

Weber Woman's Wrevenge

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WEBERWOMAN'S WREVENGE EIGHT

(Volume 2, Number 2, September 1982)

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Jean Weber, 13 Myall Street, O'Connor ACT 2601, Australia

Overseas correspondents should send non-first-class mail (fanzines, for example) to me c/o CSIRO, P O Box 1800, Canberra City ACT 2601, Australia.

Letters (and any mail from within Australia) should be sent to my street address, until 1 December 1982. Any mail of any sort expected to arrive after 1 December should go to the CSIRO Post Office Box.

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THE COVER

By Julie Vaux, featuring a dragonrider. The 'dragon' is actually a giant species related to the Comorri Wyvern. Very smart but not sentient like the dragons of the West. Julie refers us to her article in Richard Faulder's publication, Xenophilia, Number 3, November 1981, and writes, "Note that the body is an elongated aerofoil; the giant wyvern has a more efficient system than Earth's extinct dinosaurs. It is also warm-blooded."

THIS FANZINE SUPPORTS

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*   MELBOURNE FOR WORLDCON IN 1985   *
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Back issues of this fanzine are available; please send stamps (60c Australian, 75c USA or Canada, or equivalent. Your local stamps (unused, of course) will do; I can send them on to someone else if I can't use them myself (I can often use US stamps, by the way).

THE RUBBISH BIN

(Being a collection of news and opinions, masquerading as an editorial)

By Jean Weber

Domestic arrangements... I never did find anyone to rent my spare room, but it's probably just as well. Before Eric Lindsay set off on his 4½-month tour of America, he invited me to share his house in Faulconbridge, since I wanted to spend more time both with him and visiting friends in Sydney. Somewhat to my surprise, I had little trouble getting a six-months transfer to the Sydney office of the Division of Computing Research. (After six months, who knows what the arrangements may be?) The transfer will start in mid-December, after Eric returns from America, and after a convention in Canberra which I'm helping organise, but just before the Christmas parties!

This of course will necessitate my renting my house in Canberra; I can't afford not to, mortgage payments being what they are. I thought I'd lined up a suitable couple (who were also willing to keep the cat), but they decided not to wait until December before moving into a house. Meanwhile, I've been packing, and packing, and... amazing how many boxes of books I have (they're only going as far as the brick shed in the backyard). And my collection is small compared with most fans I know. I'm also finding things that have been missing for years... this is the first time in over 20 years that I've lived more than 2 years in one place (most stays were less than a year), so I haven't had a clean-up-and-throw away session in far too long. Though a lot did get pitched when I

cleaned the spare room a few months ago, this time I'm attacking the living room and closets as well. Fun. Oh, I've been here five years come September. Other domestic news: I finally found someone to do the fences, and he should start the work next week.

I mentioned the frosty nights lastish. We had about ten days of the coldest overnight lows in a decade, in early July, but the last month or so (most of August) it's been unseasonably - and very pleasantly - warm during the day (16-18 C) though still with frosty nights. The fruit trees are all bursting their buds early. It's the sort of winter that makes me really love living in Canberra. Unfortunately I am inspired to do a lot of gardening, and did my back in again about three weeks ago. Two trips to the chiropractor, and a weekend goofing off at a convention, seem to have helped, though. (Also a couple days off work.)

Speaking of conventions... SYNCON 82 in Sydney was a lot of fun, though I was in one of my bad moods and didn't party very much or even pay much attention to very many people. I had done the typesetting and layout for the programme book, averting a last minute panic when my cheapo printers were closed for a few weeks at the crucial time; fortunately the convention was running a healthy profit so was able to pay for a commercial printer. Peter Toluzzi and crew put on another unusual, and very enjoyable, participatory con, based around a series of workshops.

Several artists, artisans and craftspeople demonstrated their techniques, after which in some cases one could try one's own hand. I did something unusual for me and watched 3 hours of videotapes: six episodes of the TV version of the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy. Well done, but I think I prefer the radio version; leaves more to the listener's imagination. The masquerade was done in the guise of an intergalactic marketplace and was enjoyable, as well as having some good costumes and better presentations of them.

I had also been one of 3 judges for a short-story competition held in conjunction with the con. Am I glad I'm not an English teacher! Half the stories were so poorly written that it was painful to read them. Of the others, most were boring old stories I've read a dozen times before. Still, there were several which 'showed promise' as the saying goes, and the judges were able to agree on 3 winners. Ugh, and we're going to hold another competition with Circulation, the Canberra con in November...

At work, things are going well and on schedule, but sometimes I'm so damned efficient that, once a deadline has been conquered, I have little to do for several days. With my back bothering me, it wasn't too conducive to typing letters or fanzines at work (my usual method of filling time profitably while still being available for consultation). So I took a couple days off. But I wonder how I'll get along in Sydney. Commuting 1½ hours each way from the mountains every day will not make me too happy if I'm just filling in time at work... Actually, I hope to make arrangements for a room (preferably in a fannish house) in the city, where I can stay overnight if the trains aren't running, or I want to stay late for a meeting or party, or whatever. But lately

I've been grumbling a lot about the non-availability of part-time work in my field. Actually, one of my fantasies regarding this temporary move is to demonstrate that my job can be done just as efficiently from a computer terminal that is not located in the main office. Once that's established, it is just another step to locate the terminal in my house, or an office near my house (this is the fantasy part; I suspect something in the damn regulations wouldn't allow it, even if I could convince my boss that it's viable.) Still, rules are made to be circumvented, eh? First I must make myself indispensable....

I suppose I should say a few words about this issue of Wrevenge. I'm quite pleased with the mix this time: starting with a delightful piece by Marc Ortlieb, then some more of that heavy serious stuff on rape, but before you can get too bored with that, we move on to book reviews and the lettercol. Not enough room for the letters, as usual! I have been receiving some very good ones in response to last issue's 'writing assignment', but I want to save them up and publish all at once, and also give overseas readers a chance to get some responses in. As one of my main purposes in publishing this zine is to encourage people to talk about themselves, and their own feelings, preferences, desires, fears, etc -- I'm pleased to get so many responses of that nature. Of course others write in generalities, but that's okay too -- it often sparks someone else into writing personally. One thing I do not like is the occasional tone of personal attack from one correspondent to another. Attack ideas, fine -- but not people. I have published some of those, but am sorry I did. Nor will I any more -- personal attacks will be edited out of your letters. Be warned.

21 August 1982



A MATTER OF TALENT

by Marc Ortlieb

Anyone who watches the rapidly climbing sales figures for Anne McCaffrey's novels cannot help but be smitten by the question "Why?" What is it about McCaffrey's novels that allow them such popularity? Why do so many fans start to drool when mention of a possible seventh dragon novel is made?

It is possible to isolate many of the basic appeals of McCaffrey's novels. For a start, there is the inherent simplicity of the societies that McCaffrey portrays, particularly in the dragon novels. The reader can

(continued in right column)

leave the greys of the twentieth century for a clearcut, black and white world, where dragons are good; Thread is bad; the good guys always win; bullies get their come-uppance; and love can triumph, albeit some times after a testing time.

One cannot ignore the wish-fulfillment aspect either. I doubt that there is one of us who has not, at some time, wished for an ideal companion who knows exactly what our feelings are; who will never disagree with us; who will give us status in the world; and who will defend us regardless of all else. The fact that McCaffrey's dragons not only do this, but act as a permanent, instantaneous, and free air ticket to any time or place that we can envision is mere icing on the cake.

There has to be more than this though. A good novelist creates a multi-leveled universe which bears

re-reading and closer scrutiny, and Anne is certainly a good novelist. She has the awards to prove it. Thus, there are those who would see in McCaffrey's dragons elements of Jungian archetypes. The dragon certainly is a symbol of no mean potency. Dragons can also be seen as an extrapolation of the human quest for the ideal pet. McCaffrey's dragons can be seen to embody the more attractive features of dog, cat, and horse. (It is, for instance, hinted that dragons don't excrete - a trait that certainly would endear them to late night emptiers of kitty litter trays.)

However, to fully appreciate the significance of McCaffrey's dragons, one must delve a little more closely into Anne's personal background and pre-occupations. A cursory glance is adequate to ensure us that one of Anne's major pre-occupations is that

of talent, and of its effect on those who possess talent. Sometimes Anne looks at musical talent. Helva, the ship who sang; Killashandra, the crystal singer; Menoly, the girl harper, and Robinton the Master Harper of Pern are only four examples of musical talents whose abilities Anne chronicles. Anne herself has close ties with music, opera in particular, and these are clearly seen in the four characters mentioned.

On a more speculative level, we have the e. s. p. talents seen in "To Ride Regasus", and in the two Tower stories. Here also we see people with a strange, and in many ways, frightening talent, and we see the joys and the terrors of being placed so far beyond one's peers. When one looks at the communities of the "talented" one sees something similar in many ways to the private world of the musically talented.

However, it is my contention that the talent that we see in the dragon novels is not music, though it does in some ways, relate to music. Look at the situation. We are presented with a basically backward society, in which exists an elite group of folk, the dragon riders, who all share an essential quality, apparently telepathic, or, at the least, empathic, in nature. These talented folk are able to span the continent in mere seconds, on the backs of dragons, who think themselves from place to place. They are deeply concerned with the future of their planet, and, at the start of the first dragon novel, they are tithed a bare pittance by the stolid citizens whom they protect.

Those who are linked to dragons are, in the main, males, who are impressed by their dragons in their early teens. These males, upon impressing their dragons, take new, or at least altered versions of their names. Those few females who are

linked to dragons are only linked to golden dragons which act as the equivalent of queen bees. (The one exception to this so far listed in the books will be more closely examined later.) The female dragon riders are given an elevated position in the community, but are also strictly limited by the expectations that the male dragon riders have of them.

Certainly this could be allegorically describing the musician in our present day society, with the dragon representing the musical talent of the individual, but the fact that dragons are used hints at a more cosmic significance. I feel that, in describing the dragon riders of Pern, Anne McCaffrey is actually casting an eye on her own position as a female science fiction writer.

The parallels are too obvious to be mere coincidence. The males of Benden Weyr, prior to F'lar taking control, are basically fairly chauvinistic, and concerned with little but the games, in which they can demonstrate their mastery of the technical skills of dragon riding. It is mentioned on many occasions that most teenaged boys are fascinated by the idea of impressing a dragon, whereas the female reaction seems to be one of fear and non-comprehension. This certainly has much in common with the position of women in the science fiction field in the forties and fifties. There were few women who read sf, and even fewer who aspired to write the stuff.

The position of the weyrwoman is also in keeping with that of the female writers of the forties and fifties. That they were respected and, to an extent, protected by the male writers can no more be denied than can be the fact that there were limitations placed upon them. Female sf writers were supposed to stay well clear of the hard sf that was seen to be the domain of the male writers. They were supposed to write their

sf with feeling, and, as often as possible, aim for a juvenile audience. Thus there are the works of Zenna Henderson or Andre Norton, which are often pointed to as prime examples of pre-feminist sf, and which somehow never quite managed to fill the same niches as the works of Clarke, Heinlein or Asimov.

With that established, it is interesting to search around for other references. Take, for example, the fire lizards, which are seen as small creatures remarkably similar to dragons, and yet available to those who are not involved with the weyrs. Those who have fire lizards have to show care and attention to them, and in return receive a certain satisfaction, though this is not on the same level as the relationship between dragon and rider. The fire lizards are, in my opinion, representative of fan writing - a smaller talent, but one that is open to more people. Look at the way that fire lizard owners get together and talk about their fire lizards. You could replace the words "fire lizard" with "fanzine" and, without too much twisting, the

conversations could be the sort that would take place when any two faneds meet. While I would be wary of being too prescriptive, it is tempting to suggest that each colour fire lizard is representative of some specific type of fan activity. Thus bronze fire lizards might represent fan writing, with browns being fanart, and the promiscuous nature of green fire lizards clearly suggesting that they represent convention attendance.

This, of course, makes one wonder a bit about Ruth, the white dragon, which is seen by the dragon riders to be little more than an overgrown fire lizard. It is tempting then to suggest that Ruth represents the semi-prozines which seem to have such a hold on the fanzine Hugos. However, this does not fit with the esteem in which Ruth is held by the rest of the dragons. The fact that Ruth is not forced to live in a weyr, but lives out in the wide world, in Ruatha Hold, suggests that McCaffrey intends him to represent the link between sf and the mainstream. Ruth has broken out of the sf ghetto, but is not really accepted by either the weyr or the hold. His persistence



Michael McHann '72

and particular talents suggest that McCaffrey sees him as the future of the dragon talent, i. e. that science fiction must fuse with the mainstream if it is to progress. The way that F'lar increases the role of the weyr in Pernese society also suggests this concept. It is interesting also to note that, when Ruth does go into action, it is with the queen's wing. McCaffrey links the advance of sf with the presence of women writers, and it cannot be denied that as sf has lifted itself from the ghetto, the proportion of women writers has increased, with people like LeGuin, Russ, Tiptree/Sheldon and McIntyre becoming major forces.

However, there is a certain amount of reactionary politics in the sub-plot dealing with Mirrim's impression of a green dragon - Path. Despite the fact that green dragons are female, prior to Mirrim's impression, only male riders had ridden them. Thus

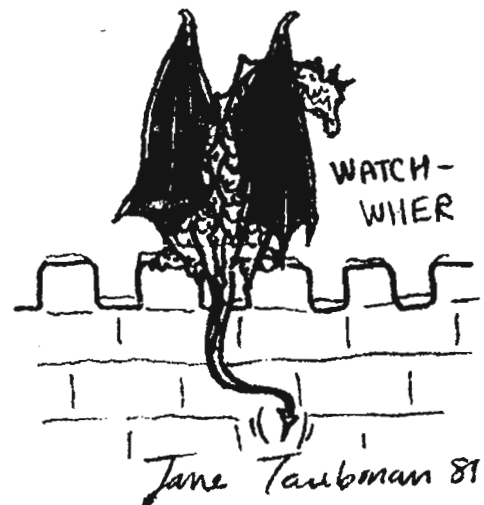
Mirrim is attempting to take on male attributes and, from being the sweet and helpful person that she was in Dragonquest, she becomes overbearing and unpredictable in The White Dragon. It would seem that McCaffrey does not believe that a female's adoption of male roles in this fashion is suitable.

The general community is clearly represented by the hold dwellers. McCaffrey's tone when writing of those who are "hold-bound" is as clearly disapproving as that of any fan who spits out the term "mundane". The Holds have been built as protection from Thread, that insidious fungus, which falls onto Pern and drains the life from it. That dragons can kill this hints that McCaffrey sees Thread as a symbol of the dull day-to-day existence, which one can hide from in mainstream literature, i. e. the Holds, but which one can only fight by going out after it, in order to destroy it before it strikes, with sf, i. e. dragons. McCaffrey does make it clear that Hold and Weyr must work

together though, so it would be incorrect to see this attitude as totally condemning the mainstream. McCaffrey shows us that meticulous plodding over the ground does have its uses.

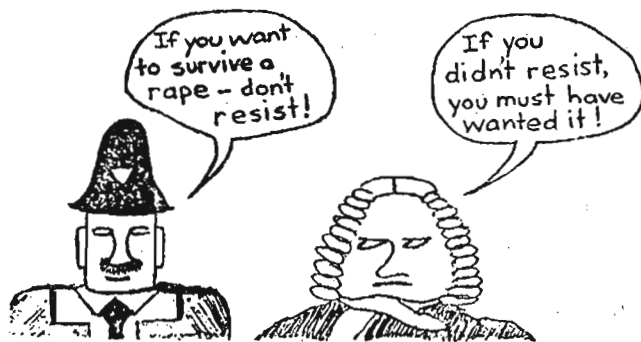
It is though clear that she does not see that the mainstream should dominate sf. The strongest critics of the Weyr, the Lord Holders, are quickly put into their place by F'lar's breadth of vision in kidnapping their wives, which can be seen as metaphorical glance at the way that Blish took up the tools of mainstream criticism to strengthen science fiction.

Finally though, McCaffrey makes her identification between dragon rider and sf writer crystal clear. It is the dragons and their riders, and the fire lizard owners, who discover space ships, while pushing Pern's frontiers to their very limit. Just as the science fiction of the forties and fifties set the mood for space travel, so do the talented few on Pern discover the space ships with which their ancestors colonized the planet in the first place, i. e. Anne is telling us that science fiction is the one form of literature guaranteed to reveal to us our true natures. The dragon novels can be recognised then as Anne's particular tribute to the field of science fiction. Is it any wonder then that they have captured the hearts of sf fans everywhere...



AFTER RAPE - WHAT?

by Jean Weber and
correspondents



It's no news that rape victims are often put on trial as much as their alleged attacker, and that the victim's sexual history can play a large part in whether she's seen as 'consenting' or not. While this might perhaps have some relevance in truly ambiguous cases, I have quite a file of news clippings about women who were severely beaten, knifed, or otherwise violently bashed about, yet whose assailant was not convicted. (Perhaps he should have simply been charged with assault rather than rape, as it would be a lot harder to deny that she'd been assaulted.) But, in addition to the problems with legal processes (leading many women to prefer not to charge a rapist at all, even when they have a case), there is the personal effect upon the woman, who may feel unclean, or somehow at fault, or simply distrustful of all men, temporarily or permanently.

In response to my article on rape (originally published in Applesauce, an apa, and reprinted in the last issue of this fanzine), JOANNA MASTERS wrote;

I would like to put forward my views from a very personal point of view. Just before last Christmas, ((this was written in 1980)) I myself was the subject of a rape. It was not the rape that is normally thought of as being rape, namely, vaginal intercourse, but anal intercourse, which you may not even consider rape. Rape is a serious offence in whatever way you think of it. The act caused me a great deal of pain - both physical and emotional - not to mention the ordeals that I had to undergo when I decided to report it to the police in Perth.

Rape is extremely difficult to prove, especially when in my case there was no evidence of semen on me. This was because my attacker was impotent. You may ask did I scream or struggle, and the answer is yes to a degree but as he threatened me and I was not about to get my throat cut or get my body maimed, that I did as he more-or-less asked. What did affect me more than anything else was the fact that I had been in a house in a good area in broad daylight and did not realise the fact that someone had entered the house without my knowing and had literally snuck up behind me and grabbed me before I could defend myself. After that, the week or so I spent in that house before I could leave left me very afraid and insecure and needless to say terrified of men, any man I met I felt was going to attack me. A false concept I realise but after an assault like that your mind is somewhat distorted and you are not likely to believe that there are men in the world who will not treat you badly everywhere.

What really made me very angry was the fact that when I went to the police to report the incident, I was met with disbelief at every turn. I was very

quickly advised that if I were lying for any reason whatsoever, the penalties for such were very heavy. The fact that I was not hysterical enough, I didn't weep and fall to pieces emotionally in front of them was extra cause for my lying. As if this was not enough cause for me to leave, decrying the uselessness of the Police Force, I was given the option to pull out of my statement by late that night. My case was forwarded to the Subiaco Police Station, where the Det. Superintendent there put me through the rigamarole again with questions on my previous sex life, did I like to wear tight revealing clothes and to describe in infinite detail what had happened to me. I have always been a survivor no matter what happened to me, but the constant doubt and the subsequent lack of any trace of this man were to haunt me for a long time. After all, it is a horrendous experience constantly having to relive the experience when you are desperately trying to forget the whole horrible experience.

Even after moving in with (friends), I was constantly hounded by the police asking whether I had seen the man again. By this time I had really had enough and decided for the first time to downright lie. So I did. The fact was I had had another visit from him at the house where it occurred. This time he used a very subtle approach and knocked at the door. Obviously I didn't answer it, but it got to me how he even had the gall to do that. After repeated knockings at the door, he finally left. That night I again left the house and this time never to return. I moved in with Sally, Roy and Julia, and for their kindly hospitality I will always be grateful... Not only did they give me a safe secure roof over my head far away from the scene of the other house, but gave me emotional security which I very much needed by this time.

I was suffering fairly severe sexual problems due to the rape and it took a lot of love and security by a lot of people to bring me back to some sort of sexual normality. Even now, I still have a hell of a lot of hangups over it and possibly will for the rest of my life. It is very hard to trust people once you have been let down like that and it takes a lot of work to instill trust too.

In writing this I wanted to let people know about the problems that still exist in our rape laws and the fact that very few people know what rape really is. It is not just violent manipulation of another person's body but over their mind too. I will push for greater awareness of the problem and the repeal of existing rape laws, and better treatment by the police, the public and the media. This is something I feel very strongly about and will fight for whatever is necessary to make this world a safer and less violent one.

PETER TOLUZZI, also writing in Applesauce, says:

Obviously, the only real solution is a change in attitudes; and this is happening, but slowly as is the way with all social changes. I am more concerned with immediate steps, both towards cutting down on the crime and doing something about the inhuman ordeal which Joanna and almost every other rape victim suffers.

Now, sexist/piggish policemen aside, it is easy to see why there is such a strong line taken by the police in rape cases. It is a very serious accusation, one which carries pretty severe penalties (in theory, at least). And it obviously can often be very difficult to prove whether the act has taken place or whether violence or threat were used; so it's not just that the cops are shits (they might be anyway), but a very difficult situation.

Joanna described to me her 'interview', complete with the cops trying to scare her or catch her in a lie; also, the usual humiliating questions and leers on her past sex life and habits. About that point, something started me thinking... We have many specialised areas of law enforcement officers: narcotics officers, murder experts, kidnap specialists, etc. But rape cases, by and large, are handled by your average detective, and they're often not much good.

What about the possibility of a specialised 'Rape Task Force', perhaps one or two per capital city. As I envisage such an organisation, it would comprise police officers of both sexes; and a great deal of proper training. This training should include studies of the psychology and history of rape -- perhaps then they wouldn't need to try to catch a lie, they'd be better able to recognise one. There should be knowledge, at least in some parts of the organisation, of manhunt techniques appropriate to tracking violent criminals; but note that it is not essential, or even good, to have the same person interviewing the victim and tracking the culprit, as each takes different training and personality types.

With such an organisation, the necessary detailed questioning of the victim need not be so harrowing or humiliating. The knowledge of a specialised force might act as a deterrent, both to the possible rapist and to those who would lie to get someone in trouble. I would like to see a respected feminist collective liaising with this task force; to provide post-rape counselling and comfort, care or treatment, as necessary, and probably to have a major say in who is selected for entry and training in this force.

Well, Jean, is this the sort of thing which women's collectives could work for?



((Steps have already been taken, at least in New South Wales and Victoria, towards this sort of specialised 'task force', but unfortunately I'm not sure of the details. I've havdn't been paying much attention for the past couple of years. Certainly the various feminist-run Rape Crisis Centres attempt to liaise with the police. Here in the ACT, there are two or three 'rape specialists' on the police force (one at least of each sex), who have attended training courses run by the Rape Crisis Centre, and there have been efforts to set up a rape centre in the Health Commission Building, but the last I heard not much had come of it. The Rape Crisis Centre staff felt that many of the women they see are too suspicious of authority to voluntarily go to a government-run centre, or to the police. The authorities have such a bad image that not only do their practices in dealing with rape victims have to change, but public awareness of this change is also necessary. -JHW))

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GERALD SMITH, who has completed a law degree, contributed the following to Applesauce:

RAPE AND THE LAW

Double Standards and the Role of Defence Counsel

Rape trials are never a pretty thing, that is a patently obvious fact. One of the major objections often voiced about the conduct of these trials is the way in which the victim's past sexual history is elicited in cross examination. Such objections do not surprise me. It is quite rightly pointed out that it is not the victim who is on trial.

However, it continually irritates me that the defence counsel bears the brunt of much of this criticism. People are often heard to say that there was no need for the barrister to ask such horrid questions of the victim. The point I wish to make is that not only was there a need for such questions to be asked, but the counsel was under a positive duty to ask them.

Every legal practitioner under the English system of justice has a duty to do all in his power to advance the interests of his client. In this he is constrained only by his duty to the law and his duty to the court. Provided he does not assist in the breaking of the law or the commission of a fraud and provided he does not deliberately mislead the court or abuse the legal process and provided he acts in a manner in keeping with his professional status, the defence counsel in a rape case must do all in his power to ensure the acquittal of his client.

Now the law as it stands states that a defendant in a criminal trial can only be examined as to his own character if he elects to give evidence under oath and the evidence of his character would show that he is guilty of the offence with which he is charged or he asks questions of prosecution witnesses designed to show his own good character or imputes the character of the prosecutor or the prosecution witness or he has given evidence of his own good character or he has given evidence against any other person charged with the same offence. This is all contained in Section 399(e) of The Crimes Act (Vic) 1958, and I'm sure there are similar provisions in other states.

Because of the double standards that do exist about rape (i.e. that a promiscuous woman is less likely to have been raped than a virgin), it is in the best interests of the defendant that a rape victim's past sexual history be placed on record. If the jury can be convinced that the victim is promiscuous, it is more likely (because of this double standard) to

agree with the defendent that she consented or at least doubt her story that she didn't, remembering that all crimes must be proved beyond reasonable doubt.

At the same time, the defendent has an out under the law as to the possibility of his own character being placed in issue (section 399d). He can not be compelled to give evidence and no comment can be made about his failure to do so.

The defence counsel is compelled by the ethics of his profession to make full use of this loophole. If he fails to do so, he may easily find himself having to explain his actions to the Ethics Committee and/or being sued for negligence by his client.

However the defence barrister has an even more important reason to run the defence in this way. His client may indeed be innocent. In most rape trials there are no witnesses to the crime itself. In the end it boils down to the victim's word against that of the defendent. In such a case the victim's credibility becomes a vitally important issue and the defence must seek to undermine that credibility.

Practically the most important constraint on how far the defence counsel goes in cross examination of the prosecutrix is his duty to the Court. In this regard, he cannot put questions to the victim concerning her character unless he had good reason for believing that her credit can be undermined. In other words, he cannot put such questions to her just for the hell of it. However, he is virtually bound to believe his client's instructions and if these instructions are to the effect that the victim's credibility is open to question, then he is duty bound to ask these questions.

Law Reform and Rape

Already I have pointed toward one of the major deficiencies in our law and the effect it has on rape trials. That is the loophole implicit in Section 399 of the Crimes Act. Under Section 399(a), the defence is able to place the prosecutrix under vigorous cross examination as to her previous sexual history and yet effectively AVOID such matters as to credit being raised about the defendent.

Now, of course, once the victim's character is put in issue, the prosecution has the right to do the same for the defendent's character. For instance, the prosecution is able to bring to the jury's attention any prior convictions the defendent may have. However, whilst this may help to convince the jury to doubt the defendent's story, it is nowhere near as devastating as cross examining the defendent as to his character.

Such cross examination may not be possible. The defendent may elect not to give sworn testimony. And, in fact, if he has a history of 'deviant sexual behaviour', then it is highly unlikely that he will take the stand. In such a case the prosecution is forbidden to make any comment on the defendent not giving evidence.

Now, in considering what, if any, changes should be made to this law, it must always be considered, as with any law, that there are two conflicting principles. Firstly there is the principle that justice must be done and be seen to be done. Secondly, a person is innocent until PROVEN guilty. However, I feel the law in this area has too long turned a blind eye to the fact that once the victim's character is placed in issue, she is effectively placed on trial and proven 'guilty' without much chance to put up a defence.

Now, my suggestion for change to the law in this regard is to make the Defendent in a criminal trial a compellable witness if he drops the protection of Section 399(e), i.e. does any of the things which can allow the prosecution to bring his character into issue. Such a change would have a very dissuasive effect on the defence in its decision as to whether to question the character of the victim. This is, of course, only one area of the law as it affects rape that needs changing.

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Gerald has pointed out the main problem with the tactics used in rape trials: obviously they could not be effective were there not the 'double standard' of prejudice against women. There is often the supposition that a female is literally 'asking for it' if she is out alone at night, or dressed in a particular way; the supposition seems to be that it's perfectly reasonable for a man to assume that a woman is willing, if she does certain things.

CAROLE CRANWELL sums up the situation rather neatly, I think. This was actually a letter of comment on WWW#7, but I'm going to put it here rather than in the lettercolumn. Here's Carole:

My theory has long been that if rape were an 'equal opportunity' crime, that could be committed against everyone in our community, we would soon see the courts take a new attitude. If rape affected men as often as it did women, if men had to be afraid to walk down the street for fear of being raped, I tend to believe things would change drastically. Certainly there is the occasional homosexual rape (and I wonder how many homosexual rapes go unreported by men afraid to appear unmanly).

Our laws were made by people that could not put themselves in the victim's place, only in the place of the accused. Is it any wonder that things are weighed on the rapist's side and not the victim's?

If rape were a crime that could happen equally to anyone, not just to Mary Smith, but to Joe Bloggs, AND to his grandfather -- and I'm not talking about a man being seduced by a pack of sex-crazed women when I speak of rape, I'm talking of violent degrading acts being committed upon an unwilling victim-- then society might start thinking a little more fairly.

If your car is stolen, does the thief use the excuse that you left it provocatively parked, with its sexy velour seatcovers showing, and its little body gleaming? Hell, if he did he'd find himself in the loony bin. Yet, that sort of shit is consistently used as defence at rape trials, along with whatever 'dirt' can be dredged up about the victim. Does HIS sex life ever go on review... unless it's on record?

((Most of you have probably seen a version of the marvelous parody of rape trial cross-examination, involving a man who was bashed and robbed, and was being questioned about his philanthropy (so you often give money away, Mr X?), his expensive suit (flaunting his wealth), and so on.

((The thing that really amazes me is that rapists of elderly women in their own homes can get acquitted, especially when the victim has been bashed. I can understand (though certainly not agree with) the prejudices that view young, attractive women as 'asking for it', but at 72?--JHW))

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BOOK REVIEWS

by Jean Weber

(Looking this time at some of my recent reading of books with female leads, and some recent works by Australian writers.)

THE HOUSE BETWEEN THE WORLDS,
Marion Zimmer Bradley, Del Rey
(Ballantine), 1980, 1981.

Having begun with the statement above, I will now review a book which fits neither of those categories. I am a great fan of MZB's Darkover books, but find her other works (at least, those I've read) far less satisfying. Thus I approached this book with some apprehension, and in fact let it languish on my shelves for quite some time before attempting to read it at all. A pity, because I enjoyed it thoroughly and found it difficult to put down.

I thoroughly delight in well-written books about people who have experiences (such as out-of-body) that no one else will believe, and where even the reader after awhile wonders where the reality actually is. This is one of those books, and does an excellent job of depicting both the 'reality' of Berkeley California, and the 'reality' of the worlds to which Fenton travels. It also has a few explanations for the bizarre things that happen daily to all of us. Have you ever tried to find an obscure store that sold some item you wanted, only to be unable to locate it despite much searching? And then another day, when you're not looking for it, to suddenly find it again? And other such experiences... This book, although totally different from Shey and Wilson's Illuminatus books, reminds me quite a bit of them in that respect, offering 'explanations' for the bizarre or the merely annoying.

Fenton is a volunteer in ESP experiments at the University of California, using a new drug. He quickly finds that, under its influence he can not only leave his body but his entire dimension. Soon he's in another place, trying to rescue a Faerie Queen from some nasties, but he's only partly there (his body being back at the lab) so he's somewhat handicapped. After he returns to his body (at a time not of his choosing), he remains concerned about the people he met, and determined to continue to help them if he can. He meets Sally, a psychology student who interviews him as part of her PhD thesis work, and who clearly is concerned about his preoccupation with his 'dreamworld'. They become lovers, but as he becomes more and more involved with the other dimension, their relationship is strained. Until a few events convince Sally that it's not entirely a figment of his imagination.

MZB's recent books do a good job of exploring the inner thoughts, fears and confusions of people, and thus her characters are very well developed. I find them realistic and generally easy to empathise with. Sometimes she gets a bit bogged down in this inner exploration and leaves one impatient to get on with the action, but I only noticed this a few times in this book. A good read and highly recommended.



RISSA KERGUELEN, by F. M. Busby,
Berkeley, 1977 (originally published
in 2 volumes as RK and The Long
View, copyright 1976).

My reactions to this book are decidedly mixed. It's definitely got a strong female lead, of the larger-than-life, extremely competent hero variety. Such characters I generally find a little hard to take, of either sex. But it's nice to have the occasional female hero around, and if one wants to read an adventure story with some depth to it, this will do quite nicely.

Most of my complaints with this book are of the nitpicking variety. One major unrealistic touch, in my opinion, was the ease with which Rissa, who'd grown up in an orphanage of sorts with no education and little contact with older children or adults, adapted so easily to changes in her life. For example, she accepted her first menstruation with hardly any reaction at all, yet I cannot imagine how she could have been psychologically prepared for something frightening like unexpected bleeding. That she'd remembered how to read is somewhat more probable (she went into the orphanage at the age of 5), but not much, considering that she'd had no opportunity to practice for 7 or 8 years.

Oh, well, never mind. The first 15 years or so of Rissa's life were only background to the main story, and Busby gave them more space than many authors might have, presumably in an attempt to improve the characterisation.

Rissa escapes from Total Welfare by winning a lottery and thus being able to pay her debts and buy her way to freedom. Busby evidently doesn't think much of welfare, and he went to some trouble to paint as bad a picture of it, using the good old extrapolation technique, as possible. The bad guys in this book are UET, a sort of multinational corporation gone wild, with effective control over the United States and other countries, which controls the citizens by various Mafia-type tactics, among which is Total Welfare. Ostensibly a cradle-to-grave subsistence program, its 'clients' include anyone who tries to fight UET; once into Total Welfare, the only way to get out it to pay what you owe for your 'help', and your wages are never enough to do this. The lottery is one chance... and Rissa wins. Immediately her family and friends, who've been unsuccessful at helping her over the years, spirit her off to a training centre in South America, where a rival wealthy and powerful group has its base. There she rapidly learns exotic survival techniques and is groomed to be a leader in the fight against UET. Most of the book is taken up with her travels, the people she meets, and the rebel band that grows strong enough to attack Earth many years later.

Mixed in with all this is some contemplation of a phenomenon all too often overlooked in 'space opera' -- if ftl travel distorts time so that you age slower than the rest of the universe (so to speak), any trips you take will find your family and friends much older when you return, and the people you may have been fighting light years away on Earth will no longer be there. One obvious necessity is to choose between taking your family on the spaceship with you, or in effect abandoning them. This problem can be partially overcome by using suspended animation techniques, but still, it must be faced and a conscious decision taken. This is the 'Long View', the title of the second part of the book.

I very much liked the attitudes that Rissa had towards important men in her life, and their attitudes towards her. Most of the women are capable types, and the ones who aren't are balanced by some silly men. If Rissa is a little too capable for belief, well, that's a characteristic of 'heroes'. Busby does attempt to give her some weaknesses, but she tends to overcome them far too easily. As a role model for a strong, capable woman, I guess she's as good as a similarly larger-than-life male is as a role model for boys, but... Another touch I liked was Busby's tendency to mention mundane trivia of life such as cooking, cleaning house, bathing, using the toilet, in passing as his characters mull over some course of action. After awhile, however, these (initially pleasant) sidelights became intrusive, and I started skipping a lot as I read. And I absolutely loathed the last few pages. I won't tell you why, but they did sort of sum up a thread running through the whole book, about genetics and its vast importance in the face of strong negative environmental influences. A point of view which I think overly simplistic and offensive.

So, you have my very mixed reaction to this book. Generally worth the read, I think, and some great high points in it, but... a lot of annoying things, too. I didn't mention the dialog -- pretty hopeless at times. I don't think any of the characters ever heard of a colloquialism or a contraction, except for one young woman whose speech is delightfully laced with slang.



BARD, by Keith Taylor.
Ace Books, 1981.

Keith Taylor, an Australian writer, has created a delightful character, Felimid mac Fal, Bard of Erin, 'descendent of Druids and the Tuatha de Danaan - the ancient faery race of Ireland, armed only with his harp and the fierce magical power of his poetry,' according to the jacket blurb. This book is a collection of stories about his adventures, which work very well as a novel. Although episodic, it doesn't read like a collection of short stories.

The Bard has an amusing personality and a tendency to tease people beyond their endurance, requiring him to fight for his life or flee, and sometimes both. Taylor has improved upon the old standby of the fair maiden needing rescue, by having her insist upon his taking her with him, and then helping him out in a pinch too. The Bard has an eye for good-looking women, and the women in Taylor's book often take the same attitude towards men. There are wizards, werewolves, giant spiders, and a host of other creatures to be fought or avoided as the Bard goes about the countryside trying to enjoy life. A very enjoyable book to read. Taylor's writing style has a nice touch to it (as well as being fully literate, a quality not always found in adventurous sf), and his humour is not of the juvenile variety that bores me. Recommended.

LANCES OF NENGESDUL, Keith
Taylor, Cory & Collins, 1982.

Arvadh, a midget in a circus on Earth, awakens in another land, under a green sky, with lighter gravity and other differences, where all the humanoids are the same size or smaller than he. Coming from a higher gravity, he is stronger and heavier built, too, and is thus able to do well for himself as a fighter although not so trained. Told in the first person, this novel chronicles his attempts to survive and fit in to the world of Barcul; what he doesn't know is that a local God is using him for a special purpose.

Once again, Taylor displays a subtle sense of humour and a writing style that appeals to me. Though he describes the landscape and its inhabitants very well, he doesn't fall into the habit of overdescribing everything (using three adjectives for every noun) which I find tedious.

I especially liked his Orhings, the humanoids whom he first discovers and lives amongst (though he's seen other humanoids, a group who'd captured some Orhings that he, Arvadh, inadvertently rescues). The Orhings are presumably modelled on the Aborigines of Australia; they have a highly developed culture but few possessions, a complex language, and live in harmony with the land; they are also considered sub-human by the 'civilized', warlike others. Not all of the others reject the Orhings; the bandits get along well with them, for example.

After spending some time with the Orhings, learning one of the 'civilized' languages from a captive, and helping the Orhings deal with some raiders of their own sort, Arvadh sets off for a city and ends up rescuing a young woman and her newborn son, thus launching himself unknowingly into local politics. Well worth reading.

Overseas readers may find it difficult to locate copies of this book, as it is published by a small Australian company. Try sending A\$3.95 (plus something for postage) to Cory & Collins, P O Box 66, St Kilda, Vic. 3182, Australia.

Shifting gears again, a book that is neither science fiction nor fantasy:

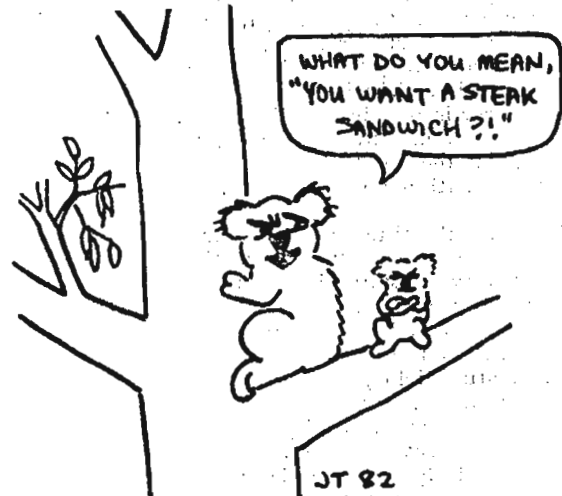
ORIGINAL SINS, by Lisa Alther.
Penguin Books, 1981.

Alther's first novel, *Kinflicks*, was one of the funniest feminist books I've ever read, so I looked forward greatly to this book. I'm not sure why, but I was somewhat disappointed. Oh, it was well written and all that, but it didn't have me rolling in the aisles like *Kinflicks* did. Possibly her use of five main characters diffused the point of view sufficiently to dilute the humour for me -- though the larger number of main characters also allowed her to explore more stereotypes and expose them. I suspect, however, that too much of the book seemed too 'real' (and at the same time, paradoxically, not close enough to my own life), for me to find it really funny.

Still, it's a book I'd recommend. One of my favourite scenes is between a teenage boy and girl, who are both misfits (he doesn't play sport, and she's a good student, etc) and who thus end up spending quite a bit of time together. The boy feels obligated to make a pass at her on every date -- otherwise he's insulting her, you see -- and she feels obligated to let him make the pass and then firmly discourage much groping -- if she didn't at least let him TRY, she'd be insulting him, you see. So they are both miserable, when really all they want to do is be friends. This scene is handled in a very witty manner. Another scene involves the same boy, who's gone off to New York and been politicized. He's been involved in freedom marches (for the Southern blacks) and learnt a bit of Marx. Somewhere along the line, he decides the economy is going to collapse, and the only people who will survive are those who live close to the land, like the poor dirt farmers in Tennessee where he comes from. He used to look down on them, but he now realises they are the backbone of the country, and he begins to almost worship their relationship with the soil. So he

goes back to Tennessee to live amongst these people, and learn from them, and tell them how wonderful they are. He is very upset that all they want to do is buy a colour TV and get a job in a city factory if they can. When he talks to them, it's in big words, spouting Marxist rhetoric which none of them understand, or completely misunderstand. But they're polite Southerners, so they nod and smile and agree with him, and then go off about their lives as if he didn't exist. They tolerate him as the local wierdo, up to a point. Then he buys a TV of his own so he can keep up on world politics and ends up watching quiz shows and soap operas (reeling in horror at the same time as he enjoys every minute); but if anyone at all comes to visit, he hides the TV under the bed. It's a very well drawn portrait of a sincere, but confused personality.

Alther satirizes anything and everything, and she definitely writes well. I recommend this book, and *Kinflicks*, to anyone who thinks feminists have no sense of humour.



WINDHAVEN, by George R R Martin and Lisa Tuttle. New English Library, 1981.

Parts of this book appeared in *Analog* magazine. To these the authors have added a third part, a prologue and an epilog. The result is a close examination of three stages of a woman's life, and of the culture in which she lives. *Windhaven* is a planet colonised by people from a wrecked spaceship. It is almost entirely water, with scattered island groups. The people turned the solar 'sails' of their ship into wings with which they can fly the winds of their metals-poor planet. Now, generations later, the tradition of inheritance by firstborns of flyers threatens to destroy too many of the wings through ineptness. Maris is the daughter of a landbound who gets the opportunity to fly for a few years by being adopted by a childless flyer who later has a child that prefers to sing and make music. They both feel the injustice of a system which requires the reluctant son to fly, and denies flight to a talented foster-child. Maris then challenges the entire system and precipitates a crisis that undergoes several stages of development through the book. An exciting story that also explores some of our own social mores and finds them lacking; merit versus birth, and a sort of racism that makes the flyers consider themselves inherently superior to the 'landbound', regardless of the facts.

SAPPHIRE ROAD, by Wynne Whiteford, Cory & Collins, 1982.

Whiteford hypothesises several fascinating future developments in this novel, starting with the desert centre of Australia having been filled with sea water via a canal from Port Augusta, and various other lakes (of fresh water piped from Queensland) also in the centre. He lightly skims over the complexities of world politics (it's essential to the story, but I'm relieved the author did not get too bogged down in the details; he gave enough of an overview to set the scene for events). Then the main character and various others go off to the human colonies around Alpha Centauri, where they find amazing developments in the people, as well as their technology. The people have adapted themselves to new environments, and consider that this is the only sensible thing to do. I would very much have liked to learn a lot more about this society (or the several societies on the several planets) and do hope Whiteford writes some more novels in that setting. He certainly had enough potential material in this book for several. My one complaint about the book was that it had a lot of rough spots that could have been improved by some minor editing. I tend to notice these things since I spend so much time every day looking for similar editorial problems at work. But the story's well worth reading regardless. Australian fiction.

ZELDA M'TANA, by F M Busby, Dell SF, 1980.

This volume tells the early life of a woman who figures importantly in *Rissa Kerguelen*. Zelda is a black woman who grew up as a 'Wild Child' beyond the confines of Total Welfare, but who was eventually caught and sent on a starship to a mining colony, along with a cargo of women destined to be prostitutes. However, the crew of the starship (aided by the 'cargo', the women) mutiny and they all go on to join the rebels. Again, Zelda's a bit too competent (especially for 16 years old) to be true, but never mind. It's a good tale.



THE COLDEN NACINATA, by Jessica Amanda Salmonson, 1982.

A sequel to *Tomoe Gozen*, further adventures of a female samurai. I liked this book much better than the first; although there's still quite a bit of bloodshed, much more emphasis is placed on Tomoe as a person, her doubts about her life, and her efforts to reconcile conflicting duties towards her family and her 'master'. There's still plenty of action, as she avenges a murder, wrests a magic weapon from a guardian beast in a volcano, and descends into Buddhist Hell. Hooray for the occasional heroic female!

IN THE HANDS OF GLORY, by Phyllis Eisenstein, Pocket, 1981.

This has definitely been my month for reading about 'heroic' women. This isn't a brilliant book at all, but it does have a strong female lead, and it's fairly well written. Lieutenant Dia Catlin, a young and idealistic Patrol pilot, is shot down over enemy territory and nursed back to health by a rebel doctor and an alien. After escaping from them, she is considered a hero and groomed for rapid advancement. Later she becomes disillusioned with the version of reality she's been fed all her life, and joins the rebels, helping them to attack the Patrol. One of the weaknesses of the book was an insufficient explanation for Dia's sudden change of allegiance, but if you can accept that, it's quite an exciting tale.

I've also recently read:

John Brunner's **PLAYERS AT THE GAME OF PEOPLE** (1980), which I thought was magnificent, though if I wrote as obscurely as he does, people would jump on me. Brunner can not only get away with it, but does so with flair. A variation on the Faust story.

Larry Niven, **RINGWORLD ENGINEERS** (1980). After all I'd heard negative about this book, I was surprised to find I enjoyed it immensely. Nothing terribly surprising in it, but much of interest and humour too.

Alvin Toffler, **THE THIRD WAVE** (1980). Not sf, though one could be forgiven for thinking it was. A pleasant analysis of where western society has been, and where it could be going, and the changes needed to take it in the direction that Toffler clearly thinks is desirable. He 'explains' the distressing things that are going on (especially in America) which many people interpret as 'breakdowns in society' (marriage, the work ethic, you name it), which he sees as positive steps. I happen to like the scenario he paints, but I think he's far too simplistic and upbeat about it.

Suzy McKee Chamas, **THE VAMPIRE TAPESTRY** (1980). A pleasant change from Chamas' heavily feminist polemic in earlier books. This one takes a new look at vampires, in the person of a university researcher whose cover is blown, and the things that happen to him. A chilling style makes one quite sympathetic to the poor vampire, who is after all only trying to survive. Very well written.

Stephen Donaldson, **THE ONE TREE** (1982). Further development of the character of Linden Avery enhances this 2nd volume of the 2nd Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, *The Unbeliever*. You'll either love them or be bored silly, depending on your preferences.

Roy Torgeson (editor), **CHRYSALIS 6** (1979). Includes a story by Australian author Leanne Frahm, 'The Wood for the Trees'. A good collection.

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LETTERS

As usual, I've received far too much correspondence to quote more than excerpts. Some, on rape and/or castration, will be held to next time. -- jean

BUCK COULSON (Route 3, Hartford City, IN 47348, USA), responding to my comments about legal barriers to amicable divorce, writes: '...From the viewpoint of a happily married individual, I'm not sure that some sort of adversary attitude isn't a requirement for divorce. I'm willing to support the no-fault divorce as a legal solution, but if the couple doesn't have an adversary attitude, there's no point in getting a divorce in the first place.'

((Well, I suppose it depends on how you define 'adversary'. I can think of lots of reasons why two people who still generally like each other might want a divorce. Of course I can think of few reasons why one should get married in the first place, so my bias is fairly evident. -JHW))

MIKE SCHAPER (211 Preston Point Rd, Bicton, WA 6157, Australia) looks at the housewife's role: 'It seems somewhat ironic that many of those who state they believe in equality are also amongst the first to react against it when they encounter something that doesn't fit in with their own concepts about freedom from stereotyping. Watching a recent episode of *Sixty Minutes* about husbands who prefer to keep house and allow their wives to be the breadwinners brought out a number of reactions from people around me; amusement at first, and then a kind of shocked incredulity that a man would actually willingly do this type of work. As an ideal, complete equality is fine, but in reality it's a different matter -- or so it seems it should be, to them.'

Similarly, have you ever come across Mark Clifton and Frank Riley's novel, *They'd Rather be Right*, wherein immortality is offered to everyone, on the proviso that they are willing to give up all their preconceived ideals and prejudices? Very few of the people concerned are ready or able to do so -- I wonder if it would not also be the same in reality?'

((No, I haven't seen that book. On men voluntarily doing the housework, I know several men who want to share childminding and housekeeping with their wives, but find it extremely difficult to arrange a part-time situation (even temporarily) at work. They feel, quite rightly, discriminated against as parents (of course a woman in the same situation would also find it difficult, though at least some 'maternity' leave may be available to her. The ideal of 'parental' leave for both parents is still a novelty, and the general reaction of the other men is that those men who want to stay home are, at best, a bit mad. -JHW))

LAURRAE TUENASI (2217 Majestic Way, Webster, NY 14580) thinks Rick Kennett might be interested in a Gene Roddenberry quote from a speech he made at the Monroe Community



College in Rochester, New York, back in 1975:

'After NBC decided to order a second *'Star Trek'* pilot, they came to me and said the woman had to go, because they couldn't believe a woman in charge of anything... I mentioned earlier the mind-expanding qualities of science fiction and you can hardly deal in propositions of equality of life-forms across the galaxy and not believe that sexual equality is so basic that it's an argument that should have finished and settled a year ago. I think typical of this is the way we laid out the original *Enterprise*; it was, in the original plans, it had fifty percent men and fifty percent women. I received another executive visit at that time. And they said, 'You can't have that'. And I said, 'Why on Earth, why not?' They said, 'Because it will look like there's a lot of fooling around out in space.' And we had a great argument there, too, and they finally came back in about a week and said, 'We had a conference, and this is a one and final offer we're going to make to you. You can have thirty percent women.' And I thought, well, hell, thirty percent healthy young girls could handle the rest of the ship anyway.'

((Wow, that last line is a real zinger... -JHW))

HARRY ANDRUSCHAK (P O Box 606, La Canada-Flintridge CA 91011 USA) writes, As for Hypatia Cluster, I am not impressed. Just what is it supposed to do that organizations like the L-5 society and the Interplanetary Society are not doing? I think it would be better for these space-oriented women to join the established groups and work inside them. For you had better believe we need workers... what non-profit group doesn't?

((I do not know about the specific groups you mention, but women often find themselves not taken seriously in 'established' groups -- they're welcome to work, but not to participate in decision-making. Also, I get the impression that Hypatia hopes to appeal to women, in particular, presumably because they feel the 'established' groups are not appealing to women. If this speculation has any validity, it might be well for the 'established' groups to re-examine their own internal structures and perhaps, make some changes. This, is, of course, merely a hypothesis based upon experience in such groups as environmentalists. -JHW))

((Harry goes on to point out an error in his article on women in space. The first American woman will not be a commander. She will be one of two mission specialists. Space Shuttle Mission 7, with Sally Ride aboard, is scheduled for launch in April 1983.))

GERALD SMITH (8 Frawley St, Frankston, Vic 3199, Australia)

Judith's "letter" to John Newman has helped me to realise the fundamental mistake I made in my comments to her original article... It is clear to me now that I have started from the assumption that housework is demeaning and beneath contempt. Working from that assumption (one totally without any evidence to support it), I have reasoned that anyone who voluntarily decides to do housework has simply been placed in a situation where they could do nothing else. This is an erroneous conclusion based on an unsupported premise.

NEVILLE ANGOVE (P O Box 770, Canberra City, ACT 2601, Australia) writes in response to my question about mental illness vs mental handicap;

Just as the 'pro handicap' lobby feel that by ignoring the term 'illness' they will change public acceptance, I feel that the same change in acceptance by the public (and I do not agree that this public acceptance will occur) could have far reaching negative effects.

Firstly (just to get rid of this red herring), there is no proof that calling an illness a handicap will make it more acceptable to the public. It is true that the two terms have different connotations, with 'handicap' being considered less severe. What is not true is that 'handicap' is more acceptable. Rather, that term tends to bring to mind the idea of visibly distasteful deformities, such as mongolism, Down's Syndrome, spasticity, paraplegia, and so on. Even totally non-visible illnesses such as epilepsy (when properly treated) are shunned, even though epilepsy has generally been treated as a handicap and not as an illness in the public mind. Basically, calling an illness a handicap is not necessarily doing the sufferer any favours.

(To me epilepsy has always been an 'illness', but one of the brain, not the mind, so that example strikes me as a 'red herring' in itself. -JHW)

But far more important is the attitude of the public, and of public administrators to an illness versus a handicap. A handicap is considered something to be endured because it cannot be cured, something that only responds to preventative treatment applied before the fact (that is, paraplegia is treated by preventing road accidents that smash spines, mongolism by aborting fetuses with the wrong chemical tracers in the amniotic fluid, and so on). I have nightmares about nursing staff in psychiatric clinics who just tut-tut to patients because they feel that any handicap is permanent, in spite of their professional training arguing otherwise, in spite of knowing that most handicaps affecting mentation can be reduced by appropriate training and medication. But the fact that the illness is called 'handicap' seems to immediately put it in the incurable category. And public administrators do not allocate funds for research into curing what is 'obviously' incurable.

By insisting that an illness be called an illness, you allow for the possibility of a cure to that illness, and you treat it as just a temporary ailment that does not have to be endured for the rest of the patient's life. It is true that some illnesses are only potentially curable, but it is this potential that permits us to allocate funds and manpower to research to find the cures. I strongly doubt that this attitude can be maintained if we refuse to admit that the illness is an illness, and attempting to have illnesses such as mental illnesses treated as handicaps is effectively such a refusal.

It is not impossible that the goals of the Anti-Discrimination Board (and others) might be better served if it were to engender a stronger public distaste for mental illness, to such an extent as to force additional

research into finding cures for those conditions that now seem to have distinct biochemical origins - this way there would be no mental illness to cause discrimination, eventually.

(Thank you for explaining your viewpoint in such detail, Neville. Now I think I'd better elaborate of my interjected remark in the previous column, about illness of the 'brain' versus illness of the 'mind'. I know perfectly well that the distinction between 'brain' (the physical aspect, organic tissue) and 'mind' is largely a matter of definition, and that many illnesses of the 'mind' are being discovered to have physical, organic (chemical etc) bases. My point is, again, public connotations of these words tends to differ. Amongst my acquaintances over the years, physical illnesses are more acceptable than 'mental' ones. Usually what they mean by 'mental' is 'emotional' or some variation of 'neurotic, psychotic' etc in all its popular psychology forms, which I know are often quite different from the clinical meanings.

I personally know several people who feel that their own alleged symptoms of emotional problems are unacceptable; they consider themselves something of a failure for having those symptoms, and feel that getting professional assistance in overcoming those problems would be a public admission of failure (particularly if their employer or workmates were to find out). But, if they should discover that their 'emotional' or 'mental' problem is really physical (reaction to something in the diet for example), that's acceptable. They are not suffering from lack of self-control or inability to cope, they're got an acceptable physical problem.

For example, fifteen years ago when I was taking the birth-control pill, it was not generally known that 'the Pill' causes mood changes in many women, particularly if taken in too large a dose. Many women, including myself, suffered through counselling for emotional problems, because no one realised the cause was actually chemical. Once off the Pill, I, my sister, and various others I know, soon found ourselves free of the distressing 'mental' problems. But the stigma of once having been treated for a mental disorder, still remains. --JHW)

DIANE FOX (P O Box 129, Lakemba, NSW 2195, Australia) sent me two long, interesting letters (on WWW#6 & 7, respectively), from which I can only quote a few excerpts, due to lack of space:

(re Hypatia Cluster); "As reproduction is a rather more personal matter for women than men, and science and technology may more and more control not only the manner of our reproduction but what we reproduce into, i.e. evolution, it should be even more important for women than for men to become interested and knowledgeable in and about such matters. If space travel will mutate our culture, the more women who are knowledgeably and effectively involved, the better."

(on cretinism etc): "...ordinary uneducated people... still see 'madness' and 'stupidity' as different things. ... Truth doesn't seem to drive out an error; only an opposing error seems strong enough. Human beings are alas, more insane than stupid. If stupidity was the only problem, they could accept the truth if it was clearly and repetitively explained to them calmly, instead of having to be brainwashed and emotionalised to change their views.

(re Leslie David's comments on Right-to-Lifers); "I see these people as being motivated mainly by the desire to decrease the amount of sexual behaviour that people are allowed to get away with... I don't think they would be greatly disturbed by the concept of children dying of starvation or being beaten to death -- as long as these deaths helped limit the amount of sexual freedom of others... I think there is a sinister element of sadism in the new puritanism. Rev. Fred Nile..."

claims that retarded or spastic children's misfortunes result from their parents' sexual immorality. When one remembers that one of Jesus Christ's most common deeds was the healing of the sick, one wonders if Rev. Nile's spiritual inspiration comes from the opposing source?

Incidentally, to digress (but to further underline the naive stupidity of people's views on the goodness of people who aren't total supporters of the establishment), have you heard about Linda Lovelace's book 'The Ordeal'? More about brainwashing, physical torture, rape, death threats to her and to her family by the man who forced her (at gunpoint, she claims) to 'star' in the supposedly 'liberated' erotic movie, 'Deep Throat'. I'd imagine that such a book might well be suspect, but am inclined to suspect evil and coercion rather than mere venality was involved here, with Linda Lovelace as the victim. You can get away with almost any atrocity if you convince people that you are the enemy of their enemy."

(re illness or handicap): "I'd agree that it would be unfair and discriminatory to lump 'retarded' and 'psychologically disturbed' people together as 'mentally ill'. A retarded person may be perfectly sane and sensible, and an unbalanced person has probably been sent that way by the stresses of life and could have a towering IQ. In fact many high IQ people are liable to be driven up the wall by the frustration of dealing with petty normals."

(re retarded children); "Most people are strongly conditioned to regard leaving a child in an institution with horror and dread - they'd rather see it dead. If it's retarded or whatever, they visualise it lying in its own excrement for days, or tormented by sadistic adults or older children, etc. If it's not retarded, they see it as hating its parents for 'handing it over' like a prisoner betrayed into a concentration camp."

((Diane also comments on castration etc but I'm saving all the comments on that issue until next time when I can put them all together. - JHW))

Christine Ashby (P O Box 175, South Melbourne, Vic. 3205, Australia) wrote at some length about my comments on her letter last time. She pointed out that babies for adoption were those their parents chose not to keep, and also said, "if the State doesn't think you can cope then your child will be taken from you. The child will be charged with being neglected; the parents won't be punished - unless that is your term for being subjected to the attentions of social workers." ((To which I reply, I know one can sign a paper to turn one's child over to the state, but I thought it was very difficult for a child to be placed for adoption unless the parents are known to be dead, or they have given consent. Otherwise the child can go into an institution or to a foster home, but its future is likely to be very unstable. Thus, although a parent can abandon a child, there are quite appropriate pressures for this to not happen. As for 'neglected' children, I've gained the impression that the evaluation of neglect is highly subjective and often different from what I'd think -- for example, lesbian mothers are often considered unsuitable almost by definition, yet numerous clear cases of incest do not result in the victim being placed in protective custody.))

Christine then goes on to point out that disabled adults (eg accident victims) are "very often discharged into the care of relatives who have to struggle on as best they can with what support services are available."

In a later letter, she adds, "People are no more compelled to care for adults than for infants" to her earlier comment that "at the time of the injury or acute illness, people can only think of imploring the doctors to save the life of their nearest and dearest, and are not concerned with what will come later."

"You and your correspondents seem to be exclusively concerned with the parents of deformed babies (and the relatives of injured adults); if I can assure you that these parents won't be forced to look after their babies, well that's all right then, and we can consider the discussion closed. You appear to totally disregard the fundamental problem of whether by medical intervention an intolerable existence will be imposed upon the child, regardless of considerations of parental inconvenience."

((Well, I can't speak for my correspondents (let's hear your views), but as for myself: it is the fact that the responsibility for a child is so enmeshed in any decision about the child's best interests, that makes the whole issue difficult to sort out. As a generality, I think the best interests of a deformed child are usually not served by turning it over to its parents. Nor do I think its best interests are necessarily served by putting it in an institution. I do think, in many cases, the best interests of the child (or the maimed adult) are served by allowing it to die. Let me also point out that I think we're all better off dead, so if you want to write me off straightaway as too weird to talk to, fair enough. Let me also say immediately that in no way do I suggest that deformed children should be put to death (or allowed to die) without exception. I cannot make a definitive list of which cases I think would be best allowed to die, nor do I think it is appropriate that I do so.



Unfortunately, the person who should make the decision, the child itself, cannot. So someone must. In practice, if not in law, this someone is usually either the doctor or the parents, or both. Given that this is the case, and given that people perceive (at least many do) giving their child up to an institution to be a terrible thing to do, they perceive their choices as limited, and they cannot easily divorce their own feelings (eg 'how the hell will I cope') from what's best for the child. They may feel obliged to cope, out of guilt feelings, and thus may make a decision that will not help anyone. I believe that if the guilt were removed from the decision to give up a child or to allow it to die, then people would be better able to make a choice that would be in the child's interests.

All of that is rather theoretical, so I'll add that for myself (switching back to the issue of maimed adults) I would probably want to be allowed to die if I were going to be very seriously disabled following illness or an accident. I would not want to be a burden on anyone else, and I can't imagine I'd enjoy life very much anyway. I accept that other people have different priorities. -JHW))

Christine again; "If Derrick broke his neck I guarantee you that I would not ask that he be let die because I couldn't look after him later on."

JULIE VAUX (14 Zara Rd, Willoughby, NSW 2068, Australia) These comments excerpted from three letters from Julie, who also sent several postcards while on her recent overseas travels. "It may interest you to know that in Negri Sembilan (Nine States), the province south of Selangor (the area surrounding Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia), the women inherit the property and land rights. The people here came from West Sumatra, an area less Islamized. The Islamic influence here is obvious but not overbearing. Chinese and Malays wear long slacks or skirts. The Chinese girls who are more Westernized rarely wear jeans or skimpy tops."

"You are right about women not being allowed to be aggressive or assertive. There are some males at work who think they can make a game of insulting and aggravating me, because excluding the occasional pimple I am reasonably physically attractive and 'free', i.e. I'm nobody's property (girl friend or wife) but refuse to flirt or act silly unless I want to or am working with someone I like, and also I straight talk them and tell them what bullies they are. Unfortunately since we have fixed stations one can't always just walk away from them and I wish I could understand why they think it's alright to make a game of insulting people. A strange male attitude, if it's a game it's alright. Why is verbal violence acceptable? I don't mean they swear at me or call me a bitch or use obscene words. They don't, but they seem to think insults should be disregarded. Two of them started talking when I was working near them about how I should be married. They apparently think a diet of regular sex and male dominance would improve my temper and turn me into a proper woman. These two are notorious for working slowly and one takes pleasure in lighting his cigarettes near me and he knows smoke annoys me. Presumably his wife has been taught women should not object to their men smoking clouds of fumes near them. Jean, I get very tired of being told I'm weird 'cos I defend myself and because I believe it's possible to be assertive even aggro in a feminine manner. Come let us walk like the tiger on the wild side.

(I suspect these men pick on you because they know they can get a reaction. It is very difficult sometimes to let someone know that you do not accept their stupidities, without getting so angry they feel they've succeeded in their little games. Perhaps you should just ignore them. Or if there are any other women

around who agree with you, perhaps you could gang up and harass the men a bit, to let them know you won't let them get away with it. I have quite a repertoire of smart comebacks, but they are more appropriate to the educated men I work with, than the ones you have to deal with.--JHW))

FRANK MACSKASY JNR (P O Box 27274, Upper Willis St PO, Wellington 1, New Zealand):

"One thing which struck me when I saw the cover was that John has drawn the dead (I presumed it so) creature with its eyes open. Most animals do not close their eyes upon death, and I thought this a very realistic item to include in the scene."

"If Aboriginal women reject traditions from their culture, as free human beings they should be able to do so with no fear of harassment or retribution. If that means 'white feminists' giving a hand to help them, so be it. Non-European cultures (Black African, Amerindian, Asian, Aboriginal, Maori, etc.) have no rights to enforce their traditions upon members of their society if those members seek an alternative. Just as Europeans have no right to enforce their values and ideas either. Basically I think it boils down to this: individual choice. Anything else, or any 'exceptions', smacks of repression and coercion."

S.
DAVE DISMORE (516/Alexandria #103, Los Angeles CA 90020, USA) continues to send me

clippings of his ride across America for the Equal Rights Amendment. By the way, I assume all my readers have heard that the amendment died three votes short of ratification. I thought you might like to see a photo of Dave, so have attempted to reproduce one below. Hope it prints well enough to see what he looks like. Dave also sent a postcard advertisement for his services, from which I quote:

"RENT AN ACTIVIST ***LIMITED TIME OFFER***
NEW & IMPROVED... I'm back from the Bikeathon and ready to work!... I'm looking for part-time/temporary work like: (A) That unique position you'd been saving for your brother-in-law until his parole fell through. (B) The odd job around the house that just isn't going to get done until you pay someone to do it (and get the spouse/kids/neighbors/Board of Health off your back).

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Debi Kean, Jack Herman, Warren Nicholls, Leslie David, Jan Howard Finder, Kevin Dillon, Margaret Sanders, Richard Faulder, Robert Clements, Sue Pagram, Jane Taubman, John Alderson, some of whom will be quoted next time.



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ADDRESSES OF CONTRIBUTORS

Alison Cowling, 9/14 Liddiard St, Glenferrie, Hawthorn Vic 3122
 Carole Cranwell, PO Box 79, Warringah Mall, Brookvale, NSW 2100
 Richard Faulder, Yanco Agric. Research Station, Yanco NSW 2703
 Joanna Masters, Perth (not sure of present address)
 Mike McGann, 483 Beauchamp Rd, Maroubra NSW 2035
 Marc Ortlieb, P O Box 46, Marden SA 5070
 Gerald Smith, 8 Frawley St, Frankston Vic 3199
 Jane Taubman, 2/2A Milner Cres, Wollstonecraft, NSW 2065
 Peter Toluzzi, P O Box H143, Australia Square NSW 2000
 Julie Vaux, 14 Zara Rd, Willoughby NSW 2068

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A POEM BY DOROTHY PARKER

Indian Summer

In youth, it was a way I had
 To do my best to please,
 And change, with every passing lad,
 To suit his theories.

But now I know the things I know,
 And do the things I do;
 And if you do not like me so,
 To hell, my love, with you!

