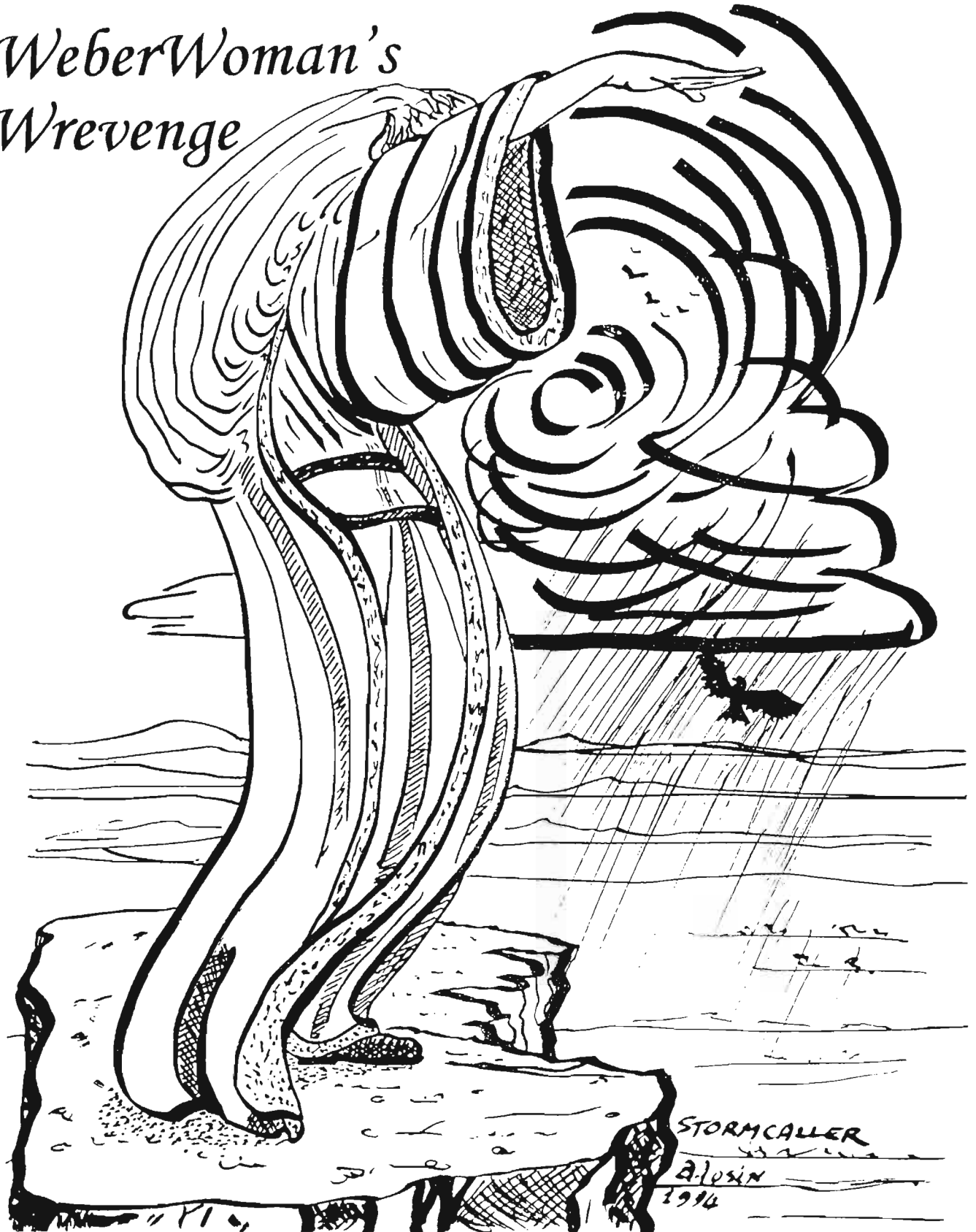


WeberWoman's
Wrevenge



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This fanzine is available for contributions, letters of comment, artwork, interesting clippings, uncancelled postage stamps, arranged trades, editorial whim, or A\$2 or equivalent per issue air mail extra). I prefer some sort of personal response.

The Rubbish Bin

One little problem with not publishing as often as I used to, and putting out "quickie" issues mainly filled with photographs, is an increasing backlog of letters and articles—including a whole year's worth of Lyn McConchie's farming stories, most of which I won't have space to print. This is a very gratifying situation for a publisher, but not nearly as much so for the contributors. So this is a double issue, with rather more pages than usual. (Eric, who does most of the photocopying, will not be pleased!)

In this issue I welcome a new contributor, Paula Johanson of Canada. I hope you'll enjoy her work as much as I do, and I hope she finds a commercial publisher soon. There's also some more photos, and a rather lengthy "diary notes" section from me, which will no doubt interest some readers and bore others. That's the nature of diaries, I think. Plus some book notes and letters from readers. — Jean

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Nancy Tucker

for DUFF!

Diary notes

by Jean Weber

It's been a fairly eventful year, most of it enjoyable. Those of you who share an apa with me will have read most of my news before.

Constantinople

At Easter I went to Melbourne for the Australian National Convention, this year called Constantinople. Eric refused to go (he's still boycotting the Southern Cross Hotel for things that happened at Aussiecon II in 1985), so I shared a room with Lyn McConchie.

The high spot of the convention was, as usual, seeing old friends. It was particularly nice this year because several of my favorite people (most notably Leanne Frahm), whom I haven't seen in years, showed up, and others who are usually running the con were not, so we actually had time to talk.

Trip to USA

Eric and I went to the USA in June. Everywhere we went, we had nice weather, but everybody said "two days ago it was stinking hot" and in fact most of the USA was having a major heat wave (well over 40° C) which broke just before we turned up.

California was fun; we saw a lot of people and did a lot of shopping

Below: Leanne Frahm



in gadget stores, but we bought far less electronic and computing stuff than we'd thought we might. I bought walking shoes and lots of clothes. Eric got a pair of super-comfortable shoes (suitable for wearing to work) at a good price.

We rented a car in California and I survived the experience of driving around on the "wrong" side of the road. I finally realised why I didn't find the traffic a problem this trip, whereas on the last 2 or 3 trips it had really freaked me out. It's because I have now been driving in Sydney for 4 years, and traffic in Sydney is really the pits,

having to cope with narrow traffic lanes and aggressive drivers. Before, I'd been living in Canberra (where there isn't much traffic, and the roads are good, with decent lane widths), or not using the car in Sydney, so I was out of practice.

We stayed with Alyson Abramowitz in her new place. One day Eric and I spent in a shopping mall. One evening we had a quiet dinner with Alyson and Michael Wallis. Another evening Alyson arranged a "women's night" which included various Women's Apa members. (Some of the women's male friends took Eric pub-crawling for the evening.) The third evening we spent visiting some long-time friends of mine.

Another day we went to a party in Palo Alto, hosted by some friends of Alyson's. I met lots of fans whose names I'd heard of but whom I'd not met before. Unfortunately we had to leave early because we'd already arranged to visit my sister. What amused me most about the party was the hordes of people my age who looked like hippies (okay, they looked like fans... many of them *are* fans) but were swapping stories about their various consulting jobs in the

Below: Yvonne Rousseau and John Foyster





Above: Alyson Abramowitz (in chair), Michele Armstrong (behind chair), Jean Weber

computer industry. I thought, these are probably all the same people I knew 20+ years ago when I lived in this area. They're still interested in many of the same things they were then, but they're also doing well financially (and even more importantly, still doing stuff that is interesting and important to them, even if the "stuff" has changed). Isn't this great! (Later I read some of the articles about "where is the Woodstock generation now", pointing out how many of the young counterculture people of the time are now successful businesspeople, and saying this in a tone that suggests they've "sold out" to the establishment, as if you can't be both financially successful *and* retain a lot of the so-called "counterculture" interests and values. Sure, some people have "sold out", but "success" or lack of it isn't the only measurement.)

As predicted, my sister Barb and her husband Ted enjoyed meeting Eric, and the men spent a happy hour discussing wiring and gadgetry for automating their homes. We spent a lot of time lounging around by their swimming pool (or playing in the pool), when we weren't out at the country club gorging ourselves at the delicious Sunday brunch.

In Seattle I saw Janice Murray (but Eric missed seeing her because he went to Cincinnati instead). Janice organised another dim sum

Sunday brunch at which I got to meet lots of people but had not enough time to talk to them as I would have liked. (Isn't that always the case?) Janice was much more relaxed and happy-seeming than the last couple times I've seen her—even though she was involved in organising a convention, which is usually fairly stressful.

Afterwards a group of us went to see Marci Malinowicz's new home. I will not do justice to explaining the setup she's living in, but I was much impressed. She belongs to a group of people who have designed a community for themselves, with a big common building and a cluster of attached houses grouped around a common outdoor area. Several members of the group were busy putting in the brick footpaths that day ("sweat equity"), and most of the buildings were not yet completed, but Marci was going to be taking possession of her place the very next day. It was spacious, well-lighted, designed for all those good passive-solar things you read about, and had a lovely outlook onto the surrounding trees.

I spent most of my time in Washington State with my parents (that was, after all, the major purpose of the trip). We drove to the new visitors' viewing area at

Below: Jean contemplating the road to the lighthouse on Fitzroy Island



Mt St Helens one day, stopping on the way to see an IMAX film of the eruption and the aftermath. It was all very interesting. Another day we drove out to a never-finished nuclear power station and took a tour through the various buildings. I found it a bit weird standing inside the containment block.

Eric flew into Seattle after his trip to Midwestcon, and we both spent a couple days with my parents before flying to Los Angeles for Westercon on the 4th of July weekend. We also attended a pleasant dinner hosted by Buz and Eleanor Busby. Eric was fascinated by their house arrangements: they live in a tiny old house, but also own a ground-floor apartment in the building next door, just a few steps outside the front door of their house. This gives them a place for Eleanor's office, guest rooms, a photocopier, and so on, that would never fit in the main house. I thought that was a most creative solution to a common problem.

At Westercon we spent almost the entire time at the Australia in 1999 table or otherwise promoting the bid. We helped Dick and Leah Smith host two bid parties, which were well attended. All the bid party suites were in one area of the hotel (most of them opening onto

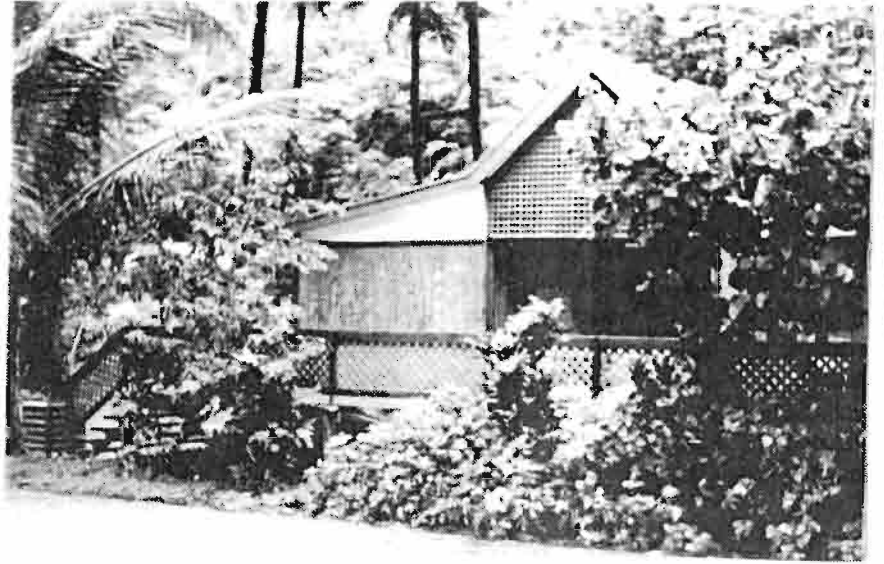
the same court-yard), so it was easy to wander from party to party, comparing the offerings of food and drink. We got the usual array of questions about how one could immigrate to Australia.

More Australian travel

In August, only a few weeks after we returned from that trip, I announced to Eric and to the folks at IBM that we were taking a few days off and going to Cairns for a holiday. "But you just had a holiday," chorused the envious (IBMers) and the put-upon (Eric). "Yes," said I, "but every year for the past I've forgotten how many, I've intended to go to Queensland again in the winter, and every year something comes up to stop me, so *this year* I'm going, regardless." Fortunately I concocted this plan a month in advance (instead of a week, my usual lead time) so was able to take advantage of advance-purchase airfares.

We had a good time, despite the fact that it rained almost all the time (3 days) we were on Fitzroy Island. We spent rather more time than we'd intended in the bar, reading our books. Still, it was relaxing. And the 2 days in Cairns

Below: Jean pointing out the road to the highest point on Fitzroy Island



Above: our room was in this cabin on Fitzroy Island

itself were dry and not too warm. Eric discovered that he likes the town after all—it's not all become high-rise hotels, and he discovered the bookshops, lots of them.

Domestic trivia

As usual, I've been doing stuff on the house. Recent exertions involved dismantling the old wood-burning heater that had been fitted into the living-room fireplace. I also had two bayonet points for gas

heaters put into the house, one in the living room and one in my office; and I purchased a portable gas heater. Then I ordered the wool ceiling batts, not fiberglass ones, partly for general environmental reasons, but also because Eric and I will be installing them ourselves and coping with the protective clothing necessary with fiberglass did not appeal.

And I've had the person who mows my lawns doing more garden work, mostly of the destructive variety. Much of the back yard now looks quite bare, helped by the drought. Minou is, of course, thoroughly annoyed at the destruction of her jungle.

I also had the gardener put up the garden shed that one of the neighbours had given me last year. It's amazing how much more room there is in my kitchen now that the bicycle, the wheelbarrow, the saw-horses, and various other flotsam isn't in it!

Some bad news

Minor excitement around here in May—I arrived home about 8 pm (after dark) to find the house had been burgled. Only two things actually missing that I can tell (new video recorder and a circular saw), with other stuff dropped as if the burglar had left in a hurry with the

job half done. (Perhaps surprised by my arrival home?)

No evidence anyone even went into my office, with all its expensive computer equipment (all prominently marked with engraved driver's license number), and no vandalism. Someone had been in Eric's room and took a sports bag, presumably to put loot into (the bag was in the kitchen by the stuff that wasn't carried off, including the microwave oven), but they didn't look around very carefully because a clear plastic envelope full of money and Eric's passport were still there.

So we were quite fortunate. Several flyscreens had been slashed as the perp obviously went around checking windows until he found the one that wasn't locked. It happened to be above the hot tub, but there was no evidence that anyone had fallen in. What a pity!

Health and fitness

I've been reading self-development and motivation books again. I binge on these every 10 years or so, and it always does wonders for my life. The latest reading list includes goal-setting,

positive thinking, and other good stuff. I enjoy these books (having been sold on the ideas since I first encountered them nearly 25 years ago, and found that they worked for me) and they usually spur me to make some important and valuable decisions in my life.

Anyway, one thing that's come out of that so far is a commitment to improving my fitness. I had a complete physical recently for the first time in about 10 years or more, and found that all my "vital signs" are good, apart from being overweight and unfit. So the only thing necessary was to psych myself into **doing something**. The vague goal of "lose weight and exercise more" doesn't work with me. I need something specific. (I also know that if I exercise more, the weight will take care of itself—it will either go away or it won't matter.) So I set my goal to walk the Sydney City-to-Surf "race" in October this year. It's 14 kilometers, some of it up steep hills. So I got into training. No more excuses—just get out and walk, at least an hour once a day, preferably twice. Boring!!! (Also time I keep thinking I can't

spare—I must find my Walkman and my Russian tapes, and do two time-consuming projects at once.) And I started attending a yoga class on Monday evenings.

When the time came, Eric and I decided to skip the City-to-Surf, although the weather was beautiful and about the right temperature for a bit of physical exertion. I had worked up to being able to walk about 8 km in one go, and thought that if I went for 14 km, I'd make it, but I'd be so wrecked that I'd give up exercising completely for several weeks, thus defeating the actual purpose of training for the race. Eric tried to push me into going until I reminded him that over 40,000 people were expected to participate. Since both of us consider that to be about 39,900 more people than we care to cope with, he was easy to convince. So we watched the highlights on television. By next year I should be ready to go the distance.

Work news

You may be surprised to learn that I have accepted an offer from IBM to become a fixed-term hire, starting October 1, 1994. Translated from IBM-ese, that means a 2-year salaried employment contract, with most of the usual benefits like paid rec leave, sick leave, and public holidays. On the other hand, there is no overtime pay and one really is expected to work full-time (defined as 37-1/2 hours a week).

The job is Team Leader of a writing team for a project that I've been doing writing and editing for off-and-on over the past 18 months.

At the moment I'm leading a team of one (me), but around the beginning of November two more people should join the group. I hope to get a third around the beginning of the year, plus some part-time help as we get into the busy phase of the project around March.

The manager of the Information Development department (Carlos)

Below: Eric on Fitzroy Island, North Queensland, August 1994



has been trying to convince me for some time to become a fixed-term hire, but I couldn't see any advantage to me until this opening came up. I kept pointing out to him how being a full-time employee would really interfere with my life, and he kept responding with "no problem."

For example, I said I had already planned about 8 weeks' travel in 1995, which was rather more leave time than normally provided. I offered to take leave without pay, but most prospective employers balk even at that. "No problem," said Carlos.

"It will also interfere with my university lecturing," I continued. "No problem!" he shot back very quickly. "We can give you time off for that. It's very prestigious for the department to have one of our people lecturing at a university." "Good," I thought, "I'm glad you realize that." (Although I'm not teaching this semester, I'm relieved to say, I confidently expect to be doing so again next year, when the Information Studies department at the University of Technology expands its graduate diploma course into a full Master's degree program and adds an elective specialization in user documentation.

This confidence is based on the interview I had with the department, at which the interviewing panel asked me to explain what online user documentation was all about, and made it quite clear that none of them really had a clue; they were desperate to get someone to run this course who did know what they were talking about.)

"You know I don't keep regular hours," I continued. "No problem!" said Carlos. "As long as you turn up for meetings, and the work get done, I don't care when or where you do it." I rapidly ran out of excuses. ("You won't pay me enough" had also been disposed of; while I'm not getting paid what I want, I am getting as much as I

could reasonably expect, and somewhat more than I thought they'd go for. And it does work out to about what I would normally earn in a year, given that I'll now have paid vacation, sick leave, and public holidays.)

It's nice to work somewhere I'm appreciated.

My next move will be to get dial-in access to the mainframe (not normally available to contractors, but definitely available to employees) so I can work even more from home.

Actually, I won't be working for IBM Australia, but for ISSC (Integrated Systems Solutions Corporation), a joint venture spin-off from IBM and a company called Lend Lease. Minor bureaucratic detail.

University teaching

Between March and June (first semester, here in Australia), I taught a graduate-level class on Thursday evenings. The course is "Information Presentation" and has to do with the selection and evaluation of information for a particular audience, and then the rewriting or repackaging of that information if necessary. This of course is exactly what I do when documenting software, but it has much wider application in things such as pamphlets on health, environmental issues, taxation, and so on and on and on. Just

about any topic where there is a mass of (often technical, jargon-ridden and hard to understand) information, where someone determines a need to make the information accessible to some group of people. We've been talking not just about how to approach the practical issues involved, but also some of the ethical issues. Those who package information can easily bias it by their selections of what they include.

Space is the place

Eric and I have got involved again in the Sydney Space Frontier Society and the National Space Society of Australia. We volunteered to work at the Space Development Conference in Sydney in September. We were told that "business attire" was required, and Eric paled—that meant a suit and tie for him. *chuckle* (He reckoned the suit came in handy for scaring his boss at work into thinking he's going for job interviews elsewhere.)

I was encouraged to revive my Russian studies, because there were several Russians attending, and it would have been nice (as well as welcoming and considerate and all that stuff) to chat with them in Russian. Although they did speak English, some of them didn't speak it very confidently.



Farming daze

Lyn McConchie

Booty

A nice weekend recently. The chap at the local shop sold his house just down the road and moved into an annex built onto the back of the shop.

As a result, he was left with a stack of odds and ends no longer required on either property. There was quite a good pair of sets of shelves, but the bread truck driver got in first.

Owing to a misunderstanding, our shopowner thought the driver was taking everything and paying much more. He wasn't, but this didn't become clear until the day before the truck was due to drop off the material for expansion at the rear of the shop. Panic!

I happened to be in the shop chatting when things were discussed, though it probably wouldn't have mattered; I suspect I'd have been able to hear the discussion from blocks away.

The bread truck driver stamped out, and I cleared my throat. Eyes turned to me. "If I give you fifty dollars and clear it out tonight...?" That offer was seized with all the enthusiasm of Tai finding a mouse. I shot home to inform my friends that we'd struck gold.

Ginger lent me her husband Tony for heavy lifting and the car and trailer for haulage home. We set off and returned twice.

By the second load Ginger was there to check the booty.

"What have you got?"

I beamed happily. "A sash window complete with glass, a stack of glass panes, lots of really useful timber planks and bits, a wire hen coop, a good paddle pool much better than their old one, seven concrete posts, a set of wire stand baskets..."

"What on earth is that thing underneath?"

"Oh, that. I think it was the old counter once. If we sawed it in half



it would do nicely in the covered yards for gear."

"And that?"

"Pigeon holes."

Ginger looked at me thoughtfully. "You already have a set of those."

"They're full."

"Where are you going to put them?"

I mentally measured the set. "Don't know, but they'll fit in somewhere."

Ginger contemplated the bonanza, and then me. "The trouble with you," she summed up the whole thing neatly, "is that you're a one-person cottage who needs a mansion to fit everything you want into." The grammar may be wrong, but the sentiment isn't!

Snow

The winter made itself felt last week. Just as the temperatures began to drop, so the wind began to rise. That bothered me. I have a horror of fire. The previous owner here had removed some 5 or 6 trees from the shelter belt, so the house is solidly exposed to the prevailing south-westerlies.

When they are really bad, I shut down the enclosed fire so that, should a massive gust bring down

the metal flue which protrudes from the roof, no flames will be leaping from what is left within the house.

Usually, such is our weather pattern, when the wind is howling like that, it isn't that freezing. So there was the gale. There was me shutting down the fire.

What I didn't expect was the gale dying early morning. I was awakened by a furious Tai. Positively bellowing with indignation, he was trying to climb into bed with me. I made sleepy soothing noises and pushed him out. He made very un-soothed sounds in reply and climbed in again.

I went back to sleep wrapped around a cat. I woke feeling oddly insecure. I opened my eyes and discovered that I had the last few inches of a double bed, while Tai had the remainder. I crawled out, gave one horrified yelp, and crawled right back in again. Tai sat in the warm spot looking smug. He'd told me it was freezing out there.

Leaving him smirking, I reeled into the fire-room and soon had a roaring fire started. I then shot back to bed. After an hour the house had warmed up a bit, so I dressed and opened the back door. Up to this point I still hadn't been awake (or the outside hadn't been light) enough for me to see the farm. I strode out to discover I was walking in snow. Wow! Here it only snows every second winter. Usually a couple of light falls. (Although one memorable August we had about 6 inches overnight.)

I fed the hens, then the geese. Opinion was divided amongst the poultry. The hens announced they were in the covered sheep yards for the next 24 hours, and I could deliver meals there. After that they'd consider further.

The geese were just baffled. They'd never been in snow before and they weren't sure if their rain dances had produced it, and if so should they celebrate. They settled for wandering about leaving fascinating trails all over the lawn.

I shot out hastily to feed the cows in the hay paddock. With them anchored, I could then plod across it to feed the yearling calves on the far side. They saw me coming. It sounded more like a pride of starving lions than a few hungry calves.

I did the milking and came back to a wonderful warm house and a smug cat. Tai lay, paws outstretched from his armchair, by the enclosed fire. This was the life. But next time it was going to snow I should leave the fire alone. Otherwise, he blinked threateningly, I'd find myself short of bed again. Bet I do too.

A silly sort of day

Today's been a silly sort of day. I had a funeral to attend at 11 am. Nothing to make any of you nervous about mortality. Flo was not only 95, she died because she was literally too stubborn to come in out of the rain. As a result, the sheep she was worried about (a venerable and ancient pet ewe) is fine. Flo caught pneumonia.

I rose early, must get everything done before the service. Rushed out to milk the cow and absent-mindedly gave Bet her hay before I milked. Result was one small fawn cow determined not to come in to be milked until she'd eaten every last wisp of hay.

Right, I'll bring in the day's firewood and thaw Tai's latest kilo of mince before I milk. Heaven only knows what I was thinking about. I milked and returned inside to find a chunk of firewood "thawing" nicely on the bench, while Tai's mince reposed centre right in the stack of wood by the fire. I sorted that out and sat down to type a few letters before changing into respectable black clothing for the funeral.

I finished a short letter, and sat back. Something was beginning to fizz mentally. Oh, dear, oh, help. I had a short story. Well, it couldn't be that long; better get it done before it vanishes again. I did, but

in the end I squeaked into the church a bare minute before all rose to sing the first psalm. (The 22nd, actually.)

I rushed home and dumped all that black, then sorted out envelopes, cover letter, and stamps. The story departed and I sat back again. Peace, it's wonderful. Ah, now for lunch and then the afternoon's mail will be in. I ate lunch quickly, which was just as well as a knock came at the door just as I washed it down with a final swallow of Coke.

"I thought I'd drop in to collect that young rooster you didn't want."

I'd prefer to forget the next hour. The bird, known as The Ostrich for his massive legs, wished to remain with me. He was supported in this by his father and a chorus of devoted aunts. The dog next door was hysterical with excitement, my cow was all but falling over the fence trying to see it all, and the friend fell flat on his face in the mud twice.

We were not assisted by a rooster and ten hens all of whom decided it was one of them we were after and as a result kept becoming caught as they flew past. I mean, the place was like tennis with hens. You just grabbed and checked what it was after it was in hand.

Eventually Gary did capture The Ostrich. He held up the squawking bird yelling it was okay. He had him now! At which point, to my amazement, The Ostrich managed to climb up himself, dig his beak indignantly into Gary's hand, and in the kerfuffle that followed, depart again.

We cornered him in the hen house where he'd hidden. Gary reeled off with a screaming carton and nicely muddied clothes. I went inside with the mail to write this before answering yet more letters. It's been an interesting day.

Slip sliding away

It's been quite a week. I fell off the ramp in the covered sheep yards

and now look as if I've been disciplined by one of the more enthusiastic Warlords—and Tai bit my editor. The editor had worked with me on my book of farming tales. She'd originally been very interested in this as she too has a farmlet. Since she was in the area the other week, she thought she'd drop in to see all the animals she'd only read about to date.

It had been hot and Diane's feet were tired, so to rest them a little, she kicked off her sandals. At which point Tai came out of the woodwork in one delighted pounce, landed astride her foot and bit her firmly in the big toe. He then beamed smugly at three stunned faces.

"See, I can do this!" He bit again to demonstrate and Diane hastily removed her toe while she still had it. That cat'll get me hung yet.

As for the ramp. That was my dud leg giving way unexpectedly as it does every so often. The hens had demanded dinner and I was about to feed them in the covered yards. (It tends to keep the sparrows, starlings, etc off to some extent.) But just as I and the jug of hen pellets and wheat arrived at the top of the ramp and I put out a foot to start down—whoops!

The hen food went everywhere, I did a half-gainer with double twist trying frantically in mid air to protect my dud leg, horrified hens fled wildly (either I was trying to fly or I was emulating a hawk and after them), and I landed again. I did manage to protect the leg mostly, but the rest of me landed with some force.

A day later my masseuse arrived to do the acupuncture on my damaged leg and stood back in awe at the bruises in other places. She reckoned she hadn't seen bruises like that since the Springbok tour in the 1980s. When one half of the country wanted to watch rugby played, and the other half wanted to protest apartheid, with a bemused and indignant police force in the

middle. Actually, as I told her in reply, I felt as if rugby had been played—with me as the ball.

That was the weekend. The middle of the week was shearing the lambs, which is always akin to the dafter episodes of *The Goon Show* or *The Marx Brothers*. Lambs to the right of us, lambs to the left of us, lambs leaping over us. There are times with lambs when you feel a butterfly net would be better.

But eventually all but a handful were shorn. Said handful were off to the show the next weekend via a friend who was also attending. While I fled in the opposite direction to give a talk on contracts to my writers' group. The discussion was a success, the sheep were better than last year with 2 third placings as against only one in '93. This shows that gradually the flock's quality is improving and I'm satisfied with that. (Although if I ever get money I may spend some on a couple of top ewes to upgrade faster, and a really expensive best of line champion-winner ram.)

Ethelred escapes

Tonight's excitement has been stock practising for the Olympics or Colditz movies.

I purchased, sight-unseen, a weaner piglet. Delivered, he proved to be miniscule but like all pigs, he'd eat and grow. I named him Ethelred in the thought that it would be ages before he was ready.

Unfortunately I was wrong—he was very ready. I wandered over next door to discuss moving the sheep over the weekend and just as we walked out to study the paddocks, my friend's son started yelling across the fence.

Ethelred, absolutely minute though he was, had vaulted over the pigsty fence and hurtled off down the paddock. Before we could stop him, Steve had leaped into pursuit. Panicked, the piglet raced through the next fence—designed to keep in fat lambs, not

skinny piglets—and rushed towards the boundary.

There he met my friend's terrier and German Shepherd both having hysterics. He dodged desperately and vanished through a different fence, then out across the local park. Steve shot in pursuit, with me screaming not to get too close and panic him again. While Steve ran, my friend trotted, and I walked hastily back to my place to grab the fourwheeler farmbike.

Then I zoomed off down the road, collected Ginger, and went in search of Steve. Piglet had swerved across the road and was now tearing about a neighbour's farm. The neighbours had just been standing in their drive discussing a forthcoming event with family when a screaming piglet passed them virtually airborne. Abandoning conversation, they followed. It promised to be far more interesting perhaps.

Ginger and I panted up on the bike just as our generous neighbours trapped piglet in a fence corner. One hindleg, two hindlegs, a good grip, piglet sounds like the wrath of hell, and we had him. Fervent thanks followed before we all piled onto the bike and made an exit. The next half hour was devoted to making the pigsty piglet-proof.

The thing that stunned us was his escape. We've had piglets in that sty for years. Only one lot ever got out of there and they were almost porkers and big enough to climb out.

Ethelred really was tiny. We couldn't think how he'd managed, but Steve swore he'd jumped. Right over the iron fence and wire at the top. We nailed up all the holes and every time we thought we'd got them all, one of us spotted another possibility. By the time we'd finished the place looked as if we were keeping pit bulls.

I staggered back to put the bike away and eat my dinner, now rather over-cooked. It's some

consolation that in six months or so we'll be eating Ethelred.

An infestuous salesman

On the Sunday of last weekend, much to my annoyance, I was infested by a salesman. Most of our blokes know when to forget it, but this chap appeared to have trained under American rules. Get your foot in the door and hang on like a bulldog.

I don't know where he'd got my name from, but he knew I was starting to have problems with osteoarthritis. His product was superior and guaranteed to alleviate this.

It was a real winter day. Freezing, blowing half a gale, and out in the paddock everything in sight was shivering. I pointed out that if he told me over the phone was the "product" was and approximately how much it cost, I could tell him if his visit was worthwhile. No, no, he had to show me, they didn't do things that way.

It's Sunday, I said. That was all right, all days were alike to him when he was on the road. He knew where I was, he'd be there in half an hour—and with that he rang off. I cursed, stoked the fire a little higher, and waited.

He arrived to spend the first half hour asking me questions about my injuries. I had no trouble answering that, but suggested he cut to the chase. He drew himself up indignantly. He'd listened to me, he said patronisingly, now I should listen to him. I blinked. That is not the way to develop a rapport with the customer. (The more so since the only talking I'd been able to do so far was in answer to his questions.)

I did notice that he'd managed to find out I owned the farm, the size of it, and if it was mortgaged, all under the guise of chatting about my accident and subsequent events.

Then he went into his pitch. I listened with great interest and

considerable scepticism. According to him, his product would cure half the world's ills; at the very least it would make me feel wonderful if I only used it for 15 minutes each day. He and his wife—etc etc etc.

He had only one problem. Firstly I didn't have the \$6,000 he wanted for his product. And secondly, if I did, the last thing I would spend it on is a massage chair. The other thing was that if I'd had the money and the wish to acquire such a chair, I certainly wouldn't have purchased one from him. To say he was getting up my nose was an understatement; by now he was so far up my sinuses that I was having trouble breathing.

I smiled sweetly and told him I couldn't afford that sort of thing. He then laid me in the aisles with the hint that I could always take out a mortgage. This was delivered in a tone that implied only the most indigent people had to go to those lengths to obtain his superior product.

I bit back a couple of things I'd have liked to say. I was raised in the tradition of courtesy to the person in your home. (Even if they had more or less pushed their way in.) I smiled again, opened the door and ushered him out. To my hastily smothered delight, he strode out in a "hail the conquering hero" sort of way and with the front steps slippery from all the rain, measured his length on a very muddy lawn. Time wounds all heels.



Photographs from Constantinople, Melbourne, Easter 1994

Above: James and Jeannette Allen

Below: Julian May



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Northwest passage

Paula Johanson

Editor's note: This essay is excerpted, with the author's permission, from the manuscript Modern Ritual.

The day felt heavy—not August's usual dry heat, but a heaviness in damp air that felt familiar even as it weighed on me. Since moving to this farm north of Edmonton three years ago, I felt the weather changing in big sweeps—usually big dry sweeps of wind that felt light and empty even as it carried topsoil from the field or drifted snow across the driveways.

This heavy dampness was different from the dry stillness I had come to expect in August. Summer on the farm was one timeless moment for me—one day like another, all hot and dry under a baking blue sky. Rain in August was not to be expected, nor this heavy chill that settled in as the sun rose. The ground did not warm as the day grew as bright as it could through a ceiling of cloud.

It looked almost like the sky I had grown up under. On the West Coast it rains more often than not, and instead of a stark blue sky there are clouds giving shape and distance to the mountains, and a filter for the sun instead of God's hot, attentive eye burning down out of a featureless sky.

This grey sky reduced the wide prairie to a scale I could understand, and made the mile to the neighbour's house seem a walk I could take before the rain came. I could walk there and let my neighbour brew me Indian tea. She could tell me again how on hot afternoons they would sprinkle water on the patio outside their kitchen door in New Delhi, and I could tell her how the rain in the trees was like the rain in my hometown on the Island.

There was going to be rain—I could smell it, that and something else.

I went out to see what the weather felt like before walking, and the grey light surprised me. My eyes dilated, relaxed from the squint they had assumed under the Prairie sun and a ball cap. With no hat, I could look up and see a sky that didn't tower over me, a layer of clouds with ridges that spoke of a travelling wind.

It looked like a weather front coming in off the ocean, and I told my husband so.

He was breathing deeply, smelling something on the air. It wasn't smoke, like we had noticed last year from the forest fires in the foothills. It wasn't dust from a neighbour tilling his quarter-section. Though it was cold, it wasn't the scent of snow, which I knew from three winters here, with the coldest spot in Canada one ridge north of us the first winter. There might be frost in that wind later, even in mid August, but it was now a heavy, damp chill like the winters I had known near the ocean for twenty-eight years before coming here.

"It's sea air," I said suddenly. "I smell salt." I knew that smell.

My husband knew it, too. For five years we had lived together in a house a hundred yards from the working harbour in Victoria. "But that wind's not coming from the west, from the Pacific. It's almost from the north. Could it have come round?" Bernie wondered.

The air was cold, with a bite in it we couldn't place till the answer soaked into me with the cold. "It's sea ice. We're smelling sea ice. We're smelling a wind that's come clear off the Beaufort Sea, eight hundred miles from the glaciers and the ice pack."

We stood, awed by the Arctic chill in high summer, and the smell of an ocean we had never seen.

Later, I walked around the windbreak trees, to feel the wind unbroken at ground level. How had travellers known there was another ocean, instead of endless earth? The prairie looks like it goes on

forever, and travellers could go in great arcs and come back round the earth where they came from. But the weather changes here like the light can change, and a cold front can blow south from the Beaufort Sea at 20,000 feet, uninterrupted by mountains, and sink to ground where I stood surrounded by the dry prairie in all directions, smelling the blue glacier ice in an offshore wind like I had never known from the cool waters near the Island.

The wind stung tears out of my eyes, for home so far away, for home here so cold and stark, and for the wish I had never known before to travel on foot if I had to, to see and taste the waters I had smelled.

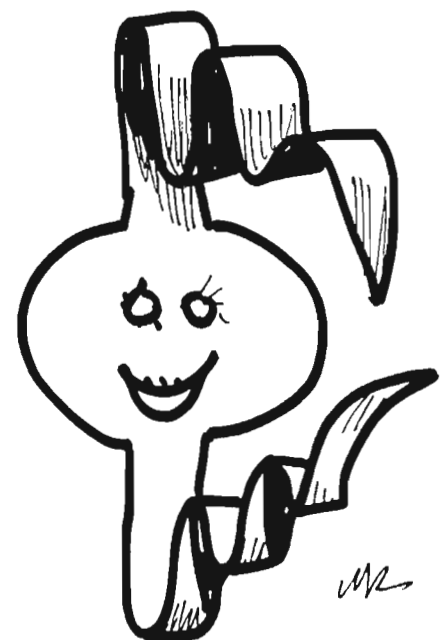
Over and over I sang all I knew of Stan Rogers' "Northwest Passage" as a hymn.

*Oh, for just one time I would take
the Northwest Passage*

*To find the hand of Franklin
reaching for the Beaufort Sea
Tracing one more line through a
land so wide and savage,*

*And make a Northwest Passage to
the sea.*

Next morning a killing frost froze our garden solid. End of season, end of harvest in one night.



Ghost story

Paula Johanson

Editor's note: This essay is excerpted, with the author's permission, from the manuscript Modern Ritual.

The Guest of Honour had no voice to make a speech. He did so anyway, to a silent hall. The convention members who had whispered through his introduction held themselves still and silent when Sam Moskowitz took his turn at the microphone, notes in one hand and a small, buzzing machine in the other.

Moskowitz spoke in a whisper, since throat surgery had taken his voice box some months earlier; when he wanted to speak, he held a vibrating machine, smaller than an electric razor, against his throat. The mere dance of hand to throat was enough to capture the attention of most of his audience. It was probably the most attention any of them paid to any of the speakers at the convention.

For a convention of science fiction readers, the sight of science in action was enough to intrigue many people—at least, until the Japanimation film festival started. Actually listening to Moskowitz's commentary on writing science fiction, on the future and the lives of people he had been associating with for forty years... well, that took more time and attention than many were willing to give.

But I at least was thrilled when invited to join the Guests of Honour for dinner. Moskowitz I knew by reputation, and had seen at panel discussions all weekend. But I didn't know the other Guest at all.

Alex Schomburg was an artist who had illustrated covers for several of the old popular pulp magazines with titles like "Thrilling Science Stories". He was also a Puerto Rican Jew, which seemed like a joke from a situation comedy, but it was true. He told stories of his childhood in Puerto

Rico as our dinner party went to the restaurant.

We were a mixed party: half-a-dozen young men with glasses and pocket calculators, an older couple and a few younger women, all dressed up a little from the modern uniform of t-shirts and jeans. The guests in plain suits looked distinguished by contrast; though neither was wealthy, or looked it, they both had the contented air that comes from the flattery of talking all weekend about their work and their love for it—and being listened to.

Dinner was a buzz of conversation, several exchanges going on at once around the table, and yet a consistent habit developed at once, persisting throughout the meal. Whenever Moskowitz's left hand came up, bringing his voice machine to his throat, the conversation around the table would become much quieter.

It soon became apparent that everyone was keeping one eye on Moskowitz, so as not to make him strain by speaking over their voices. We all learned that we didn't need to be silent in order for him to be heard, just quiet. It was easy to tell whether he was addressing his neighbour or the table at large. The grace with which he used his whisper and expressive gestures inspired the respect which we tried to show in the most practical of ways—we listened and we made the rest of the table's conversation fit naturally around his quiet talk.

Alex Schomburg was easy to contrast with Moskowitz: small where the other was tall and lean, with quiet and warm conversation instead of whispering bright observations. With a little coaxing Schomburg was willing to talk about his art and how he was repainting the covers he had done for old pulp magazines, into great canvases that he was selling to provide his income now that he was semi-retired.

He was easier to talk with but harder to know than the other

guest. Several times I caught him looking at the women around the table, looking with appreciation and pleasure that was in no way offensive. It wasn't his age; he was clearly vital and had drives. But none of us women took offence at being admired like a flower, or a painting.

He listened to Moskowitz's stories of the old science fiction magazines and the readers whose tangled associations he had written about. Schomburg discussed the pulps and the new writing, which neither of them had read thoroughly, but none of the rest of us could do so either—the genre had expanded beyond space adventure stories into cyberpunk, magic realism, interactive adventures, and a dozen other fiction forms. Some authors were a genre unto themselves, especially if they were as prolific as Stephen King.

Moskowitz had never written many books; he hadn't been inspired like King by something with the emotional impact of horror novels and ghost stories, he said. He'd mostly written about the world around him, the science fiction readers and their lives.

"I can tell you a ghost story," said Schomburg. "It's a true story, too, for I saw it happen."

"When I was a young man, I lived in Puerto Rico. We were not wealthy, there was not always much to do when I was growing, but I had friends and we would go together and talk, have what fun we could. One night we began telling each other ghost stories, trying to see who was afraid of ghosts, and who wasn't, and trying to scare each other. We dared each other to prove who was braver, stronger, smarter, and it ended up with one of us taking the challenge to go to the cemetery that night. No one was brave enough to go to the cemetery at night! There were no street lights then, remember, no lights outside the houses," he added.

"But how would we know he had done it?" Schomburg asked, quiet and a little shy as he realized he had the interest of all of us around the table. "He could just go away from the rest of us in the dark for a while, then come back and say he had been in the cemetery. How would we know?"

"We decided that he would have to drive a nail into the wooden cross in the centre of the cemetery. We could go there in the morning, when the sun was up, and see the proof that he really had won the bet, that he had been there in the middle of the night.

"There were no lights near the cemetery at all when we came there all in a group. We were whispering and laughing together, a group of young men—teenage boys really," Schomburg said, and for all that he was in his late sixties we could see something of the boy still in him, in the smile creasing his tan-olive skin.

"The entrance to the cemetery was by a sort of a short tunnel that ran under the road—the only road around. We were quiet going through there. Nobody liked it in there. It was pitch black, not even the stars and moon could shine in there. We were all silent then, walking quietly, no more talking and joking.

"When we reached the cemetery, the boy who had taken the dare walked ahead into the dark without speaking. We could hear his footsteps moving out of the short tunnel, through the entrance and among the graves. He's really doing it, we thought, holding our breath quiet to hear him move.

"We heard him stop when he reached the centre of the graveyard, and the rustle of his coat. He'd brought a hammer and a great nail to spike into the wooden cross as had been agreed. We heard the clink as he set the hammer on the nail-head, and the strokes of the hammer as he drove the nail into the cross.

"A moment later the most awful scream came to us," Schomburg said, and we all started, though he hadn't raised his voice or moved to surprise us. "Every one of us took to our heels and ran away, out of that tunnel under the road. We didn't stop till we got back to town. We were frightened out of our wits."

Schomburg paused to drink from his glass, and we all waited for him to go on. "Eventually we stopped running and we counted heads. It wasn't until then that we realized that one of us was missing. The one who went into the cemetery wasn't with us. He had been left behind.

"A long time later we got the courage to go back and look for him. We brought lights," he said, smiling thinly this time, and I could well imagine that they had brought any and every light they could get their hands on at that time of night. "We went back, even more afraid than before, when we had been enjoying our fear of the stories and the bet. It was much later, but still pitch dark.

"We went back through the tunnel, into the cemetery, and saw the nail driven into the wooden cross in the centre of the graveyard. And we found our friend," Schomburg said, turning his water glass in his hand.

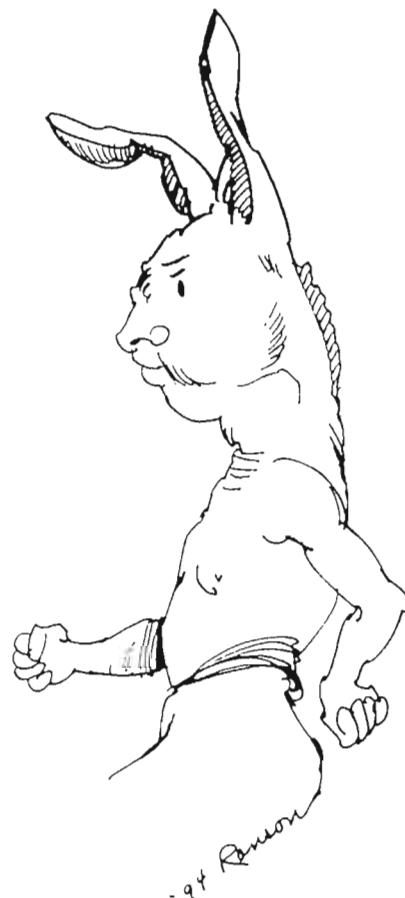
"When he had taken the great nail from his coat pocket, the point had caught on his coat. He hadn't realized. We had heard him driving the nail into the cross with the hammer, but he was driving the nail through his coat." With a pencil, Schomburg mimed how the nail must have caught on the coat pocket as it was taken out.

I heard gasps around the table as Schomburg continued. "So it all went well until he turned to go, and found himself caught."

After a moment, he went on: "He hadn't screamed to frighten us. He was frightened beyond words. We found him still caught there. We found him dead of fright.

"Perhaps he had had a weak heart, and hadn't known until he took this great fright of being caught and stopped at a moment like that. Perhaps another of us wouldn't have died of the fear, but none of the rest of us had been brave enough to take the dare in the first place."

There was silence around the dinner table. Horror and sympathy showed in the faces of the listeners, who had no more questions or bright, witty comments for the first time in three days. Moskowitz was thoughtful; he who had never been inspired to tell a story as imaginative as that was watching us to see the effect it had had. And the three of us at the table who were trying to be writers ourselves felt sick for the useless death of Schomburg's young friend for the sake of pride—and sick at the knowledge that never in a hundred stories could we ever make up one with the thrill and the impact of the story he had told simply and from the heart.



Letters

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2/21/94

I saw you added a quick note at the end of *WWW* 46 that you now had E-mail capability, so I decided to loc by E-mail. A luxury I don't get to use too often. Unfortunately, I can't impress you with my fancy fonts and cute graphics this way, so I'll just have to take my chances that I can still write a letter to catch your fancy. <g>

I've been marginally hanging out in the cyberspace about 3 years now. I don't usually do much more than send E-mail to friends and faxes related to work, lurk on a couple of fannish and business boards and occasionally download files. I'm pretty much a light-weight in this area.

I certainly enjoyed the last two zines you sent. Knowing me I probably haven't written a letter in a year, if I went looking to prove it I might find out it's been even longer.

It just seems easier in this lazy day and age of technology to write all the letters, let the computer make the phone call and direct all the letters to the proper locations and people.

I do admit I wish Genie offered Compuserve's postal mailing feature. It's not cheap at a buck (\$US) or so a page, but I'd probably get a lot more stuff mailed. (We have Compuserve at work plus some piece of crap that works on a Novell Netware file server at HQ.)

It's probably been a while. So I'll ramble on catch-up type stuff.

My kid, Teddy, is 11 and I haven't killed him and he hasn't gotten himself arrested so he must be turning out okay. He's into baseball, collecting baseball cards, BBSing, costuming, writing, music and everything fannish or boyish except school work and cleaning up



after himself. He gets mostly B's, a few A's and C's. He's good, so he might do a little better in a couple of subjects he gets C's in if he'd do his homework more often.

My husband, Dan Lissman, sold a second story back in 12/92, which will be published in *Aboriginal SF* in Spring 94. He hasn't made any more sales since then. He keeps plugging and has a number of things out. He recently applied for an editor's job in his department using his writing and *Clarion* credentials. He didn't get the job, but apparently it came down to him and a woman with a journalism degree and 10 yrs experience. He doesn't feel bad about losing out and was surprised he even made it past the initial interview.

He's seeing he's got more options with his writing to earn money after he retires from the present job, if he chooses to use them. He still wants to be an SF

writer, but he might settle for making money at being a freelance writer or editor, while continuing to plug away in dedicated fashion at the SF. He's off to explore his options contributing book reviews to some local papers. One of his *Clarion* friends in Indiana seems to be doing okay by doing book reviews and working occasionally as a stringer.

I've been working at the District office of the regions Unitarian Universalists for 18 months. I provide secretarial services to minister who serves as the District Executive, bookkeeping services to the Board of Trustees, support services in the form of desktop publishing, bulk mailing and expense re-imbursement for projects. I help volunteers lay out and edit an 8-page tabloid style newsletter. (Working on fanzines helped with that.) The job is dead end, but the work is varied, and

occasionally dull. The pay check is secure and doesn't bounce.

I get a few benefits. I generally like the DE, Rev. Carol Brody, and most of the volunteers who come in to help are pleasant.

Some of my (white, privileged) UU volunteers don't like my uneducated volunteers from community volunteer referral services.

I've had folks doing community service for nonviolent crimes. One man updated my entire mailing list on his home computer, one church at a time. I mailed out a list and diskette and he mailed back the diskette with the updates marked on the list. It took 9 months to finish a job that had been languishing undone for almost 2 years.

Joan, a black woman waiting for money to go to school, was extremely computer literate and wanting to learn more, but also on welfare and had no teeth and was on a waiting list for dental work.

(She felt she couldn't get work without the teeth, and was afraid of losing her skills if she didn't get some kind of work using what she had already learned in her job training program. I'd hire her, if I had funds for another person.) She got her teeth a month ago, and is working nights in a bank as a proof operator. She's still on partial assistance, but she's getting off.

Martha, a mildly mentally retarded woman from one of the sheltered halfway houses, comes in one afternoon a week and helps with photocopying, stuffing and labeling envelopes. She's going to school and learning to read and write at age 55. She runs the copy machine by looking at the little pictures in the window, and she can count to close to 100 and can read numbers. I'm not too sure she can conceptualize numbers. I've told her I'm going to teach her to run the computer and do data entry when her reading skills are better. She just might want the chance to learn. She's extremely reliable, a bit slow (speedwise) and stubborn about doing it her way. It's gotten

her fired from a number of volunteer positions. I learned about a technique called modeling. I do the job the way I want it done, if she sees my method is better than hers and asks for help, I show her, if not I leave her alone cuz the work gets done.

We rent from the Presbyterian church, and we share second floor wing in an old downtown historic church with Metropolitan Area Council of Churches and NARAL (Nation Abortion Rights Action League). The Presbyterian church also provides a daycare center, low income Head Start program, a food bank, referral and charity services for the homeless, a pregnant teenage clinic. The meeting space is available to nonprofit community groups to use for meetings.

I still do a bit of freelance work, mostly taxes, some bookkeeping out of my home. I no longer do it fulltime, and I can't afford to invest my time heavily in getting a business back to life, because my health won't take it. I get a few hours of work a month, and it pays for my computer equipment and software. After related expenses, I break even or lose a little money. I support 3 computers out of that money, so I don't do badly.

I just finished a 2 year stint as Program Director for a little con in Toledo, OH called Connect-A-Con. A friend of mine, Shannon Bosh, finances and runs it. It drew about 75 people this time and the year before. Shannon broke even last year, but this past one was about \$800 in the hole.

She got some new blood on her committee for the next one. A couple of the folks have deep pockets and can afford to help Shannon pick up some of the con expenses.

It was a very pleasant con. Friday night was spent schmoozing in the consuite. Saturday was broken up between programming and gaming and time in the pool by the attendees. Sat night was split between a pool party or a filk to

turned into a true sing along, with few filkers, but lots of enthusiastic folks singing and suggesting songs.

The GoH was Geoff Landis, a multiple Hugo and Nebula award winning short story author. He is not well known and has not been a GoH at any con before. He's also working on the next Mars project at NASA and gave an interesting slide show and talk about the upcoming project.

The Artist GoH was Dave Ivey. A very quiet, reserved man who makes the most fabulous monster costumes and can dash off wicked cartoons of events going on around him when he draws. He is also very and whiny and does a really great "Poor me." He was a great GoH, but dealing with him as Program Director, I found his whining very trying.

Fan GoH was a Detroit area smof and long time friend of mine Jim Overmyer. He's great fun to talk with. He and I being morning people often go out to breakfast at cons or share a cup of coffee in his room.

Weather kept Hal Clement in Boston (an ice storm shut down the East Coast), and bad health of her husband kept Verna Smith Trestrail and her family away. Most everyone else turned out.

The con had the usual problems of not enough staffing and misdirected resources.

It appeared to be a success. Dan and I will be Fan GoHs for the next one. Ted Reynolds will be Author GoH. They're talking to an artist now, but he hasn't made a commitment yet. Dan and I get to be Fan GoHs for all the times we've pulled Shannon's butt out of the flames, the legal work Dan has expedited through his office for her, the databases I've provided, and the folks we've pulled in as gofers and the money we've laid out for small expenses. It's kind of nice she's decided to recognize us for our very small contribution to her con.

This last Connect-A-Con left me very tired and burned out on cons. My guts are telling me to go back to something more solitary. I might start one of my zines back up. Don't know for sure yet. I'll make a decision in June about the summer. Tax season will be behind me. I still get an occasional request for Quintessential Space Debris. It's been 2 or 3 years since I've published and distributed it. Nobody, but a couple of close personal friends ever ask after Life with Gallagher. The good thing about hobbies is you can pick them up and put them away.

My camera and my bike are calling to me right now too. That could just be the nice weather we've been having. A bit of spring weather and sunshine crept in between the dreary February rain and snow.

April 14, Dan and I will be married 5 years and things appear to still be going strong. Relationship works and we're happy. We didn't need to go to his and her residences, but his and her computers, desks and bookcases contributes a great deal to staying out of each other's space. We take turns buying one large family toy. One year he picks and the next I pick.

I hit 4-0 in a couple of weeks. I'm planning to buy myself a ferret, go out to dinner and generally party for a week or so before settling back down. Birthdays are made to be celebrated, and I'm going to enjoy mine.

We've started house hunting. I've got to call a business acquaintance who might be selling, about going through his house with my husband. We did a drive by. I'd really like to get it if I could.

Guess this isn't much of a loc on the zine as much as a commentary on my life. As always, I love the book reviews. I'm coming very much to enjoy Lyn McConchie's farm stories. It took me a while to warm up to them. I like them, and it shows a different

world and worldview than my city living. I like the locs too.

Irwin Hirsh
26 Jessamine Avenue
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Australia
13 March 1994

I was extremely surprised when you said (in *WWW* 44) that "I am well aware of the 'rules' of good writing, and especially travel writing. If I were writing in the hope or intention of publication by someone else I would follow their rules". Why does the place of publication make a difference? I don't think there should be any difference whether I'm reading your writing in *WWW* or reading it in some other fanzine. The suggestion that you'd try harder, or better, or even an approach which I'd appreciate, for outside publication sits rather uncomfortably with me.

{It's not a matter of "trying harder, or better", but of writing for a market. I change my style between fanzine writing and business writing, and between one market and another within those divisions. Writing for fanzines is not quite the same as the sort of professional writing I do for a living, but it's similar.

{When I hire writers to work on a project, I tell them that they must follow the "house style". That style is not necessarily better, or more correct, than anyone else's style, but it's the one we're going to follow. They accept that (or they don't stay), and they write accordingly. I'm sure if they were writing for a different market, they'd write differently.—JHW}

D Gary Grady
817 North Buchanan Blvd Apt D
Durham, NC 27701, USA
August 1994

Reprinted from *No Theory! Facts!!* #35, in FLAP 89.

I have to disagree with Lyn {McConchie} in her conclusion that cat jealousy implies cat love (in response to her cat's dismay at

discovering that a lamb was getting some pampering the cat wasn't). I don't think any kind of jealousy implies any kind of love. Many years ago an acquaintance of mine told me that if he ever found his wife "with" another man, he'd kill her. When I asked why he blurted, "Because I love her!" I'm afraid I burst out laughing at him. Given that the fellow was about twice my size, that might not have been tactically advisable under the circumstances (though I survived), but it was a spontaneous reaction to a remark that struck me as self-evidently ludicrous. Perhaps I'm too romantic, but I can't equate love with selfish possessiveness. Besides, we're talking about a *cat*, here!

Craig Macbride
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{The following is a compilation of several exchanges between Craig and me over a couple of days in February 1994, plus some extra commentary by me.—JHW}

As you now have your own net address, I thought I'd send you something. It's so much easier than all that envelope and stamp stuff. By the way, are your readers not all that up with telecommunications? The "phone (02) 809 4610 (overseas prefix: 61)" in your informational box could just be put in the conventional form, "+61 2 809 4610", I would have hoped. It also makes it obvious to overseas callers not to try 61 02 809 4610.

{When I gave my phone number as +61 2 809 4610 to one overseas professional group of which I am a member, it came out in their roster as 61 280 9461, which was pretty useless, and in another list (a different group) it turned into 612 809 4610, which looks like a normal North American area code plus phone. In both cases, the clerical staff were probably the culprits, but still...—JHW}

Yikes. I would flame these "professional" organisations severely. This is the sort of

stupidity that can only be brought about by parochial Americans who haven't notices that the rest of the world exists yet.

Many organisations print "+61 3 ..." on their business cards and, if you send faxes to companies, you will find that many fax machines report their number as "61 3 ..." If people in supposedly professional organisations can't recognise and deal appropriately with "+" as the standard symbol for international dialing prefix, they need a bloody good kick.

{I don't think "flaming" or "kicking" anyone does much good; it just makes them more resistant to education. I politely pointed out the problem and it was fixed, with apologies. By the way, I'm not convinced the fannish hordes are any more knowledgeable about overseas telecommunications, for all that they use their phones domestically.—JHW}

I would actually think that, given the nature of fandom and the large number of us involved in technology, the fannish hordes would have a vastly better chance than the abovementioned clerical staff.

{I'd like to think so, too, but experience has shown me that fans are no different from the general population. You probably hand out with a subset of fans that are into technology; so do I. It gives us a very non-random sample of who's out there.—JHW}

In your reply to Brian Earl Brown's letter, you mention that IQ tests are too culturally biased to make them a measure of anything other than ability to take IQ tests. I think this is a little unfair. It seems a little like simple computer processor benchmarks: they can be confounded easily by different architectures but are often still quite good indicators on similar machines. I can't see why an IQ test wouldn't be a comparative indicator of some kinds of intelligence in people who have similar backgrounds and thus don't significantly

set off any cultural biases in the test.

{Your point is well taken. However, in most cases that I'm aware of, that's not the situation. For example, most Australian schools, at least in the larger cities, have students from a wide variety of ethnic, cultural, or national backgrounds.—JHW}

True. I was thinking of times such as at university when the vast majority of the students (OK, depends on the course and the uni, but I haven't been doing things with many Asians) have come up through the Australian school system.

{In most of the groups I work with (as a technical writer), people educated in the Australian school system are in the distinct minority. I suppose I also notice this more because although English is my native language, the cultural icons etc of the part of the USA that I grew up in have a lot of non-overlap with what Australians grew up with. For a trivial example, any cricket metaphors make no sense to me whatsoever. So my default assumption is that people DON'T have cultural stuff in common, whereas yours (and probably lots of other people's) is that people DO have stuff in common.—JHW}

By the way, why did you get a CompuServe account instead of an Internet account of some sort or just an account on a Fidonet BBS? CompuServe seems a pretty expensive way to go. Does it have some particular services that are useful to you?

{I'm on CompuServe mainly because I didn't know a convenient way to get to the Internet otherwise. Services have become available since then, but I can't be bothered to switch.

{Eric is no help because he kept telling me I could use his account at UTS, but after 2 years I got tired of waiting for him to arrange home access.—JHW}

What do you mean by "arrange home access"? Does this translate

to "buy a modem"? All you need is a modem, a computer and some public domain comms software to log in to UTS and away you go.

{Obviously I have a modem, or I wouldn't be on CompuServe. What is missing is a phone line that I can dial into at the university, that is connected to the machine there. I'm not sure what the big hassle is, but it's probably bureaucratic. Eric can certainly handle any technical hardware or software type problems; after all, that's how he earns his living.—JHW}

**Eva Hauser
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Czech Republic**

My career in Harlequin finished at the end of January, because I got an interesting offer to work as a copywriter in an advertising agency. It is Ogilvy and Mather, one of the largest US advertising agencies.

I hesitated a bit, but then I decided that I am overfed by romances and that I would like to try a different job. But very soon I found out that it is not the kind of work which I could cope with. I like the creative part of the work—creating ads, headlines, bodycopy, claims—but I just HATE the organization of the job!

I must sit in my office every day from 9 am to 6, 7 or 8 pm, and mostly wait for the tasks, which come very hectically, hurry up, and often it means only to change again and again the details of the copies, according to the immediately mood of the customer.

So at the end I don't manage to do much work at all, and when I return finally home in the evening, I am really exhausted as very nervous and irritated with my children, parents, pets... the only person who has a calming effect on me is Cyril, but anyway, I feel that I can't live this way, I don't have time and energy enough for my hobbies, writing, translating, femi-

nist and environmentalist activities. In Harlequin I could organize my work myself, and so I managed to do quite a lot of work and still have time for other activities.

So I decided to finish regular work in the agency at the end of February, and I plan only to cooperate with them as a freelancer. I shall support myself as a freelance translator, writer and journalist. That is exactly what I really wanted to do all the time, but I didn't dare to. But at present I hope that I shall have enough of work, so that I shall be able to earn enough money and still have fun from really creative projects.

Buck Coulson

2677W-500N

Hartford City, IN 47348, USA

31 March 1994

Certainly men *can* control their behaviour; it's just that a lot of them have never been required to do it, and prefer not to learn. Mostly, too many Americans don't know how to be parents. (Probably the same hold true for other nationalities, but I don't know all that many people of other nationalities.) What's "cute" in a 5-year-old is not longer cute in a teenager, but it has to be corrected at the 5-year level; waiting until it beomes obnoxious means that it's probably too late to change it. This hold good for *both* boys and girls; there are a lot of obnoxious females in the world, too, but they're generally less violent. They get started at the same age, though.

Personal news here is that I had my second heart attack on March 18. (First one was in 1985.) Since I was in downtown Hartford City when it hit, I got to the hospital immediately and was given a "clot-buster" (the technical term my doctor used) with a half-hour. Spent one day in the local hospital, then Juanita drove me down to Indianapolis to a big hospital for a checkup. Results? My heart and arteries are in better shape right now than they were in 1985 when

the last checkup was done. Arteries are still partly blocked, but less so than previously; heart itself is pretty much the same. No enlargement, which the specialist expected. Specialist went from talking about open-heart surgery to allowing us to drive to Dayton for Millennicon two days after I was released from the hospital. (Juanita had to drive, though.) I'm now back to walking the dog, and I give credit to that activity, and to following my diet more or less, for the internal improvements.

John Newman

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Ballarat Mail Centre, Vic 3354

Australia

11 April 1994

One great thing about the oncoming winter is that the wildlife is more subdued. In particular I speak of the eight-legged, occupying dark corners in the house, type of wildlife which leaves web everywhere. We are plagued by them in summer and early autumn, then they start to disappear.

The worst ones are the large, flat, hairy things with long legs. We call them "Huntsmen". The problem is that in autumn they get clumsy. Perhaps they are reaching the end of their life cycle.

Whatever it is, it causes them to drop. To fall off the ceiling as they wander about. Last year one landed on Ben in the middle of the night, causing Ben, and the bed, to leap into the air. This year one fell on my knee while I was watching Red Dwarf. The next fifteen minutes were spent looking for the damn thing, which had disappeared when I slapped it.

It was under the sofa. Later another one bounced off the TV, to lie half curled up on the VCR. This was when we realised they were dying, or at least not very well. All in all we have had about ten of the great hairy horrors wander into our space this year. They're harmless, unless you count heart attacks, of course!

But that's all by the by. You must had to cope with similar things. Administrators, tradesmen, all sorts of creepy crawlies. Which reminds me.

We've had tradespeople all over the shop lately. Jan decided that the double shop was more than she could stock properly, and so we have had the two separated and rented out the bluestone section. This all necessitated not just mere bits of wall but new gas, electricity and water supply arrangements, as well as a new toilet and hot water service. It will take the first year's rent to pay for the work!

So we had tradesfolk all over. The builder and electrician are fine, professional people and the plumber is skillful but unreliable. The real problem is the "regulatory bodies". Mainly the SEC and Ballarat Water. They officiously lay down the law and tell everyone what they should do, and yet it's always them who stuff it up!

The other bit of obligatory rural news is that we lost 6,000 gallons of water, just before the driest March in years. Suddenly the "big tank", which was nearly full after good rain at the start of February, was nearly empty! Nothing left but green slime!

We had in the past had times when we thought, on looking in the tank, "Gee, I thought there was more in there than that", but never had our intermittent leak been so serious.

I took the opportunity to clean the green slime out of the tank, which involved getting in and sloshing around in rubber boots, heaving bucket and bucket full out, as well as siphoning the last grubby remnants of water. In the process I discovered no cut or break, and we still have no idea what the problem is or was. There has been insufficient rain since to check the plumbing.

So, that's enough bull from me. You'll notice I've not mentioned work, which is because the fun has gone out of things a bit lately.

Frankly I'm getting mighty tired of writing software! All this work, so little reward!

Harry Andruschak
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7 May 1994

I am sure you have read about our own fires, followed by winter rain storms that caused massive mud slides. What you may not have read is that as a result of the fires, we have had a huge display of spring flowers. The fire burned out all the chapperal, and the heat caused long dormant seeds to activate. The flowers only come out after a fire has cleared away the chapperal. In a few years the chapperal will be back and the flowers will go into dormancy again. A strange balance of nature. Not that too many burnt-out house owners may appreciate this fine point.

{Your desert flora is much like ours in the effect of fire causing things to sprout and bloom.—JHW}

I had two medical problems earlier this year, and felt I needed a doctor close at hand. The very nearest in the Blue Cross-Blue Shield book was Eugene Hardin, and we got along great. So good I've made her my new primary physician. Yes, her, and Black too. Much more importantly she had me fixed up with minimum fuss and bother.

Arthur Hlavaty's comment on the use of the term "recovering" in NA shows how much it has drifted from the original AA concepts. Not too surprising when you consider how different alcoholism and drug addiction really are. I also know that NA has forgotten or prefers to ignore that part of the 12 steps were written by the original atheists and agnostics on the program. That part being the phrase "as we understood Him", leaving it wide open as to what concepts of God/Higher Power could be used.

Bernie Klassen
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May 1994

No, not dead or lost in the garbage (although that last does sometimes seem to best describe life...). Actually I came back to Victoria about 18 months ago to go back to school for a year. I've completed an extensive furniture-making course and am launched into that unknowable future called self-employment. Gods...

The children are fine—now 9 years old and too damn smart. Even two on one we parents don't stand a chance.

Paula is doing quite well. She won a short story competition while we were on the farm and was offered the chance to review books for the local daily. Since then she's been reviewing books for both an Edmonton and Victoria daily and spending the rest of her "copious free time" writing. She has a book coming out this summer from a small publisher—called "No Parent Is An Island," it is a collection of articles on parenting, most of which were sold to a local parenting magazine first.

A Winnipeg parenting magazine is about to start reprinting them as well.

Of course she doesn't see this as any big deal—after all, she still hasn't sold "that damn novel."

Paula Johanson
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5 June 1994

I'm sending you a piece of prose about how Bernie and I have been living. When we were on the farm, we became aware of the weather at all kinds of seasons, and I wrote *Northwest Passage* about that weather sense.

10 June 1994

Work for me is a wierd combination of lots and none. Lots to do as homeparent and helping out my parents and grandparents. Also lots of books to review, some of the reviews selling for money,

which is what we're living on plus the income from editing a book for a local press.

None as in no salaried work, no "job" and none left over at the end of the week, let alone month. But the kids are healthy and we're going to sell veggies this summer on the farm so I can't complain. I'll just work harder. Hah.

Clive Newell
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Subject: LynC's latest production

Roger Henry Newall (v1.0) was released at 2:33am, June 22, 1994. Weight: 3.3 kg (= 7 lb 4 oz).

Roger is a unique product from Clive Newell & LynC production house.

It is expected that the product will be enhanced in due course to include basic motor skills, language skills, etc, but the producers and their technical assistants expressed satisfaction with this initial release.

I also heard from

Sheryl Birkhead; Ellen Butland, who sent an essay on "A day at the Easter Show", which I don't have room for this time; **Diane Fox** and **Rachel McGrath-Kerr**, with more cat stories and comments on books; **Brian Earl Brown, Lloyd Penney** and **Pamela Boal**, who (along with many other loccers) have been happy to see all the photos I've been publishing; **Teddy Harvia; Karen Herkes, Joseph Nicholas**, who continues to discuss travel writing; **Jeanne Mealy; Sarah Prince; Lucy Schmeidler**, who sent lots of e-mail, a button that says "Writing well is the best Wrevenge", and some other stuff; **James Styles; Sue Thomason**, who has "left my previous job and am currently writing, learning to drive, gardening, and making music. And reading, of course"; and no doubt others whose letters I've answered or misplaced.

I've also got some letters that are being held over until next time, from **Joy Hibbert, Graham Stone, John Newman**, and **Mae Strelkov**.

Books

Notes by Jean Weber

Poul Anderson, *Harvest of Stars*, Tor, 1993

Among the various types of story that I like are the ones that start off with a realistic (and usually negative) extrapolation from our own present, and go on to offer positive possibilities, usually through the efforts of some underground group, which may be helped by outsiders who have a different perspective on things and thus offer a different role model. (Whew! What a sentence.)

Harvest of Stars is one of those books. It also has a strong female lead character (who I could find believable), which also appeals to me. "To save her planet... Kyra Davis is sent on a mission to liberate our last bastion of freedom and rescue its legendary leader. Her bold adventure will sweep her from Earth's rebel enclaves to the decadent court of an exotic lunar colony, from the virtual realities of biotech and artificial intelligence to a brave new world menaced by a dying star." Yep, there's a lot in this book, and it really held my attention.

Patricia Anthony, *Cold Allies*, Ace, 1993

I don't like war novels (with a few exceptions). I especially don't like graphic descriptions of maimed and dying people, and other icky war-related topics. So I mostly didn't like this book, although it definitely did have some moments that I very much enjoyed—such as the woman who writes books about meeting the aliens in the UFOs (who knows the stories she tells aren't true), but who is approached as the "expert" on the subject by senior military personnel when a real alien shows up. The writer's attitude toward the generals is that they are silly little boys; this makes for some quite amusing interludes in an otherwise fairly grim tale.



Wilhelmina Baird, *Crashcourse*, Ace, 1993

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, which follows the adventures of three young people. One of the boys is a sculptor, another boy is a prostitute and a drug addict, and the third is a thief (she makes the money so all three can survive). So they sign a movie contract, figuring that they can work a few weeks, run a few risks (not new to them), make a lot of money and get off the planet.

There are, of course, several catches. The movie is for "cybercinema", and the actors are wired to record their emotions, which the (wealthy) audience can plug into. To achieve realism, the actors don't know the script; they simply react to whatever happens to them. These young people get caught up in a real-life battle between various power groups.

The sequel, *Clipjoint*, is also well done. I enjoyed them both.

John Barnes, *A Million Open Doors*, Tor, 1992

This is only the second novel by John Barnes that I've had the opportunity to read. I was very impressed with *Orbital Resonance* (1991). Barnes does a wonderful job of poking holes in everyone's cherished belief systems (the ones that "go without saying" in particular).

This book contrasts two cultures (on different planets), both of which were deliberately set up and maintained to "preserve" certain value systems and points of view. Barnes shows clearly how not everybody in either culture is happy

and comfortable with the situation (even though they've been taught all their lives that theirs is the "best" system). In addition, he shows how change arises inevitably from contact with another culture and the opportunity for people to choose where they will live. He also shows some of the good and bad points about that change. A most thought-provoking book, as well as a good story.

David Brin, *Glory Season*, Bantam, 1993

Imagine a society in which a fetus can develop either as a clone of her mother (and always be female) or from a fertilized egg (and be either male or female). Men are needed to "spark" clones into developing, or to fertilize a woman's egg in the usual manner. What might male-female relationships be like in such a society? Indeed, what might be the relationship between clones and nonclones?

In this book, many centuries ago, a group of women deliberately gene-tailored a group of humans with these characteristics (and also with the men altered to minimize aggressive tendencies), and established a society with a religion, rituals, laws, and so on, to maintain certain relationships that would maximize stability while still allowing for change... but slowly. But not everyone's happy with the status quo, so change is brewing. And then an unaltered male human (effectively an "alien") drops in...

Brin has written what to me is a very believable story arising from these premises, and explores a lot of issues relating to human relationships. I found it extremely interesting, though a bit tedious at times.

Flynn Connolly, *The Rising of the Moon*, Del Rey, 1993

This Del Rey "Discovery" should get an award for how to write a book about feminist politics. This book also falls into that

category I described for Poul Anderson's *Harvest of Stars*: a realistic (and negative) extrapolation from our own present, but offering positive possibilities through the efforts of an underground group.

Connolly's depiction of a future Ireland where women's rights have gone backward blatantly is all too believable. Although she focusses mainly on women, she doesn't neglect the effects on men of such a society, nor does she fall into the trap of depicting all men as the enemy. And with only a few changes in the details, the repressive politics could be those of any regime, whether aimed at a species, a race, a religion, an ethnic group, a political party, or whatever. A very gripping book.

**Margaret Davis, *Minds Apart*,
Del Rey, 1994**

The sequel to *Mind Light*, this book continues the story of Greg Lukas, Daniel Keenan, and the Michaelson family, who live on the only ship allowed into the alien Miquiri's diplomatic outpost at the edge of human space.

In *Mind Light*, Greg Lukas formed a mental bond with a bodiless alien intelligence, the Quayla, which normally bonds with Miquiri.

In this book, yet another alien species, the Gan-Tir, join the story. They are an extremely long-lived but dying race (no young have been born for many years) accustomed to a life of subterfuge and coercion. The author does an excellent job of showing the folly of interpreting or anticipating alien actions; their motivations and assumptions are sufficiently different that humans get it wrong most of the time, with potentially dangerous results.

One of my complaints with previous book was the textbook-pat psychological study of Lukas; I found this book more believable and the psychology acceptable, not a problem.

**Suzette Haden Elgin, *Earthsong*,
Daw, 1994**

Third in the *Native Tongue* series. "On a future Earth where economic survival depends on communication and trade with alien species, linguistics has taken on a power and meaning unknown to us today... this is also a world which denies women equal right and has plunged civilization into a repressive dark age. Women are once again considered property, useful only for procreation and menial chores. Only the women of the Linguist Lines, whose talents are too valuable to waste, have ever been allowed to do anything beyond basic domestic work.

"But when the aliens suddenly abandon Earth, taking their technology with them, and plunging the Earth into economic disaster, can the women of the Linguist Lines, who have long planned for the liberation of their sex, now seize the power to save their world?"

I've never found these books very believable, but I do enjoy them as parables of life, and a delightful fantasy of how women (or indeed any repressed group) might manipulate their situation and do important things right under the noses of their oppressors. The author takes a lot of cliches about women (from both the conservatism and radical ends of the spectrum) and makes a great story out of them.

**William Gibson, *Virtual Light*,
Penguin, 1993**

This story takes place in the year 2005, mostly in San Francisco, State of Northern California. A young female bicycle courier gets caught up in a major struggle between rich and powerful people. Information is power and money, and a pair of sunglasses hold a deadly secret.

Having lived in San Francisco, I was fascinated by the images of the shanty town on the Oakland Bay Bridge, as well as other descriptions of life amongst both the rich

and the poor. This is another fast-paced action book with many insights into the relationship between technology, culture and morality.

**Colin Greenland, *Harm's Way*,
Avonova, 1993**

I don't know why I enjoyed this book as much as I did. Perhaps the premise is just so bizarre that it doesn't get in the way; perhaps the heroine makes so many good feminist points in the course of the story; perhaps the adaptation of historical and literary events amused me (and my knowledge of English literature and history isn't great, so I wouldn't know if any or all of this is just reworked material from somebody else).

The cover blurb says: "Sophie Farthing is a survivor challenged by life with a gloomy and repressive father. Somewhere beyond a forbidden threshold, her destiny awaits—if she has the courage and cunning to find it. For to know her future, Sophie must first pursue the past—and embarks upon an astonishing journey from Earth to the Moon and across cold barbaric Mars in search of the perilous origin of her birth..."

**Nancy Kress, *Beggars in Spain*,
Avonova, 1993**

An award-winning book that explores the problem of one group of genetically-engineered people, those who do not require sleep. Born in 2008, Leisha Camden's sleeplessness was chosen by her parents, who thought they could give her a head start in life, but who never dreamed what a curse this "blessing" would become.

The Sleepless have become outcasts, blamed for all the problems in society (which always seems to need a scapegoat), and have mostly been driven off Earth into orbital space stations. Many Sleepless have come to feel superior to Sleepers and to see them as a lesser breed of humanity, thus fueling some of the Sleepers' stereotypes about Sleepless.

This is an extremely thoughtful book that explores some important issues in society today, and the feelings of people on both sides of the issue.

Phillip Mann, Wulfsyarn, Avonova, 1990

A psychological drama, told from the point of view of a robot, Wulf. A starship, transporting hundreds of refugee alien lifeforms back to their homeworlds, disappears. When it is found, a year later, only its commander is alive, and he is a tormented soul. As Wulf deals with the man, slowly the shocking truth is revealed.

This is a very well-written book, but not really to my taste. I only discovered New Zealander Phillip Mann's work recently and have been collecting some of his books to read. This is the only one I've read so far. I must confess it hasn't encouraged me to read more. Other readers, with somewhat different tastes, might find his work more to their liking.

Anne McCaffrey, To Ride Pegasus, Corgi, 1994

First published in 1973, this is the book that McCaffrey has in the past few years developed into a series (*The Rowan, Damia*, etc.). I remember this book as being quite well done, exploring the lives of those with telepathic "talents". Even if you haven't liked the recent books, if you haven't read this one, you might find it interesting.

Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Ann Scarborough, Power Lines, Bantam, 1994.

Sequel to *Powers That Be*, which I haven't read. McCaffrey writes such a range of books, from those that enthrall me to those that bore me silly. This is one of the latter. I find the notion of a sentient planet impossible to accept, even though I like the idea. Most of the action is too pat, the characters are often stereotypes, and then there are the telepathic cats! (Another

notion that I like, but cannot accept.) I often like McCaffrey's stories (such as the *Dragonrider* books) despite some of these elements, but this book really didn't make it for me. Other McCaffrey fans will no doubt enjoy it immensely.

Anne McCaffrey, The Chronicles of Pern: First Fall, Bantam, 1994 (copyright 1993)

I'm a Pern fan, so I enjoyed this book. It contains 5 episodes in the history of Pern, from the very first space survey recommending colonization, to the last, where the world, its dragon culture undetected, is condemned to be isolated from the rest of humanity.

I had read the final story in the book, "Rescue Run", previously, and had found it a powerful tale. The characters all assume that they've found all of the surviving humans on Pern, and are dealing with their problems (which makes an interesting story in itself), but the reader knows that hundreds of other humans are on the planet, undetected by the survey ship. I got so caught up in the story that I wanted to scream at the characters! Their reactions and deductions were very realistic, not contrived (as the Talent books often seem to me to be).

Judith Moffett, Time, Like an Ever-Rolling Stream, Del Rey, 1992

Sequel to *The Ragged World* (a collection of stories), this novel expands upon some of the events (and the background to those events) in the story collection. I suspect that some of the human characters are the same (I didn't go back to the earlier book and check); certainly some of the aliens are the same. "The Hefn had come to rescue Earth from ecological destruction, but humans reacted with fear and resentment, following the Hefn's restrictive rules only because disobedience brought swift and brutal retribution. Not every-

one heated the Hefn. For teenagers Pam Pruitt and Liam O'Hara, the aliens were mentors who introduced them to exciting new ideas... In return, Pam and Liam showed the Hefn a place where the aliens' unmet goals were a way of life: Hurt Hollow, a tiny homestead on the Ohio River. But the peace of the Hollow was soon shattered—for Hefn's ecological message had convinced too few and made deadly enemies of far too many."

Elizabeth Moon, Hunting Party, Baen, 1993

The first few chapters of this book lulled me into thinking it had a lot less depth than it turned out to have. No doubt the author intended it that way, because the main character is also lulled into thinking her problems are a lot less than they really are. She thinks she's dealing with a collection of rich, spoiled, brats—and she is. But she also gets involved with a much bigger, nastier problem when some of the spoiled brats go missing.

Moon creates a range of very believable characters, who develop in believable ways as events unfold. I kept thinking there must have been a previous book, in which hinted-at events had been described, but apparently not—the hinted-at events are ones that no one but the main character is expected to know about, so when they are eventually revealed, everyone—characters and reader alike—are surprised.

"Heris Serrano was an officer... Being forced by a treacherous superior to resign her commission under a cloud was not just the end of a career path; it was the end of everything that gave her life meaning.... Heris has wound up as 'Captain' of an interstellar luxury yacht... all is not as it seems... and soon Heris finds herself fighting for her life against as varied and villainous a bunch of cutthroats, smugglers, and 'sportsmen' as ever had the misfortune to cross her

path when she was a captain of the fleet."

The sequel is *Sporting Chance*.

R. Garcia y Robertson, *The Spiral Dance*, Avonova, 1991

Award-winning fantasy set at the dawn of the Elizabethan Era, along the Scotland-England border, following the journey of Anne Percy, Countess of Northumberland. "In the company of witch and werewolf, amid feuding clans and lawless brutality, her perilous odyssey leads her from castle to hovel to dungeon" and even into the land of Faery. One of those extremely well-written books that kept me feeling cold and muddy, even as I curled up in front of the gas fire.

Kim Stanley Robinson, *Green Mars*, HarperCollins, 1994 (copyright 1993)

I raved about *Red Mars*, and now I'm raving about *Green Mars*. Wow! Eric says this book is full of errors of physics, but I didn't notice (okay, so I'm ignorant; I'm a biologist by training) and don't care. I loved the people, the politics, the enthusiasm. I could really relate to the "constitutional convention" the underground holds, to try to decide how to govern the planet if and when they are able to take it over. Weeks of haggling between people with very different points of view, some of whom refuse to consider compromising their ideology one iota. This is so familiar to me from my political-activist days! And it's so important—destroying a system is relatively easy, but replacing it with something workable, that won't be as repressive to someone as what it replaced, is not.

And again, here's that element of positive possibilities for a future extrapolated from the present.

Melissa Scott, *Burning Bright*, Tor, 1993

The jacket blurb talks about a planet "where role-playing games

are highly popular, and the biggest celebrities are those who can create new scenarios in the Game", so I expected to enjoy this book rather less than I did, because I'm not all that interested in role-playing games, and I've read (and didn't much like) several books that I suspect started out as a role-playing scenario.

I was happy to discover that I enjoyed this book thoroughly. The role-playing game aspect was central to the story, but it didn't dominate the story. The main character, a woman pilot named Quinn Lioe, visiting the planet while her ship is in for repairs, has written a scenario that is an instant hit amongst the Game players. Several of the local power brokers use her as a pawn in their power games; she is not interested in local politics and it doesn't occur to her that she might be used in this way, so she walks right into several messy situations before she realises that she's in deep shit.

At that point she quits being a pawn and becomes a player, and the game (and the Game) changes dramatically. I was impressed.

Melissa Scott, *Mighty Good Road*, Baen, 1990

This earlier work of Scott's turned up, presumably because her recent books (*Dreamships* and *Burning Bright*) have sold well.

It's got plenty of adventure but somewhat less political overtones than her more recent books (that is not a criticism, just an observation).

"What does a big corporation do when a job is too dirty and dangerous for its own employees? Why hire a freelancer, of course. That's how salvage operators Gwynne Heikki and her sidekick Sten Djuro find themselves commissioned to make their way to the surface of an undeveloped planet where they are to find and return a lost cargo. Dangerous, maybe, and dirty certainly, but the job seemed simple enough—with

just enough complication to make it 'interesting'.

"But there were a few problems that the company didn't tell them about... it was almost as if their employers wanted them to fail—and to die in the process."

Amy Thomson, *Virtual Girl*, Ace, 1993

This first novel is quite well done, although I found the premise a bit trite and hard to accept: programmer "brings a robot to life" with an artificial intelligence program. What follows, in terms of Maggie's (the program's) development as a "person", seemed quite logical, well-developed, and chillingly real. Thomson even manages to get in some very good points about male-female relationships as well as human-other relationships. Is Maggie an inanimate possession, like a vacuum cleaner or a car, or is she a person? Should she have any rights? If not, why not? These are things we need to think about, preferably before fiction becomes reality.

George Turner, *The Destiny Makers*, Avonova, 1993

Another excellent Turner novel of the near future, featuring an overpopulated Earth where (in Australia at least) the vast majority of people are supported at a minimum subsistence level while the powerful and more wealthy try to keep civilization intact.

Medical treatment of terminal illness is considered a crime against society. Yet in secret, behind the doors of the Biophysical Institute, a dying old man has been artificially and illegally rejuvenated. It is Detective Sergeant Harry Ostrov's job to guard the mysterious patient, an assignment that drags a good cop into a lethal mire of scandal, corruption and political outrage."