. I was impressed. That's a lot of people dropping off a lot of plastic.

Our sorting went quickly, but even so there were at least three drop-offs made while we were there - and that's on a Friday evening. We did find that a lot of stuff was being diverted away from the landfill.

But the one thing that kind of surprised me was that the largest single item in the plastic recycle bin was bags of bags: those handled plastic bags that everyone forces on you these days at every type of shop. Each bag looked to contain about 30 more of these bags. Everyone I know uses them for garbage, but from the volume of them we stumbled across, it's obvious that the bags accumulate faster than the garbage. Here on our farm we use maybe one of these bags a weeks for garbage (we've been working at reducing our waste volume) and so an accumulation of bags makes sense. But it appears that the problem is much more widespread than I had thought.

### THE RABBIT'S PROGRESS

By Lyn McConchie

So your friend has become a writer. How's she doing? Is she making much money?



What about the constant rejections, do they bother her?

She's earned nearly a thousand dollars, so far this year.



No!

That's nice, all that money and even rejection doesn't worry her, what does she say about being a writer?



She says that rejections are nothing! It's the Postal Charges that are killing her.



## There and back again: (A hobbit's journey to North America and the U.K.)

by Lyn McConchie

### Getting ready

I packed for the trip over a couple of weeks. Stacking everything into the cases, then hauling it all out again a couple of days later to resort and dump half of it out again.

To my irritation, the day before I was to leave, I was struck by a story. I'd been mulling this one over and had intended to write it after I got back. Alas for the best laid plans – it came to fruition, so instead of spending the last day relaxing, I spent it writing like a maniac so I could post it before I caught the plane.

### The flight to Seattle

The plane trip to Auckland from the small Palmerston North airport was fine. Not so fine that I then had to wait 4 hours for the overseas flight; still less that I had to change planes in Honolulu and wait a further 5 hours there. By the time I landed in Seattle I'd been awake some 30 hours and was running out of energy.

Being met by Jan Murray and Jean Weber and friends with a banner welcoming me to Seattle perked me up a lot. So did being able to present Jean with a whole box full of miniatures of Myers rum. That happened because of an airline faux pas. As some of you know, I use a crutch (a full length one) to get about. Airline people tend to have odd reservations about my having it during takeoff. I don't quite know if they envision me using it to hijack the plane, or just to stroll about when they want me seated – whatever, it was taken off me on the Hawaii to Seattle leg of the journey. (Editor's comment: U.S. airline regulations require that all carry-on luggage must be under the seat or in the overhead lockers for takeoff and landing; the crutch won't fit in either place, so they are required by law to put it somewhere else.)

I made them promise to bring it back as soon as we were allowed to move. I waited – and waited – and waited. After an hour I needed to head toiletwards. I clutched a passing stewardess (Editor's comment:

flight attendant – ahem!) and requested my support.

'Sure, I'll bring it to you in a minute.'

Half an hour passed. I rang the bell for staff. No response. I rang again; still no reply. By this time my bladder was getting unhappy and my temper wasn't too far behind. Eventually, some two hours into the flight, I nailed another stewardess.

'Please can I have my crutch.'

'What?'

'Please can I have my crutch.'

'What?' (Wonderful! The only deaf one and I have to land her!!) (Editor's comment: maybe it's the New Zealand accent? \*duck\*)

By this time I had ceased to care who heard me. 'I WANT MY CRUTCH BROUGHT TO ME. I WANT IT RIGHT NOW!'

Looking slightly stunned, she rushed off to produce the vital item. A male appeared to discuss this. I suspect I was supposed to be embarrassed and apologise for my in-temperate demands. Like hell! It was he who departed slightly pink around the ears when I told him why I'd needed it and asked what the airline had against my bladder anyhow?

The staff were full of apologies after that. One of them sat with me to chat awhile. I told her about my failure to obtain a suitable bottle of rum for Jean at Honolulu. As I left the plane, a fat white box was pressed into my hands.

'So your friend isn't disappointed,' I was told. It turned out to be ten miniatures of Myers rum from first class. I think my bladder paid off.

### Seattle

Seattle was great! I hit half the bookshops, bought a fortune's worth of SF/F books, and met a ton of writers. Jan Murray and her husband (Chris Bates) know everyone. I barbequed with Ginjer Buchanan, Carol Severance, John Berry, Vonda McIntyre et al.

With Jean I spent half a day at the aquarium watching the otters punt themselves about on their backs, in company with Eleanor Busby. After which we returned for drinks and a



chat with F.M. himself and a look over their house. (He is one of my favourite SF authors, and I was so pleased to meet him and listen to him discuss his books.)

### Westercon

Then it was on to Westercon, with four of us stuffed into the car with all our luggage. I made the Canadian customs unhappy right from the start.

'Okay, girls, where are you from?'

'Seattle – Seattle – Seattle – New Zealand.'

'What?'

'I'm from New Zealand.'

'Go down there and speak to immigration.'

I did so, wordlessly proffering my passport.

'How many of you are there?'

'Just me.'

'You're driving?'

'No, I mean the other three are Americans.'

'Then where are they?'

'Outside. They didn't know they had to come in as well.'

'If you're told to come here it means all of you. Get them in.'

I shot out in a hurry. The others scurried back with me and also offered ID. This was glanced at and we were permitted to cross the border. We were still wondering an hour later if he's thought I was trying to smuggle them in or something. Jan came up with a good name for him, and from then on he was referred to as 'The Customs Officer from Hell.' (Editor's note: the same thing happened to me, although the officer I got was very polite and friendly, while wearing a very long-suffering air regarding the border guards who don't tell people that everyone in the car has to come in.)

After a night we were also refer-

ring to 'the beds from Hell'. Westerson was at the Gage residence, part of the University of British Columbia. I have never in all my life met beds so unyielding! After several nights on mine, I had developed small bruises on the inside of both knees. (Editor's note: I thought the beds were pleasantly firm and I slept very comfortably. But then I remember the beds in your house, with are mostly so soft that I couldn't sleep on them and my back screamed in agony.)

The campus was quite magnificent, as was the view from our tenth floor windows. The con was also very conveniently situated in two buildings only, so that I was able to trot from one to another in less than 5 minutes and without leg trouble on too large a scale. This was important as I had been handed five panels over the four days on which to speak. The hucksters' tables were many and varied, so that once again I had a wonderful (and very expensive) time.

My first panel was Humour in SF/F – overdone or not enough. This was on the Friday at 1pm and was a lot of fun. After that I returned to the pro-writers' suite (separated from the hoi polloi) and was able to listen to C.J. Cherryh and John Dalmás. Carol Severance, whom I had met at the Seattle barbeque, was also there and we vanished into a corner to talk about her book *Reefsong* which was due out in September.

My leg then played up and I retired for an extra early night. I gather my disappearing act baffled most of our quad, who wondered where on Earth I'd vanished to. Jean guessed, but also guessed why and said nothing so I could sleep in peace.

Saturday I also had panels. I discovered I was on one with Ru Emerson, and later we were able to exchange our views on the similarities of our homes. We both live in small townships where we know just about

everyone and everyone knows us. I really liked her and kept finding echoes of her books in things she said.

I finally met Garth Spencer, too. Cute! But intense to the nth degree. I looked thoughtfully at him, wishing I was ten years younger and wistfully decided that I was too old and tired. It's hell getting old and tired!

## Seattle again

Sunday was more of the same, then back to Seattle in the afternoon. We detoured so I could see various views and got back very late.

On Sunday, being by now completely confused about International Date Lines, time zones and the like, I'd phoned the possible agent at Curtis Brown in New York. I discovered my mistake when a weary cleaner answered to inform me it was Sunday, no one was there, and could I please phone back some other weekday.

Tuesday I managed to get postcards off to several friends, then Jan and I hit the op shops. Several of them were quite fabulous and we arrived back with a stack of books and assorted other bits and pieces. (Jan can recognise silk at twenty paces and did so.) I discovered several books I'd wanted for ages.

Jan then phoned Jessica Amanda Salmonson for me to suggest a meeting. I have been running into her fanac for some time, and have also corresponded with her occasionally. To my delight, she remembered me at once and had heard I was visiting. We were invited to meet her and her friend at a restaurant. Jessica had brought a box of books, into which I disappeared at once. She'd just had published (by Paragon) a definitive hardback on Amazons and I grabbed a copy, paid on the spot and had her sign it. I intend to lean on local libraries in NZ to get copies. It really is a great book, particularly for any feminists or women's groups.

After making a pig of myself on the best turkey sandwiches I've ever eaten, we drove back to Jessica's place, where I vanished again into more books. Jan was too busy admiring the Mexican walking fish in the wall tanks. Me – I admired the gorgeous parakeet that Jessica and Jules have. He's cute, clever, and very definite on not wanting to be tucked away.

Several hours later we staggered out with an entire small box of books,

some for me and some for FFANZ auctions. Jessica had kindly autographed the lot. I've heard such a lot about Jessica. In some ways I was quite surprised to find a pleasant, intelligent woman who could talk interestingly on a variety of subjects. Her friend Jules is also very nice, and I was happy to find that I really liked them both. I hope if I get back to Seattle to be able to meet them again.

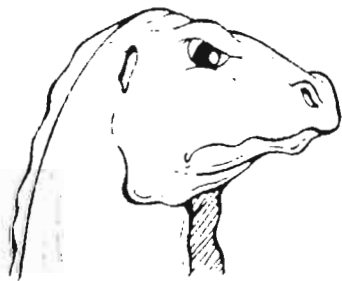
Tuesday was quiet. Jan had to return to work, so I decided to sleep in really late and catch up a bit. I can't complain about jet lag. Apart from being as hyper as a grasshopper full of adrenalin, I had no problems. No exhaustion, headaches, sickness, or anything, which I thought was wonderful. Half of the place had warned me before I left how miserable jet lag could make you and I was worried I might feel lousy all the time and my trip could be spoilt. I didn't, and it wasn't.

Thinking about all the warnings I received before I left, they were all wrong. No one attacked me or tried to steal my cases. No one tried to cheat me with the exchange rate. Taxi drivers, without any exception, were charming and helpful. People held doors for me, lifted things, and offered to carry my suitcases or hail taxis. Of course I was insulted at regular intervals by people who announced that they 'liked my accent'. I don't have an accent. Foreigners have accents!

Tuesday afternoon I watched *Ghost*. I loved the darn thing. It's so sentimental I snivelled and decided that I must get a copy if I can sometime. The night before we'd gone out to dinner at a terrific restaurant. Some place called St Anthony's on the Pier I think. Gail Butler, Jean, me, Jan, and others. I had some pretty good meals in the U.S. Most of the restaurants are clean, and while not cheap, are not too expensive either. The takeaway places confused me though. What they offered was never what it meant in NZ, and I kept getting things I couldn't recognise.

## The agency phones

But Monday was the day! I rang the agency in New York around 3.30 pm their time (midday Seattle). Susan James was there, but too busy to spend the time talking that she wanted to. She offered to ring back in a couple of hours when she'd have



free time and we could discuss things.

I was convinced that this was the preliminary to letting me down lightly. I must have looked for the next couple of hours like someone sitting on an ant's nest as I couldn't sit still. I stood up, wandered about, sat down again, and then back on my feet. Jan and Chris watched with amusement, as well they might.

Then the phone rang for me and it was Susan James at Curtis Brown. Yes, she had read the book I'd sent; yes, she did like it; yes, they were officially accepting me as a client. I don't remember too much of the conversation after that.

I do recall wandering about with an ear-to-ear grin for the next couple of days though. It kept amusing Jan and Jean Weber at the restaurant the following evening. The thing that delighted me beyond measure was that Susan knew the book. She could quote bits that she liked from it and had several suggestions for the necessary partial re-write needed. I made mental notes like mad, and a later conversation was even more helpful. (I wound up back in Norsewood with a very clear idea of the necessary minor changes that would improve things in final draft.)

I was due to fly out to New York on the Friday around lunchtime. On the Thursday Christ Bates ran me over to Vonda McIntyre's home to buy signed books for FFANZ (Fan Fund of Australia and New Zealand). Vonda was very kind and quite stunned me at the end of an hour's conversation, by refusing payment for a whole stack of books, mandlebrots (signed) and various other items. I'd come prepared to pay full price and could hardly believe that she was donating them for free.

## **I cuddle a snake**

The other delighted visit included Gus the reticulated python next door to Jan and Chris. New Zealand has no snakes, and I was very keen to meet a real one that I could handle. Gus looked me over and then wound half of his 15 feet affectionately about my person. I was charmed at his beauty and the lovely rough silk feel of his scales. Despite the terrific pressure he could have exerted, he showed no sign of unfriendliness but graciously permitted me to scatch under his chin and stroke his scales, while admiring better muscles than Arnold

Schwartznegger. In short, Gus was magnificent! If NZ ever changes its policy on smakes, I'm going straight out to offer a home to a reticulated python!

## **To New York & New Jersey**

The plane flight to New York was shorter than my travel agent here in NZ had told me, a mere 4-1/2 hours. I staggered out into New York with my two suitcases at 9:15 pm. It was dark but the lights made the city look colourful. I ambled out to the taxi stand at the front. (I noted a total dearth of muggers, murderers, rapists, etc as I did so. So much for all the warnings.)

A nice taxi driver opened his door and asked me where I wanted to go. I explained that I was staying with friends in Glassboro and wanted to go there if he could take me. He tucked me into the front seat, my cases into the boot, and assured me he could take me anywhere I wanted. I found that he was Polish and that his best friend has just immigrated to Australia. We stopped at the nearest phone box to tell his wife he could collect her after work as usual and headed for Glassboro. A peaceful relaxed trip as we chatted about Australia, New York, and NZ. People has also warned me about the nastiness of NY taxi drivers. If this man was an example, they are wonderful.

When we got to Rinehart's place, he was so worried about me traveling up the path in the dark with my cases, he turned the taxi so the lights would shine right up to the door and carried my cases in for me. I paid him, and gave him a lovely white carnation for his wife. (The airline had given them out to passengers just before landing.) May he live long and prosper. This is one NZer who will always remember his kindness to a stranger in his country.

Rinehart was still up when I arrived and I was whisked inside. His wife Grace came down shortly after hearing us talking and I was enveloped in caring and cups of tea. I needed the Saturday taking it easy, but on Sunday we drove all the way down to Long Beach Island and crossed over to see it. There was a charming little museum there that was most interesting to look over, and a herb garden which made me think of my next door neighbour at home.

Ginger is into gardens and would have adored this one.

## **The perils of packing**

I thought I'd been very cunning about room in my cases while I travelled. Well prior to my departure, I'd crocheted several rugs for friends as gifts. These, while not heavy, are bulky. As I dished out rugs, I reasoned, there would be room in my cases again to place the presents I wanted to bring home for friends there. Other presents I intended to buy in the US for English mates I would be staying with. Yes ... well! The best packed plans of tourists! I found that even before I left Seattle, I now had a whole large box of books that couldn't be fitted into the cases. Muttering about how the heck that had happened, I obtained a spare book box from Jan and filled it. This arrived safely at my home on the 17th of October, to my heartfelt gratitude. Since I'd lost nothing on the entire trip, I had a terrible conviction that this would turn out to be the one thing that did go missing. Thanks be that I was wrong!

Of course, it didn't end there. After another week in Glassboro visiting what seemed like half the shops in New Jersey, I had a second box of things that wouldn't fit in my suitcases either. This I managed to pack and post the day before I left from New York. It arrived a good month before the other box, and in a bare eight weeks. Almost unheard of for seemail from the US to NZ.

Coke on this side of the country turned out to be drinkable too, which pleased me. The Coke in Seattle always tasted both over-sweet (with a sickly aftertaste) and slightly flat to a NZ palate. The Canadian coke, which I found once I arrived at Westercon, was just like ours, so we stopped at the border and I collected a sixpack to take with me and drink until I left for New York.

Monday was shop till you drop, and Tuesday was being interviewed by a local paper, the Gloucester County Times. To my surprise they sent not only a reporter but a photographer as well. They stayed talking to me for several hours, as the paper had been smart enough to choose a reporter who was also an SF/F fan and wanted to know all about Westercon and NZ fandom. We had a terrific time, and the clipping arrived from Rinehart

several weeks after I got home. I then found to my even deeper surprise that I'd missed a radio interview as well. Apparently as soon as the article appeared in the paper, several days after I'd flown to the UK, the local radio station had rung and wanted to talk to me. A pity, as I'll always wonder what they wanted to discuss.

Then it was a Friday again and I was on my way to New York again and on to Heathrow. Luckily I rang the airport to check a couple of days before the flight, and discovered that the travel agent had got the departure time wrong. Nineteen hundred hours is not 9 pm!

## Encounters

I caught the bus to N.Y. from Laurel Mountain stop, and while we stood waiting was stunned by the behaviour of those there. Now this was a decent stop, office, restrooms, ticket counter, and comfortable seats. Waiting to get on a bus were a nicely dressed dark haired woman and two children, one a baby and the other a boy of around nine. Quite casually he dropped his shorts and peed all over the pavement in front of some fifty passengers and those waiting to board. The way he behaved made it clear that he regarded this as normal behaviour. His mother stood, seeing what he was doing but ignoring it just as casually. I was stunned. I can't imagine any woman in NZ permitting a boy of that age to act like that in a

public place. (In fact here it's illegal to do so.) It wasn't as if she was in dirty rags, or there was no restroom available. No – it was imply a part of their way of life. Who or what she was I don't know. I only know that if that's her standard of living, I wouldn't want any of her family here.

The bus trip in to the depot was quick. I trotted off and received my two cases and was at once accosted by an elderly negro with a wide smile. He offered to take my cases to the taxi for me, and I could pay him what I chose when we arrived at the stand. I accepted and he faithfully delivered them.

We were then almost 'set upon' by a large male in a uniform who belated at us both. My case deliverer was a 'lousy junkie', 'he had no right to be taking luggage', 'I was a fool and what did I think I was allowing this man to work for me!!' I was so surprised that while he ranted I was speechless.

Then I regained my voice. In tones almost as loud and clear, I announced that I had allowed him to carry my cases because he seemed to be the only one prepared to do so. That he had carried them with honesty and dispatch, that I had no knowledge of his personal habits but at least he hadn't yelled at an innocent visit to the city! I then paid the elderly man and we both glared triumphantly at the uniformed one as I shook my case carrier warmly by the hand and thanked him. (I have no idea if the accusations were true. I only know he was clean, his clothes were pressed, and he smiled kindly at me and carried my cases to just where I wanted them.)

I grabbed a taxi on to the airport and passed the time chatting to the Pakistani driver about the political troubles in his original country. He was nice too and found me a person

to carry my cases in to the ticket counter to check in.

## Arrival in England

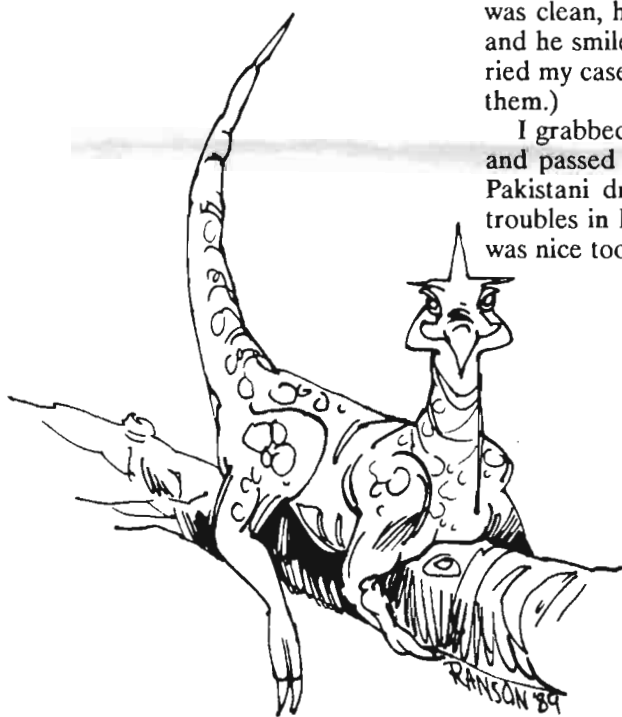
Owing to time changes, I staggered out of the plane at Heathrow at 7:15 am. A helpful taxi driver took me to Charing Cross, as I figured that it would be easier all

round if I went straight on to Maureen Speller's home at Folkestone. On the way I discovered that the driver comes from the same village in Wales that two of my great-grandparents immigrated to New Zealand from. The airport had said that a train left at 10 am. We got into the station at 8:45 and found there were no baggage carts. Not wishing to leave a countrywoman stranded, the driver locked his taxi and escorted me through and onto the train, carrying my cases for me. It turned out that the train left a 9, not 10, so he had just time to collect his money, tuck my cases under the seat for me, and bid me a kind farewell before we were off to Folkestone.

I sat in a slight daze watching the names familiar from books for years flow by on stations down the line. We passed over the Thames and I had a sentimental tear in my eye. So many years that I'd read about it and now to actually see the river was almost too much for one who was tired out as well. Out at Folkestone and taxi down the road and around the corner to Maureen's. Knock – knock – knock – PANIC! Maureen wasn't sure which day I'd arrive, because I hadn't been sure. Just my hard luck if she was away for the day, but no – a car pulled up across the road and two people came up the path. Phew!

It was great to meet Maureen. We've corresponded for years and now at last I was able to meet her and her S.O., Paul Kincaid. We ate and talked, and the next morning I found M.R. James' books in their library. Squeaking happily, I vanished back upstairs with them and read until lunchtime. Ate, talked, and then read more. Mid-afternoon a story started percolating, and I must have developed the look of a hen that wants to lay an egg. Maureen generously loaned her computer and I sat down to type the story outline. It developed into two stories, but it kept me quiet since they had work to do as well.

Later that evening, Maureen became worried about Sophy, her young female cat. I looked at the small feline and agreed, Sophy wasn't well. Eventually Maureen and Paul rang the vet and took her there. Diagnosis was feline incurable illness and most unhappily and reluctantly Sophy had to be put down. They brought her small body back to be buried in their back garden. They weren't the only



ones in tears. Rasti is nearly 15, I may not have him too much longer and I empathised with their grief.

Monday night I took them out for an Indian meal at the New Delhi. It was nice and so was the food, but our waiter had language trouble, or rather we did with him.

## Seeking the One Tun pub

Train back to London and spent the next two nights at my sister's flat in Hampstead. I'd arranged with Mic to meet them at the One Tun in Saffron Hill around 8:30 pm. My sister, wanting to be helpful, rang me a cab and I climbed in. 'The One Tun pub in Saffron Hill in Holborn,' I said, as Mic had told me to. Yup! For the next hour and three quarters we travelled through Holborn. Be bisected, trisected, and disected Holborn. We went over, under, through and several ways I would have thought unlikely to journey in Holborn. I now know Holborn as I am unlikely to ever know another suburb of London. We passed, repassed, and circled, we travelled laterally, diagonally, and horizontally, I think we may have even moved vertically once. Eventually in exasperation I took the book of maps from him, stopped a passerby and asked where we were, then navigated us to the pub. Since the fare was set at an agreed price, I should think that trip would have been on the debit side in a big way!

(In case you wonder how this could happen in a taxi, it's simple. My dear sister, worried about the expense of getting to Holborn, had unbeknown to me ordered a minicab. The driver (and you have to credit this, I'd never be able to make it up!) was a Swahili from Kenya. He'd only been in London a month.)

I staggered in through the door of the pub at 10:15 pm. Mic, John Rickett, Alan and Neil were still waiting. We had a short time of chatting and then had to break up to catch trains home. I caught a taxi. A black one!

## The Pardoes

The next day I spent shopping merrily all down Finchley Road, which is just around the corner from Robbie's flat. Then an early night and call a taxi again. A brief trip to Euston and onto the train to Chester to Ro and Darroll Pardoe's home there. Not a lot of time with them, unhappi-

ly, but it was better than no time at all. Ro liked the outlines I had written at Maureen's, and I have since sold one (to an editor in Middlesex).

There were canals all long by the train tracks on the way to Chester and I just about fell out trying to get a good look. We don't have canals in NZ and I made a note that if I ever have the money, I should come back and hire a canal boat for a few weeks to go from Chester down the canals to London. Canals were something else I'd read about for years and never believed I would get to see. The long narrow boats that travel them look fabulous. I must travel in one!

## Wales

Having thoroughly enjoyed what I saw of Chester and Ro and Darroll, I caught the train to Bangor in Wales. A careful check on times since my arrival in England had informed me I could spend two days or so at the con there. Not wanted to miss my first (and possibly only) U.K. con, I managed to fit this into my schedule.

The taxi driver on the way from the Bangor station enlivened my trip by telling me all about how the Bangor population has embarrassed Prince Charles on a recent visit. I was left with the feeling that it was as well I could honestly claim to be 1/2 Welsh in lineage and list the places my great-grandparents had immigrated from.

Dropped at the convention, I trotted inside to a warm welcome as

soon as I said I was from New Zealand. Someone pounced on me to ask if I'd speak on a couple of panels, and an extremely kind guy named 'Jaffo' conducted me to my room, carrying my cases for me and worrying about stairs and me. The couple of days here were great! I met Gael Baudino, listened to a fantastic array of talent filking, and talked on the panels.

The masquerade was small but with a good line-up

of costumes. My favourite was 'Master Robinton with his fire lizard' talking to 'Jaffo'. I think everyone who met the fire lizard fell in love with him. He was so cute and believable. Steve Glover found me at the con for about two minutes, but I never saw him again. I also saw Dave Rowley's name on the con membership listing and meant to find him to say hi, but never found the time. Gael Baudino was a bonus, as I hadn't know she'd be there.

On the downside was the absence of Anne McCaffrey, the featured GoH for the con. Somehow people got their wires crossed so that she never showed up. It wasn't until the Saturday mid-afternoon that this was announced definitely, and I was quite annoyed as I'd been to the shop on Friday and purchased some L35 of her hardbacked books to be signed. The excuse seemed to be that she had received her latest galleys to be corrected just prior to the con and had only 3 days to do it in.

## Manchester and Belfast

Then it was catch the train at Bangor station, after waiting ages, and move on to Manchester and the airport. There to my deep interest I discovered a couple of guys in uniform with machine guns. This isn't just a novel sight to a kiwi, it's unseen ever here, so I trotted up agog with fascination to look them over. Observing me observing them, one queried

The McNally's, where I stayed in Belfast.



my pop-eyed stare. Informed I came from NZ, they were interested in turn and for some 15 minutes until my plane was called, I discussed the NZ police system and assured them that indeed our cops didn't carry guns. We have a special armed defender's squad for that kind of thing. They even allowed me to take photos of them in suitable poses, guns prominently to the fore. Parting with reluctance, I scurried off down an endless series of stairs to find my plane. I arrived in the right place only to be told that they was a delay in boardin.

I arrived in Belfast trying to look in all directions at once, and hoping to Ghod I'd recognise Joe or he'd recognise me. Luckily he did, and I was whisked out of the airport and into a small car, whereupon we set our course for his home. His mum is a darling and the house was lovely. It's just the kind of house a lot of Kiwis would love to own themselves. The double bed I had gets my vote as most comfortable bed of the entire trip. I sank into it and found it almost impossible to surface again.

I saw the sights of Belfast that day, burnt out cars and half bricks all over the street as well as several ominous-looking males lurking on a corner. Joe speeded up at that point and we whizzed out of the area. I met Eugene, who - much to my surprise - gave the impression of being a teddybear in real life. It's a great pity he doesn't write that way too. Later the next day we went over to Portrush to meet Deidre and take her out to dinner. We also took in the Giant's Causeway, and other areas along the coast. Ireland is beautiful and as green as NZ.

Finally and reluctantly I had to tear myself away and head back with Joe to the airport. A fast flight to London, a taxi to my sister's, and a night's sleep before I staggered out at some ungodly hour to make it to the plane again. But first I had to collect a book from the Natural History Museum on the way. (I'd promised to get a hard-to-find copy of *Rare Breeds of Farm Animals* that they published several years ago, but which is now unobtainable in NZ.)

With that safely in my luggage, I arrived at the airport, only to find that their was a technical fault in the plane's internal hoist. We were an hour late taking off, and there was no hot meal on the trip, but we got two

small envelopes of compensation vouchers to make up.

## San Francisco

We landed at San Francisco at 5 pm. I was met by a charming lady with a wheelchair for me. Happily and comfortably tucked into this, I was whisked off to collect my cases and through customs. I found a taxi and we drove straight out to Rachel's home where I'd been invited to spend the night.

After a cuppa, I was driven around the corner to Marion Zimmer Bradley's home, where I met her dog, Signy, and then Lisa Waters who works for her. I was particularly interested to meet Lisa, as she was the first Gryphon Award winner in 1989. I spent several hours there thoroughly enjoying myself and found first off that both had been with-holding a surprise until I arrived in person. They were accepting another story for the MZB Fantasy Magazine.

I was overcome with delight at the news. To have sold two indicated to me that the first sale wasn't a fluke. I really was writing readable fantasy. Eventually we headed back to Rachel's, where I ended up in a very comfortable bed with her cat, who clearly felt it his duty to make a visitor welcome.

We returned to Marion's place around mid-morning the next day. By this time Marion herself was up and while she wrote out a cheque and chatted, we took it in turns to sign the contracts while I shared her breakfast. We talked about her latest book, the book I was working on, the Gryphon award, and fantasy in general. Then Lisa ran me over to the Locus offices to meet the gang there. I had another wonderful couple of hours, part of it immersed in the library that Robert Heinlein had left Charles Brown. I collected several signed hardbacks for FFANZ and was shown the entire house and offices. Everyone was so kind to a stray Kiwi. Noticing that they had a shelf of mostly sheep souvenirs, I made a mental note to send a pair myself. As soon as I was home, I did and got a lovely letter from Faran in reply.

Then I was driven back to Rachel's place where I packed sadly. I gave her cat a last cuddle and range a taxi for the airport. The drive in was quick and I enjoyed watching the city go by. San Francisco airport is a good

one. It was clean, well laid out, and the staff were very helpful and polite. I pushed my cases off and reflected that I'd see them in Honolulu.

## Return to New Zealand

Then I ambled off, had something to eat and leisurely boarded the plane when first boarders were announced. There was some confusion at that point. I entered, sat, and disposed myself comfortably. Ten minutes later a stewardess appeared to say she was terribly sorry, but they'd have to move me. It wasn't until I'd been reseated that I realised why. The original seat had been by an emergency exit. (Apparently they'd changed the plane type at the last minute.) They don't like that. There is some kind of assumption that having a dud leg, I'll hold up people trying to get out of the plane quickly in a disaster. Personally I'd have thought I'd clear the plane a lot quicker if I didn't have to stagger down the aisle to an exit.

Then we were airborne and one book, two movies, several meals, three Cokes, and quite an area of crocheting later, we landed in Hawaii. This business of having to trail out of the plane, collect your luggage, trail back onto the plane with it all again and then take off, is a pain! I'm sure there's a good reason for it, but no one seemed to know what it was.

Then we were on the last leg. Auckland came and went in a blur as I repeated all the off-with-the-luggage onto-another-plane bit once more. This time I had an impulse to giggle wildly. After all the planes I'd been on in the last five weeks, this one was almost minute. It had some forty seats in four rows of ten, two on either side of the aisle. Just like the big aircraft, a stewardess arrived with soft drinks and food. I drank Coke and ate sandwiches while my companion and I chatted. Then it was Palmerston North. We taxied to a halt, the little staircase was brought up, and I disembarked for the final time.

Behind the barrier Ginger and Tony waited beaming. We collected my cases and I plundered one immediately. The book on rare farm breeds was produced for the colleague who stood hopefully by. Then I scurried for the car. Nearly home. We turned into my gate, I grabbed my keys and dived doorwards. A Siamese hysterically happy to see me was right there! I was home at last!

## Letters

While looking for something else, I discovered a file of letters related to *Wrevenge* #39.

**Lucy Sussex**  
39 Chapman Street  
North Melbourne, VIC 3051  
Australia

I have been writing a story on surrogacy, and incorporated several *true* instances of medical insensitivity. Surrogacy is an interesting issue, as the sides are as violently opposed as pro/anti abortion, and I think will get worse.

**Lea Day**  
PO Box 538  
Silverdale, WA 98383-0538  
USA

I would like to trade/swap/send money to get some *Redgum* on CD. Not the new stuff, but their older music.

*{Can anyone out there help Lea? Write her first with titles and prices, before buying or sending something, just in case she's already got it. I don't pay attention to contemporary music, and have no interest in attempting to track down whoever this group might be. - JHW}*

**Sheryl Birkhead**  
23629 Woodfield Road  
Gaithersburg, MD 20882  
USA  
3 February 1991

Relay to Monica that, while nowhere near as extreme as her story, I found (accidentally - the 'old school Doctor' was of a mind that 'discomfort' was a part of the woman's lot) that Anaprox helps me. We had systematically gone through all the other drugs in his arsenal and he had me try it just as an afterthought. I watch the dose, but I use it a lot. Here is is relatively expensive if you use it regularly - a 100 pill (I think) bottle is over \$100. There are drugs to help, but it took a long time (and a lot of 'discomfort' - hah!) to find what would work. I also have annual blood reviews which I hate, but continual use of a non-steroid anti-inflammatory drug (Nsaid) should be monitored. As much as I hate needles....

**Marc Ortlieb**  
PO Box 215  
Forest Hill, VIC 3131  
Australia

Cath and I have, more or less, given up on interstate conventions... we don't have the time or the money. I'm finding that I only really enjoy conventions if I'm working on them....

We do keep some contact with fandom, particularly on Friday nights, but our fossil status was confirmed when Sally Yeoland invited us to a dinner for Art Widner, with John Bangsund, Foyster, the Hardings, George Turner, Damien Broderick, Bruce & Elaine {Gillespie}, Wynne {Whiteford}, plus Lucy {Sussex} & Julian {Warner} and LynC and Clive {Newell} as token new-comers. We tried to keep our bright-young-thing reputations by attending a MSFC housewarming for Becky and Danny that afternoon, but blew our credentials there by having Michael with us and by dropping lines like 'Well, at the first Aussiecon...' Then Becky said, 'I was fourteen at Aussiecon Two.' It was strange to be the oldfarts at that gathering and then the new-comers at the next.

**Brian Earl Brown**  
11675 Beaconsfield  
Detroit, MI 48224  
USA  
10 April 1991

I've noticed a growing complaint ... about how women are excluded from studies of new medicines, presumably because an all male group is more 'stable', not interrupted with pregnancies and so on. Activists are upset that the particular conditions of women are all too often sloughed off as irrelevant or a needless complication.

At the same time some conditions are hard to notice, like Joyce Scrivner's sleep apnea. Denice claims I have it, but I've never gone in to have it diagnosed. Yet what is it? The symptoms are restless sleep, chronic tiredness and so on, all complaints easily passed off as psychological. Some people still argue that Chronic Fatigue Syndrome isn't a disease, it's just depression. And I saw in the

newspaper this week a note on headaches that wonders whether cranky babies might not be suffering from migraines...? It would explain a lot, but how would you prove it?

**R Lorraine Tutihasi**  
5876 Bowcroft Street #4  
Los Angeles, CA 90016-4910  
USA  
12 March 1991

A comment on my own letter. I'm happy to report that I have overcome my shyness, though I'm not quite sure how it happened. It happened in October after I made a decision about a particularly emotionally bothersome problem. Since then, I have been discovering new things about myself. It's almost like getting to know a new friend. I have no idea how different my outer behaviour may be, or whether there has been any change, but I know I feel quite different. I find that I feel quite comfortable now doing many things alone that I would never have done before without company. I think I'm generally getting along better with people. However, there is a chance that my relationship with some people may have deteriorated; because, I think, I may be more outspoken than I was before.

**Pamela Boal**  
4 Westfield Way  
Charlton Heights  
Wantage, Oxon OX12 7EW  
21 February 1991

Life is pretty drear for me just now. I'm having one of my peculiar high blood pressure storms that makes me so dizzy I can barely sit up. Then my husband has been made redundant (at 63-1/2 he isn't going to get another job) which means our less than luxurious income is dropping by 75% until he qualifies for State old age pension and then it will still be only 50%. No doubt I will recover from the former, and the latter is just a matter of sorting out priorities.





**Kathleen Gallagher**  
 PO Box 42  
 Worthington, OH 43085  
 USA  
 18 November 1990

Re crisis at work. In August it was so dead I was looking for temp work, but didn't get any. By September I was so backlogged with work, I hired a friend to help me out... Even my husband was pressed into handling some data entry into my worksheets. We got through... Now I'm back into a very slow period. I'm thinking of job hunting or taking another contract position or temp job to even out the income... One week I may make \$40 and another week I make \$1000. My client base is still too small to be able to budget how much money I can expect to bill and collect... For the moment I can't pay for any new equipment, education or needed subscriptions. When I started with Lou {the CPA she contracted to a year before - JHW}, I used his books and equipment. Lately {now that she's on her own - JHW} I've had to take on those expenses for myself.

I got a 32K dedicated wordprocessor. It runs on four AA batteries, and can drive several popular printers. I really prefer to write my letters in bed at odd moments. I used to write on a yellow pad and then type them into the computer. About half the time, I'd mail the handwritten letter or lose it. Even worse, I'd forget about it on the hard disk and leave it there several more weeks. With this thing, I can type the letters at odd moments, on the same erratic schedule that I did when I hand wrote them. Typing is easier on my hands these days than writing for the same amount of time, and I can get more done. I still run into the problem of forgetting to print the letter...

**Lloyd Penney**  
 412-4 Lisa Street  
 Brampton, Ontario  
 Canada L6T 4B6  
 5 February 1991

Monica Sharp describes the doctors she has come in contact with as always knowing better, always superseding your wishes with what they feel is best, and deriding you for what they call your ignorance. My wife Yvonne is a similar victim. She's had a thyroid deficiency for many years, and has been trying for nearly ten years to get her thyroid prescription brought up

to date. She received too much thyroid when she lived in California, and now that she's back home, she doesn't get enough. She wants to see a thyroid specialist, but to do that, she must be referred to him by a family doctor. She's seen three family doctors outside of her own; her own doctor won't refer her because he thinks her current thyroid levels are fine. The three doctors she saw after either didn't feel qualified to refer her to a specialist, or didn't think there was anything wrong at all, nothing wrong with her thyroid or any other part of her body. Therefore, none of the doctors will refer her, and the thyroid doctor won't see her without a referral.

**Joy Hibbert**  
**13 Merrivale Road**  
**Stafford, ST13 9EB, U.K.**  
**12 February 1991**

I'm particularly pissed off with the medical profession at the moment. I had a smear in Dec 89 which came back 'nuclear dysplasia' with a recommendation that I have another in a year. In Feb 90 I developed a group of symptoms which included exhaustion, sore joints, some undercarriage, itchy blotches, sore throat and dizziness. The first doctor I saw gave me antihistamines, worried about the joint pains and tested me to make sure it wasn't rheumatoid arthritis. It wasn't, and the symptoms went away.

In June 1990 I moved, had a relapse, and saw another doctor who gave me antihistamines, told me the other symptoms were fantasy, and when pressed agreed to refer me to a specialist in obscure diseases, then didn't. He refused to consider my theory that I had intestinal candidiasis, on the grounds that the drugs to treat it are too dangerous and there's no way to test for it without giving me the drug. Another remission followed after a particularly nasty phase when I had to sleep 20 hours a day and could hardly walk because of the blotches on my feet.

The next relapse was in Dec 90. I was working at the University then, so I went to their medical centre and saw a pleasant and respectful doctor who didn't think it was candida but was quite happy to let me have a course of tablets to treat it (which I should have had during my Dec 89 attack of thrush; the tablets are

harmless). However, she loses points by commenting that the symptoms were those of a depressed immune system but ha ha you can't have AIDS. As it happens I haven't, but it made me wonder how many conventional-looking married women are having AIDS symptoms ignored because they don't fit the stereotypes.

The candida drug had no effect. I registered with a doctor nearer my home. He took the symptoms seriously but said nothing could be done until my Oxford doctor sent up my notes. Another remission, during which I had another smear. The nurse who discussed the still-abnormal smear failed her euphemism exam, referring to the result as 'pre-cancerous'. Smears are now to be done twice a year until it either gets bad enough to treat, or returns to normal.

Then a friend phoned to say that *Our Bodies, Ourselves* lists most of my mystery symptoms under 'secondary syphilis'. I am substantially pissed off that none of the doctors thought to check for it. *{She's since had a test and doesn't have syphilis. - JHW}*

*{Joy included some material on attacks on religious freedom and lesbian and gay rights, which are now a bit out of date through no doubt the problems continue. - JHW}*

**Buck Coulson**  
**2677W-500N**  
**Hartford City, IN 47348**  
**USA**  
**25 January 1991**

In defense of doctors, quite often they can't take the patient's word for his/her condition, because a lot of patients of both sexes will lie like a rug in order to get some new medication they've heard about on tv. However, a good doctor should know which patients are trustworthy and which aren't. I somehow doubt that our doctor talks as freely to all his patients as he does to us, though I suspect that since he's past retirement age and financially secure, he may well give them home truths that they really don't want to hear. If they leave, well, it cuts down on his work.

Most people want doctors to take them by the hand and tell them everything is fine. Not, perhaps, most fans; but most people.

**Lee Hoffman**  
**401 Sunrise Trail NW**  
**Port Charlotte, FL 33952**  
**USA**  
**28 January 1991**

I loved Lyn McConchie's description of the sheepdog taking the lead in working the sheep, though it reminds me of a depressing event some decades ago.

In the early '50s my family had a radio-TV sales and service business in Savannah, Georgia, where the Old Southron Traditions had not passed away. At the time we were so far from the nearest TV station that a viewer had to have a high complex antenna to bring in a picture. These were usually put on roofs. At first we had a sub-contractor put them up, but then this Black man who'd had a lot of antenna experience came around looking for a job. My Dad hired him, and teamed him with a young White man who was working for us, learning the TV repair business. They got along fine together and did good work. But one day a customer called my father to complain that the Black had been telling the White what to do. No matter that he was far more experienced and knowledgeable about the work. This was a serious breach of local custom.

Which reminds me of another time when I was quite young, and new to Savannah, and referred to a Black woman as a 'colored lady'. Our next door neighbor bawled me out for this - not for using the word 'colored' but for the word 'lady' in reference to a Black person. It seems this was also a serious breach of local custom.

**Sue Thomason**  
**190 Coach Road**  
**Sleights, Whitby**  
**North Yorks YO22 5EN**  
**U.K.**  
**19 January 1991**

I was particularly interested in Lyn McConchie's account of the earthquake, in comparison with my memory of experiencing a (much smaller) quake about 10 years ago. It was morning. I was lying in bed, with Sausage my cat purring on my chest. Suddenly all the birds outside stopped singing, and Sausage stopped purring. His eyes widened, and all the hair along his spine stood up. 'Ogodwhats happening', I thought - and *then* the ground shook, the house rocked, and I heard and/or

felt a very, very deep low noise. The voice of the earth crying out; the sound of fear. And then, still half-asleep, the fear switched off. I thought, 'Oh, it's only an earthquake', and started to drift back towards sleep. About half a minute later, I realised what I'd thought. *Earthquake? Only an earthquake?! I threw off the duvet (and the cat), leaped out of bed, and prowled around the room. But everything was quite normal again by then (except Sausage, who was highly indignant about having been thrown off the bed wrapped in duvet). That's my only experience of an earth tremor, so I don't know why I identified it so quickly. For years afterwards, the low rumbling sound of a distant plane, early in the morning, would wake me with an adrenalin surge.*

**Harry Andruschak**  
**PO Box 5309**  
**Torrance, CA 90510-5309**  
**USA**

Medical tales: I have a fair working knowledge of alcoholism. The trouble is, many doctors still don't. Combine the typical ignorance with the typical attitude of prescribing sedatives and tranquilizers for all of life's problems. Sure, those tranks are supposed to be non-addictive.

Sorry, but alcoholics do have an 'addiction proneness', and many are the horror stories in AA about members who got hooked on the 'non-addictive prescription drugs' and sometimes wound up back drinking, in hospital, over-dosing, and so on. That is why I stay with my current doctor. He knows all about the dangers of prescriptions drugs for alcoholics, and makes sure my medications are what I really need if I have to have something strong.

And he also warns me away from over-the-counter medications that are dangerous. Take cough medicine. Most of it nowadays has something that is supposed to be non-addictive. Hah! I know of at least one fan, not even an alcoholic, who got thoroughly hooked on it.

*{I was, for all practical purposes, addicted to tranquilizers once. It was not fun giving them up. I was horrified that no one had warned me about this potential problem, in addition to be annoyed that the doctor had fobbed me off with a drug when that wasn't what I needed. - JHW}*

## Rasti

Rasti my Siamese is dead. He became ill in late September and slowly faded. Over the week of January 5th to the 12th, Rasti grew steadily weaker. He wasn't in pain, but his appetite dropped away and so did his strength. In the early hours of the morning of Monday the 13th, it was clear that he was going. I rang the vet who called round at 7 am. It was time to say goodbye to a 15 year old cat and our 6-1/2 years together.

The vet gave him the lethal injection and left at once. I held Rasti in my arms while he purred for me one last time, and then at 7:10 am he was gone. I felt the life go out of him and I cried. I buried him later by the Boronia. He'd loved to sit under it and smell the flowers, so it seemed the right place to put him. He was such a loving little cat, and I'm doing to miss him badly. I put his squeaky tribble in with him; he adored that fool toy. And I tucked his favourite fuzzy blankets around him. Sleep well, Rasti.

Cats live short, while we live long,  
 And I mourn a friend who's gone beyond.  
 I'll miss the chirp, the churr, the call,  
 And the Siamese purr that said it all.

Still in my heart he walks behind,  
 Small Siamese paws within my mind.  
 Oh Pasht, let him be waiting where -  
 I go. Because I loved, I cared.

And as my spirit travels on  
 my body dead, this life all gone,  
 May I be sure that close behind,  
 I'll hear his pawsteps in my mind.

Feline Goddess, let my cats be -  
 Companions in my Eternity!

- Lyn McConchie



### I also heard from

(On *Wrevenge* #40 & 41) Sheryl Birkhead (who is trying out her Macintosh computer, but printing her letters on someone else's printer), Pamela Boal, Buck Coulson, Brian Forte, Alexis Gilliland (who included a copy of his memorial issue for his wife Doll, a woman who impressed me by her feeling of warmth and friendliness), Craig Hilton, Chuck Jones (who publishes a hilarious zine, *Glen Burnieland*), Jeanne Mealy, John Newman, Lloyd Penney, Bruce Schneier (who sent some fascinating reports of his travels through Japan, Nepal, Burma, and other places), Joyce Scrivner, and Carol Severance.



## Books

Notes by Jean Weber

Mountains of books here, some of which are review copies that I'm not going to read (either because I'm not interested, or because they are reprints of books I've read before – I don't have time to read new books that I want to read, much less re-read books). So, as usual, these notes don't claim to be 'reviews', just the odd comment.



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### **Arachne, Lisa Mason, Avonova, 1992 (c 1990).**

I was delighted and impressed with this book ('in the cyberpunk sub-genre'). Set in San Francisco after the Big Quake II, it follows a young woman, Carly Nolan, who has just finished law school and joined a mega law firm. She conducts her research and argues her cases while 'jacked in' to telespace. Odd and frightening things begin to happen to her in telespace, and she needs to get her 'problem' sorted out to ensure her continued success in a very competitive world. Meanwhile she also begins to suffer doubts about the morality of what she's doing (helping big business rip off individuals) and the means she needs to do it (taking illegal link-enhancing drugs).

As in all the best stories I like, this one has at least two levels. The first is the action level, which involves Carly, an artificial intelligence entity, and various other people (including a drug producer and a co-worker), and which has all sorts of little asides giving the reader glimpses of what life is like (including gridlocked traffic jams, parts of San Francisco and Berkeley completely controlled by ethnic or political groups, smart buses, overcrowded subways, and so on).

The second level is the philosophical, as we learn about Carly's hopes, dreams and fears, and her reactions to things she does and things that happen to her; and a bit about the world of the artificial intelligences.

Excellent reading. I must search out any other books by this author.

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### **Yarrow, Charles de Lint, Pan, 1992 (new edition of an Ace Book, c 1986).**

I have become a great fan of Canadian Charles de Lint's writing, so when a review copy of this reprint (which I had not read before) turned up, I dropped everything and read it in one sitting. Great stuff!

Cat Midhir is a writer of fantasy novels. She has very vivid dreams, in which she is told tales which she writes (and expands upon) when she awakens. Then one day the dreams stop, and she is very distressed – partly because she can no longer write, and partly because she believes the place she visits in her dreams is real, and she's worried about what's happened to the creatures there. An SF bookstore owner, and a fan of her, try to help her, and get involved in some weird happenings.

The reader quickly learns she's being preyed upon by a psychic vampire, but it takes awhile for Cat to find out. Meanwhile she begins to question her sanity, as her friends try to convince her that she only has writer's block and that she should try harder.

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### **Take Back Plenty, Colin Greenland, Avonova, 1992 (c 1990).**

I can really relate to the main character, Tabitha, whose spacecraft is full of kipple (housekeeping isn't one of her strong points, and besides you never know when you might need some of that junk) and who is always one step ahead of total disaster of one sort or another. She has a weakness for gorgeous males who are totally full of themselves. Women readers in particular will recognise them only too well! Then there is the sentient

spacecraft, Alice, which one suspects is more than it seems, and a collection of annoying aliens. Greenland treats all the species (including humans) and individuals with equal disrespect, which only increases the enjoyment for the reader.

Greenland introduces quite a few characters and sub-plots through the book, some of which appear to have nothing to do with the story, but the general level of writing was so good that I assumed he'd tie it all together quite neatly at the end. I was right! A most enjoyable read.

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### **Dreams of an Unseen Planet, Teresa Plowright, Grafton, 1990 (c 1989).**

For most of this book I wavered between annoyance, boredom, and outrage, due to Plowright's emphasis on stereotyped female characteristics and a preoccupation with reproduction through heterosexual activity (with an emphasis on how to get a partner and be inseminated by him), as if a failure to conceive could be cured by frantic fucking with males lured with sexy clothing (I suppose the pheromones in the air were reasonable, under the circumstances). However, somewhere in there was a message, beyond simply that there's more to women (and men) than that.

The book also reminded me quite a lot of *Solaris* (which I never read all the way through), in the psychological effects of the planet on the main character.

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**Raising the Stones, Sheri S Tepper, Bantam Spectra, 1991 (c 1990).**

A fascinating science fiction tale of the humans of Hobbs Land, an agricultural colony on a planet that appears to influence the humans' emotions – towards peace, love, and mutual assistance. The counterpoint is the planet from which some of the main characters came, where one of the societies sounds like the worst excesses of the Muslims in regards to women. The characters are very believable, as I have come to expect from Tepper, and the story is complex (though it seems at times deceptively simple). Recommended reading.

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**Nothing Sacred, Elizabeth Ann Scarborough, Bantam Spectra, 1992 (c 1991).**

More social commentary lies beneath this story of a young woman, Viveka, shot down over Tibet in a war a hundred years from now. She and other prisoners of war are taken to a camp in the Himalayas where time seems different somehow (and she gets a severe headache when she tries to think about how long she's been there), the other prisoners seem plucked from wars in many different decades, and Viveka has strange dreams. Then the sky lights with nuclear war, and the earth quakes. But the people of the valley survive, and life there goes on. A most interesting novel. I look forward to the sequel.

(I always enjoyed Scarborough's lighthearted romps through traditional fantasy, for example in the *Song of Sorcery* series, but I definitely prefer the more serious books she's writing lately – starting with *The Healer's War*.)

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**Reefsong, Carol Severance, Ballantine/Del Rey, 1991.**

I met Carol Severance at Westerson last year in Vancouver, read some of her short stories, and waited with much anticipation and no patience for the appearance of this book. I was not disappointed; I definitely liked and was impressed by *Reefsong*. Angie, the main character, is seriously injured when she disobeys orders and rescues another person from a forest fire. She is saved, but as pay-

ment for the costs of saving her (and as punishment for disobeying in the first place), she is sent to a water-world called Lesaat, having been fitted out with gills and a new pair of hands.

She is very unhappy about this development, and spends a lot of time and energy figuring out how to get back to Earth, but she believes her mission is important – to find an enzyme that could help end hunger on Earth. Slowly she learns what the negative side of her success would be (mainly for the people of the world of Lesaat), and must deal with the moral dilemmas involved. The people of Lesaat must also deal with their own fears and prejudices, and accept the need for collective action against the Company.

If you haven't discovered Carol Severance yet, I suggest you rush right out and buy or borrow this book. She's a writer to watch.

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**Alien Tongue, Stephen Leigh, Bantam Spectra, 1991.**

A spacecraft from Earth disappears through a wormhole, and contact is lost following an unclear and cryptic message. Some years later, a rescue mission is sent out, and the story is told from their point of view as they find an avian-like alien civilization on the other side of the wormhole. Most of the book deals with the cultural problems of trying to deal with the aliens (you never know when what you say or do means something totally different to the other species), while the crew tries to find out what's going on, and whether the person they came to rescue is, in fact, dead, as they've been told.

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**Lifeline, Kevin J Anderson & Doug Beason, Bantam Spectra, 1990.**

'In shock and grief the last remnants of the human race watched from space as the holocaust of war raged across the face of the Earth. Now the future rested in the hands of three fragile space colonies: Aguinaldo—the Philippine L-5 colony whose brilliant biochemist had engineered a limitless supply of food; Kibalchich—the Soviet space exploration platform that harbored a deadly secret; and Orbitech 1—the American space factory whose superstrong weavewire could be a lifeline to link the colonies,

or a cutting-edge weapon of destruction.' (Quote from the cover blurb.)

The diverse characters, and the societies from which they come, are very believable, as is the mutual suspicion of motives as various people try to deal with the situation. Clearly, any situation is open to interpretation, and one's interpretation is biased by one's assumptions about what's possible, technically or culturally. This book is an excellent example of what to me is the best in science fiction – not just a look at a scientific or a technical solution to a problem, but recognition of (and realistic dealing with) the human element – all of it very believable and in a situation where the reader is likely to care what happens.

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**The Sorceress and the Cygnet, Patricia A McKillip, Pan, 1990.**

I found this fantasy hard to read, although the words flowed beautifully. Most of it was a bit too abstract to me, and I never really cared about the characters. The fact that I don't usually like quest novels didn't help. I enjoyed McKillip's other books that I've read (for example, *The Riddlemaster of Hed* trilogy), so I was particularly disappointed in this one. Others might find it more to their taste.

Barrayar, Lois McMaster Bujold, Baen, 1991.

The story of Cordelia Naismith and Aral Vorkosigan after the events of *Shards of Honor* and before the birth of Miles Vorkosigan, including how Miles received his birth defects; plus a few years of Miles' early life. A fine story in its own right, but especially interesting to fans of Miles' later adventures.

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**Grumbles From the Grave, Robert Heinlein (edited by Virginia Heinlein, Del Rey, 1990.**

Interesting glimpse into Heinlein's private life, and his dealings with agents and editors. Some passages should be compulsory reading for anyone who thinks writers have an obligation to respond to fan mail – the time required, of course, seriously reduces the time available to continue to write new novels.

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**Nemesis, Isaac Asimov, Bantam, 1990 (c 1989).**

An independent novel, not part of any of Asimov's well-known series. A dwarf star is on a collision course for Earth. An Earth colony circles the star's planet Erythro. Administrators don't want to tell anyone the truth, but some of the scientists know, and do want to tell. And there's something decidedly strange about Erythro and its effect on humans.

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**The Silent Stars Go By, James White, Del Rey, 1991.**

An alternative history, in which the Kingdom of Hibernia (Ireland in our universe) arose because some trader brought technology out of ancient Egypt. By the fifteenth century, Hibernia (and its allies the native Redmen of the western continents) is ready to send a starship to colonise a new world, at less-than-light speeds. It will take about 500 years, and the crew and colonists will be in cold sleep for the journey, except for the few years each spends on duty rotation. The Church and military control the ship, but there are some unbelievers on board. A most intriguing premise and an interesting book, but for my taste the author rambled on at rather too much length about some of the customs and opinions of the various ethnic groups involved. (And I'm a person who usually enjoys philosophical and psychological asides.)

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**Serpent Catch, Dave Wolverton, Bantam Spectra, 1991.**

A group of genetic paleontologists built a terrestrial zoo on a planet many light years from Earth. In addition to re-creating many extinct animals, they did some genetic tinkering and produced engineered creatures as well. But now some of their biological barriers are breaking down (deliberately?) and some of the inhabitants are trying to do something about it. I did not find this book particularly satisfying, probably because of the episodic quest nature of the story (which I usually don't like in a book). To me there was too much 'oh, let's tell the reader about these new creatures we just met' and not enough working those new creatures into the thrust of the story.

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**Other SF/F Books Read**

**The Plains of Passage, Jean M. Auel, Bantam, 1991 (c 1990).**

The fourth volume in the *Earth's Children* series, begun with *The Clan of the Cave Bear*. A trek across Ice Age Europe from Russia to France. Fascinating to me, as are all Auel's books.

**New Destinies IX, edited by Jim Baen, Baen, 1990.**

Anthology of science fiction and speculative fact. Consistently good series.

**The Firebrand, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Pocket Books, 1991 (c 1987).**

The Trojan War as seen by the women, primarily Cassandra, the warrior-priestess who foresaw the truth but was never believed or listened to. Almost as good as *The Mists of Avalon*, and vastly better than her books about Atlantis.

**Leroni of Darkover, edited by Marion Zimmer Bradley, Daw, 1991.**

Anthology of short stories by the Friends of Darkover.

**Rama II, Arthur C Clarks and Gentry Lee, Bantam Spectra, 1990 (c 1989).**

The sequel to *Rendezvous with Rama*. A second Rama spacecraft enters the solar system.

**Wild Magic, Jo Clayton, Daw, 1991**

Return to the universe of the *Drinker of Souls* trilogy, to follow some new characters in a fantasy world where the gods are entirely too busy interfering in people's lives.

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**Review Books, Not Read**

**Seeress of Kell, David Eddings, Corgi, 1991.**

Book 5 of *The Malloreon*, a fantasy series. A friend of mine (another technical writer) fell upon this book with cries of delight.

**Lord Valentine's Castle, Robert Silverberg, Pan, 1981.**

Reprint (1992) of a book I thoroughly enjoyed when it first came out in 1980.

**Stronghold, Melanie Rawn, Pan, 1990.**

Book One of the *Dragon Star* fantasy series.

**King's Sacrifice, Margaret Weis, Bantam Spectra, 1991.**

Volume 3 of *Star of the Guardians*. Fantasy set in a high-tech future.

**Dream Weaver, Jonathan Wylie, Corgi, 1991.**

Fantasy from the author of the *Servants of Ark* and *The Unbalanced Earth* trilogies.

