

Weber Woman's Wrevenge

Volume 3, Number 6

May 1984

Registered by Australia Post, Publication No NBH4389



Please Get Your Sheep Out of My Swimming Pool

by Lyn McConchie

Over the years I have owned a lot of animals: cats, dogs, horses, etc. I have discovered that not only does one have to have endless patience with animals, but it helps if one is also on good terms with the neighbours. Five years ago I bought a small cottage down at the beach. Luckily only one out of the five places bordering on mine is occupied all year round; the others are tenanted only at Christmas and the odd summer weekend.

When I arrived, I had two cats. Tabby Tigger sat watching me sort books onto bookshelves and, reassured by a well known routine, wandered out to explore. Ming, blue eyes wide with interest, had already vanished into the hedge, from which she reappeared at regular intervals, to inform me in a loud Siamese wail of all her discoveries.

What I didn't know was that the permanent tenants on one side were the owners of a large outdoor aviary. In this were quail, budgies, love birds and canaries. Tigger, who for years has considered little birds rather beneath his hunting skill, was quite un-interested in the aviary and its occupants. Ming, who has a food track mind, took one look and dedicated her time to a ways and means study.

The neighbours didn't know me, but after a couple of weeks they certainly knew Ming. Every time they looked out of their kitchen window, there - blue eyes glowing with fervour - would be my dear little Siamese pursuing her latest hobby. The aviary was quite high, about 7-8 feet; Ming was climbing up and from a comfortable seat on top, bird-watching at close range.

This, quite naturally, gave the assorted residents nervous palpitations. Equally naturally, their owners would look out to see why, and leap forth to protect their pets. I daresay the first few times they failed to see just what result they were provoking, and by the time it dawned on them the pattern was set. As soon as they opened the back door, Ming would look up, and then run the length of the aviary on top, jump down into the hedge and vanish into my place.

The birds disliked her sitting quietly on their aviary and watching them, but the sight of her, hurtling across the aviary at full speed only a paw's length or so away, produced a lot more than palpitations. So there we were after three weeks: me, still shelving and sorting books in my library; Tigger, alternately keeping me company and sunning himself on the lawn; Ming, joyously practising ornithological research; and forty-two assorted species of bird and their owners suffering from incipient nervous breakdowns.



Why it never occurred to them to speak to me, I'll never know. Instead, the story got back in the usual sort of way common to small towns. My friend's mother plays bowls, the woman next door plays bowls, and when at bowls, my by now totally exasperated neighbour told the entire beach bowling club all about it. My friend's mother came home, rang my friend and told her the story. Five minutes later my friend was telling me. I headed next door and discussed the problem. A couple of days later I had managed to put a stop to Ming's forays.

Things were peaceful for ages, until I was given a rabbit. Hooper was a very nice, very large, gray rabbit. Everything was fine for awhile. Then the rabbit down the road fell in love with Hooper. The first I knew of it was looking out the window and seeing that Hooper was out. Hooper was often out; however, on this occasion, I knew I hadn't let her out, and I was curious as to how she'd managed her escape.

At close range, it suddenly dawned on me that Hooper was still in her cage and that this was a different rabbit. Slightly smaller, and more of an iron grey than a powder grey, he sat nose to nose with Hooper, pressed as close as he could get through the wire. I managed to persuade him into a spare cage and blocked them apart. A couple of hours later his owner turned up and I discovered they both lived two houses down from me.

The visiting rabbit was called Thumper (after the rabbit in Bambi) and belonged to Simon, who kept him in a moveable cage on their back lawn. Why Thumper developed this passion for Hooper I don't know. We have a lagoon at the beach, only a short distance from my place; this is a reserve and there are hundreds of rabbits living there wild. Thumper could have found a female there without any trouble at all, and one moreover who was not caged away. Maybe it was the lure of the unattainable. For weeks whenever I glanced out of the window, Thumper - escaped again - would be cuddled up to Hooper on the other side of the wire. Eventually Simon got sick of trudging round to collect his rabbit and shifted Thumper's cage onto my lawn next to Hooper's.

The next development was my guilt. Thumper's pleading face started to make me feel like all of Romeo and Juliet's parents combined. Oh well, in for a penny, in for a pound, and Thumper in with Hooper. This produced a population explosion. I now had thirteen rabbits on the lawn, and if I didn't think of an idea soon I'd have no lawn. Thumper still loved Hooper and I wondered if our Vet would spey a rabbit, and what he would say if I asked him to.

It was about now that the sheep arrived. Two ewes named Emily and Ermintrude. The lawn where my rabbit family weren't was growing madly and two sheep should keep it down nicely for me. They were a friendly pair, ex-bottled lambs and used to humans. What I hadn't taken into account were the cats. Tig, who has seen many animals come and go, wandered out, looked at the sheep, looked at me, said something I will not repeat, and thereafter ignored them. They ignored him as well. Ming was a different kettle of fish.

For a start, she had never had much to do with sheep before, not at close range anyway, and she was absolutely fascinated by them. The sheep, oddly enough, were fascinated back. Whether it was her Siamese voice, which they'd never heard anything like before, I don't know. But as a result the three of them spent their spare time doing stately minuets across the lawn. This was because neither Ming nor the sheep wanted to get too close to each other, just in case. But all three wanted to get close enough to get a good look.

Ming would advance slowly on the grazing sheep; once she got close enough for her purpose, she would sit down. The sheep would then decide to have a closer look at her, she would get up and retreat a little, the sheep would stop, Ming would advance now they were stationary, and the sheep would retreat.

Things might still be that way, if the people on the other side hadn't rented their cottage for the summer, and let a snake into our Eden. I like dogs; what I don't like is dog owners. In this case a young couple who allowed their dog to roam the streets all day. It wasn't as if it was a little dog either; instead it was a big, hulking, bad tempered German Shepherd that chased cars.

If I rang the ranger once about that dog, I rang a dozen times. And not only me: my friend on the corner who nearly crashed her car when the dog appeared from the side and bounced off her half-open window, seemingly in an attempt to get at her; the chap who looks after the beach loos, who got fed up dodging the dog on the road at five every morning; and several others - all to no avail.

Well, of course the inevitable happened and I arrived home one night to find that the rabbit's cages had been broken into. Three of the babies were dead, and Hooper and the rest were all missing. We knew it had been the dog - he had been seen, but the person who had seen him wasn't game to interfere (and I don't blame them, they could have been attacked as well). Hooper and the babies were never found, and when I paid a visit to the dog's owners they offered me money.

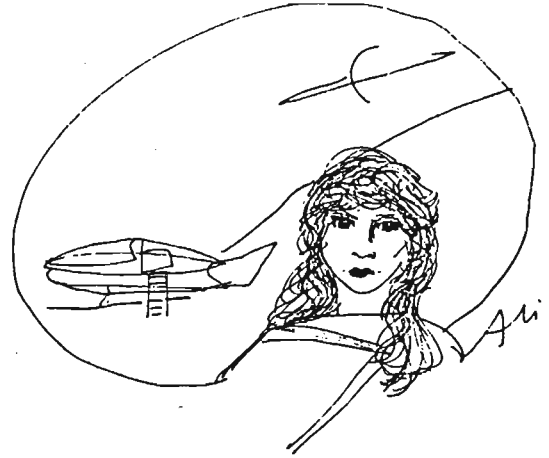
Needless to say they got told what to do with it. All I wanted was their promise that the dog would be kept on their property and not allowed to roam. For a whole month he was; then, presumably deciding that was long enough, they began to let him run wild again. With the rabbits no longer there, he turned to the sheep. Emily and Ermintrude weren't being hurt, just chased, but that was enough. I kept coming home to find them missing, and having to tear round the neighbourhood looking for them. (Something I didn't much feel like on top of a twelve hour day.) Mostly they would be on the property behind me, having gone through the hedge in their panic to get away. Having panic-stricken sheep hurtling through it at regular intervals wasn't doing the hedge much good either.

After a few weeks of this, finally I walked out on a Saturday morning early, just in time to catch the dog bailing the sheep up in a corner. Unluckily for him, I had the little axe in my hand, on the way to produce a bit of kindling. For a moment I thought he was going to attack. I waved the axe and he changed his mind and cleared out, but I'd had enough of the whole thing. I might have changed my mind, but the sheep went missing the following day before I got up. When I noticed they were gone, I started looking, to be met down the road by a somewhat bewildered bloke in bathing togs, asking if I had lost a sheep. It seems he had been dozing beside his swimming pool on a lounge, when a sheep had suddenly rocketed past him and into the pool. Could I please get my sheep out of his swimming pool? It wasn't easy. Emily dry didn't weigh much; Emily wet weighed a ton - at least that's what she felt like.

Eventually I retrieved her, walked her home and dried her off. Ermintrude turned up in someone's garden, and I rang a friend who has a farm. They would like two sheep? Yes, very much! I was sorry to lose them, but it wasn't fair to keep them under such conditions, and that dog was going to be around for months yet.

The only thing is, no sheep and the grass gets longer and longer. So I was at our local library a couple of months ago muttering about the damn grass. Zophie, who has a few acres and breeds Chihuahuas and goats, piped up with the offer of a spare goat. So I now have a goat; so far he has butted a TV star, me, several friends, and a would-be rapist. Not to mention a Mormon, and the postie. At least he is used to being tethered, unlike the sheep. This means that he is less likely to get me into trouble with the neighbours. Considering the above list of buttees, that's just as well.

BOOK REVIEWS



Joy Chant, When Voiha Wakes, Unwin Paperbacks, 1983.

This book turned out to be quite different from what I'd expected from the title and the blurb, and it's much more to my liking. It's very much a feminist book, but without being preachy. It's marketed as fantasy, but the only real 'fantasy' element is its setting on a different planet (in a different universe?). It's the same planet as Joy Chant's novels RED MOON AND BLACK MOUNTAIN and THE GREY MAME OF MORNING, both of which I enjoyed. But there is no 'magic' in this story - except for the 'magic' of love.

This is also very much a love story - but one with several great differences from the usual love story. Firstly, here is a society in which the men and women live separately (the women and their children in houses, sometimes several 'families' - usually sisters, or a mother and her adult daughter and the younger children of either - and the men in 'lodges' across the river), and the women are the lawmakers, the merchants, etc. Men are craftsmen or (if they haven't the skill or intelligence) labourers. There is a clear division of sex roles and very strong societal pressure not to transgress those roles.

That is the background. Enter the two main characters: Rahike, the Young Mistress of the town (in training to be the ranking secular leader when the Mistress retires), and Mairilek, a young man who desperately wants to be a musician. Unfortunately, music is not considered a craft in their town. When Rahike brings Mairilek a musical instrument from another town, and then allows him to practice playing it in her home, gossip abounds - it is especially improper for the Young Mistress, who is supposed to set a good example for all in upholding their rigid customs. Eventually Rahike realises she has come to love Mairilek, and is frightened as she comes to appreciate how different love is from lust.

The most powerful aspect of the book, to me, was the treatment of the relationship between Rahike and Mairilek. There was no suggestion that one would try to dominate the other, or that either would give up his or her 'future' for the other. Rahike learns about other musicians and helps

Mairilek to meet them, even though she knows he will have to leave her to pursue his destiny. But because she loves him, she will let him go. A beautiful and moving account of what I see as 'true love': loving someone enough to do what's right for them, even though you may be hurt in the process - and even more importantly, letting the other person make his or her own choices on the matter. In other words, an honest expression of one's own needs and desires, but no emotional blackmail.

One minor failing was the lack of any mention whatsoever of non-heterosexual relationships, despite Chant's close look at most other sexual attitudes and practices. Surely in a segregated society such as this, loving relationships would develop between members of the same sex. It's true that the issue was irrelevant to the main events of the story, but it did leave a gap in the reader's understanding of the society. On the other hand, I suppose one could be grateful that we weren't presented with a horrified condemnation of homosexuality.

This book spoke very strongly to me, and I was impressed. I think you will be, too.

Anne McCaffrey, Moreta - Dragonlady of Pern, Severn House, hardcover.

Another book set on the planet Pern, made famous in the other six 'Dragonrider' books. I didn't find this one quite as fascinating as the previous ones, but I certainly did enjoy it. I especially appreciated the ending, which was very fitting after all that had gone before - but was very sad. Anne McCaffrey says she writes love stories in a science fiction setting, and this is no exception.

Moreta, the title character, is a Weyrwoman, the ranking female in one of the communities raising and working with the 'dragons' of Pern. In this position she (like Rahike in Joy Chant's WHEN VOIHA WAKES) is expected to maintain a certain decorum and adherence to custom, and is severely criticised when she does not do so.

This problem, however, soon becomes submerged in a greater problem: a very severe epidemic which is sweeping across the continent and killing both people and runnerbeasts (horses). Most of the book concerns the detective-type efforts by Moreta and others to determine what's causing the epidemic and how to stop it. During the course of this investigation (which only lasts about two weeks but seems like months, both to the characters and to the reader), Moreta and others are called upon to deal in a no-nonsense way with a lot of ignorant, stubborn and frightened people.

The book is full of suspense, excitement, adventure, and good characterisation, all very well written in a manner that gripped my attention. I only say I liked it less than the other books; less is a comparative term. I certainly thought it far superior to a lot of things I read.

For anyone not familiar with McCaffrey's dragon series, do not be fooled by the cover into thinking this is fantasy. The "dragons" are actually genetically-engineered creatures bred for a specific purpose on a planet colonized many generations ago by Earth people. To explain the background would take far too long, but it is summarised in the book for the benefit of new readers. One thing I especially liked about this novel is the fact that competence (and other positive qualities) occur in both sexes in about equal measure with various negative traits (stubbornness and incompetence, for example). Previous books in this series exhibited a bit more sex-role stereotyping, but in general both sexes are found in most of the jobs (there are some exceptions: the cooks tend to be female, for example). I've long felt that some feminist criticism of this series is mostly complaining that McCaffrey didn't write the story they wanted to read - hardly a fair or valid criticism of any novelist.

Mary Gentle, Golden Witchbreed, Gollancz, hardcover, 1983.

This book deserves lots of superlatives. Mary Gentle has accomplished quite a feat: she's done a variation on a story-telling technique which I generally don't like, and kept me interested all the way through 476 pages. The theme of the book is one I like (when it's done well, as it is here): earth envoy - in this case a woman - meets alien culture and learns not only about the aliens but also about herself and her own culture. The technique is that of the envoy taking a trip around part of the alien planet, meeting various races and having adventures along the way. Typically in science fiction books, the "reason" for this trip is merely some excuse for the author to tell a bunch of stories and trot out a whole stable of exotic creatures which inhabit the planet. Sometimes these are very well done, but usually they still don't interest me very much.

But Gentle's story is only superficially in this group. Her envoy goes travelling a right (an envoy should, after all, meet the people, not just the government or religious leaders), and the Bad Guys try to kill her, and she has all sorts of harrowing adventures while she treks around quite a bit of the continent while surviving, but it all fits into a coherent whole. It leads to certain events which wrap the book up, while yet leaving mysteries that no one (other than a superhero) could reasonably be expected to figure out in a mere year or so in an alien culture.

Gentle has also worked in as a sub-theme a favourite topic of mine: how would a society develop if its children were not raised as females or males, but all the same? Ursula Le Guin tackled the question in THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, but there the adults as well can be either male or female (and usually are both, at various times in their lives). Gentle's Ortheans are neuter until their equivalent of puberty, when they become the sex they will remain for the rest of their lives. However, since until then no one has any idea which sex they will be, all children are naturally raised simply as children. And since by the time they "change", they are fairly well trained in some skill, having served as apprentices for some years, virtually all occupations have both male and female practitioners. This situation is not discussed; it simply is. The Earth envoy and other Earth people do not realise the true situation (after all, even pre-pubertal Earth children look fairly "neuter" except for their genitals, which are not usually visible in public). One day, however, the envoy suddenly realises that Orthean children are neuter, and at the same time her Orthean companion realises that Earth children are sexed. Both are shocked. The Orthean's reaction is: But how do you know when they are adults? The Earth envoy's reaction is: But how can you raise a child if you don't know what sex it is? (And immediately recognizes what a stupid question that is.)

Ah, but what about this Golden Witchbreed stuff in the title, you may ask? So did I, and I'm still wondering. The title misleads one into expecting a fantasy, with magic and all that, but the Golden Witchbreed were apparently the former ruling group of the planet, and rumours abound that they are still about somewhere. Certainly the fear of them underlies much of the actions of Ortheans. They are the central mystery of the book, always lurking in the background. We are eventually told who and what they were, and what they did, but neither the envoy nor the reader learn whether they are still around.

I loved this book. It was very well written, quite convincing and internally consistent, and addresses some very important topics. I would highly recommend it, even at the hardcover price, and that's not something I often say.



Marion Zimmer Bradley, Thendara House, Daw, paperback, 1983.

This is the long- and eagerly-awaited sequel to THE SHATTERED CHAIN, set on the planet Darkover. (If anyone hasn't been introduced to the Darkover series, I urge you to rush right out and borrow a few volumes - preferably recently written ones.) Bradley deals here directly with the issue of lesbianism with the Renunciates of "Guide of Free Amazons" - those women who have renounced the traditional role of wife and mother, to join a Guild which offers them both protection and dignity.

The "Free Amazons" have been bit players in several books about Darkover, and had a leading role in THE SHATTERED CHAIN, but never before has the reader had the opportunity to look inside the Guild itself. Much of this book takes place within Thendara House, the Guild's communal home in Thendara, the Darkovan capital. Magda, a Terran woman born and raised on Darkover, whom we met in THE SHATTERED CHAIN, has come to the Guildhouse for six months of initiate training. We see not only her daily life, but also her reactions to it (it's primitive by her Terran standards).

Quite a bit of feminist theory is stirred into this book, and many of the debates between the Renunciates themselves reminded me of debates within feminist groups I've belonged to - as no doubt they were intended to. I think it's a good book to give to someone who wants to know what feminists are really on about (and/or who doubts the differences of opinion within the feminist community, who thinks there is a feminist "dogma"). The women here are individuals. Some love men and bear children (there is no barrier to "freemate" marriage or childbearing outside marriage for a Renunciate, but boys over a certain age must be fostered out to homes outside the Guildhouse); some love women. Some show characteristics typically considered "masculine", others "feminine". They argue; they help each other; they have sulks and ecstasies, just like everyone else.

Bradley's brilliant touch was to also have a Renunciate go to live in the Terran community, where she must learn to adapt, just as Magda does in the Guildhouse. Jaelle is freemate to Magda's former husband (a nice touch) and finds his Terran male habits and assumptions very difficult to take. She tries to explain her point of view to him; he simply doesn't hear her. The contrasts (and similarities) between the two women's experiences make absorbing reading.

Lee Killough, A Voice Out of Ramah, Daw, 1981.

Reviewed by Deborah Kean

Killough portrays a world settled by Fundamentalists, visited two hundred years later by a ship selling (or attempting to sell) a "matter transmitter". The woman whose job it is to sell the thing lands with her male escort, who

promptly becomes very ill. Naturally, the male is taken for the Terran representative, the woman for his personal assistant. She explains the error, and is told about a sex-linked disease that kills 90% of males in adolescence.

She nurses her escort through his rapid decline into death, and realises that she's stuck on the planet. She would carry the infection back to her ship... She arranges with the Captain of her ship (a woman) to try to find a cure for the disease. Confidently announcing that medical technology will find a cure, she is struck by the horror of the male establishment.

One man, a priest, and so a higher-up in Maran society (anagram Ramah, and Hebrew for bitter), confesses the vile truth. The population is by now largely immune. The death rate is caused by systematic killing that enhances male scarcity value, and ensures both male domination and female nurturing of the surviving males.

With the help of the Terran woman, the repentant priest exposes the whole system. Hunted by his erstwhile colleagues, he is forced into passing as a woman. Killough uses this brilliantly, to bring home to her male character (and the reader) what a sexist society is like to those on the bottom - women. Very highly recommended.

Margaret O'Donnell, The Beehive.

Reviewed by Deborah Kean

"The Beehive" is similar in many ways to "A Voice out of Ramah". A small country (Ireland, though never identified as such) has been under a fascist dictatorship for thirty years. The dictator, Gorston, is a mad misogynist, elected on promises of taking married women out of the workforce, thereby effecting full male employment. Having done so, Gorston realised that women had been propping up the economy, with their work and a low rate for the job. The top fifteen per cent, intellectually, of girls are then sent to special schools, brain-washed into a total denial of sexuality, forced to dye their hair grey at 18, and assigned to the workforce. These women workers are not really women.

One woman, Sarah Hillard, resisted the brainwashing, keeping a feeling of self-worth, and has created an underground of women bent on overthrowing the dictatorship. A man, Carl Tolland, comes back to the country, having been taken away as a small boy by his mother, a political refugee. A careless sexist all his life, Tolland's awakening comes when, on meeting Sarah, he starts to examine the country he's come back to. He sees how its extremes are different from his own casual assumptions only in degree. His desire to "help" the women nearly ruins the whole up-rising, but in the end the women triumph. The book ends with Sarah realising the harder fight is still ahead - against men who feel that Gorston's regime went too far, but that it is still natural that women "know their place".

Margaret O'Donnell has been a campaigner for the legalisation of contraception in Ireland, for many years.

DIARY NOTES



1 March 1984. On 18 February I started a week's holiday, and I sure needed it. I had intended to go up to Eric's for ten days, but with my Small Business Management Course on Monday night, and heaps of chores to do around my own house (such as mowing the lawn and bottling pears), I decided to stay in Canberra until Tuesday. This was just as well, as Eric phoned to say he was suffering from an especially obnoxious virus. Sunday I came down with something unpleasant myself, and didn't feel much like doing any more than reading a book; so not much got done.

Tuesday I finally drove up to Faulconbridge, arriving at Eric's a few minutes after he got home from work. He greeted me with, among other bits of news, an advertisement for a job opening for an editor at the Australian Museum. A quick perusal of the ad convinced me that they were highly unlikely to be paying anywhere near my present salary, but on Wednesday morning I phoned anyway, just to check. I was right about their intended salary range, but during the course of the conversation they expressed great interest in having a talk with me ("no obligations on either side") about possibilities in the future. Fine by me.

Wednesday I spent printing half of the March issue of *Wrevenge*. Thursday I trekked into Sydney on the train for an interview at the Museum. This was a most enjoyable experience, with the interviewers spending most of their time trying to figure out how they could afford my asking price, and offering various other inducements (such as part-time work, which I want, and work-from-home, ideal if I want to live in Faulconbridge but not commute into the city all the time). They'd obviously quickly decided they wanted to hire me; it was just a matter of how to manage it.

I finally potted off, sure I wouldn't get a firm offer but having enjoyed the interview, and fronted up at Galaxy Bookshop, where Harry Harrison and Bert Chandler were signing books. Nattered to quite a few friends who showed up, then joined Bert, Harry and his wife Joan, and half a dozen assorted Sydney fans, for dinner at a nearby Greek restaurant. Quite pleasant, until the cigars came out. Left soon thereafter as I wanted to catch a train.

Friday was devoted to more fanzine printing, and the beginnings of collation. Saturday (my 41st birthday) Eric and I braved the trains again to attend a day of Syncon 84, a small con organized specifically to take advantage of

Harry Harrison's Australian tour. Again, it was nice to talk to various friends, but the con itself was not impressive and we grew bored early. Not a particularly auspicious birthday for me, but then nothing negative happened, so I suppose I shouldn't complain.

Sunday we collated, and stuffed envelopes. Somewhere in the midst of this week, I was introduced to my new microcomputer. I left on Monday with a carload of computer gear, a printer, and far too many manuals. Got home in time to collect the cat and the mail, harvest mushrooms, tomatoes and very overgrown zucchini's, eat a quick dinner and rush off to class.

Tuesday I turned up at work to discover that all hell had broken loose in my absence. Upon reflection, I realised this wasn't surprising, and was glad I'd missed as much as I had. It all started on February 9, with a long-awaited decision by the Powers That Be to split the Division of Computing Research into two segments, the service section or computing network (CSIRONET) itself, and a smaller advanced-research section which would form the nucleus of a new Information Technology group. The Friday before I went on holiday, several high-ranking people addressed a general staff meeting to tell us of these developments, which would not take effect until 1 January 1985, and to field questions on the effect this might have on the staff. It was quite evident that most of the nitty-gritty decisions had not yet been made.

While I was away, two more staff meetings were held. The Chief of the Division announced that he was confident he would succeed in his bid to remove CSIRONET from CSIRO completely (this rumour had been going around for some time, but the betting previously had been that he wouldn't succeed). If this occurred, we would have the "opportunity" for much improved terms and conditions of employment, as we'd no longer be required to conform to CSIRO or Public Service bureaucratic rules. He also conceded that there would also be the "opportunity" for management to do such things as get rid of unsatisfactory staff (by sending them back to CSIRO). The next event, hardly surprising, was a meeting of the Officers' Association, the union covering professional staff, at which it was decided to work with the other unions (technical and administrative staff) to ensure we got the deal the staff wanted.

Fine. It is now Tuesday, 28 February. I turn up at work and am immediately approached by the local rep for the Technical Officers' Association (Joanne, a personal friend of mine), who announces that one of the two Officers' Association reps does not want to be bothered to do any work on the issue. She was urging me, as a member of the OA, to light a fire under my rep's tail. So I spent half the morning doing just that. By mid-afternoon, people were rushing madly this way and that, meetings were being organised, etc, and I'm trying to quietly fade into the carpet before someone decides to nominate me to actually do some work. Meanwhile I'm trying to catch up on my work.

In the evening, I rushed off to Mark Denbow's to recover a monitor Eric had lent him, and returned to unpack all the bits and pieces of the Apple system and plug it in. That was when I discovered I did not have a crucial lead, the one between the computer and the monitor. So I could start up the computer fine, load programs, and all that - but it could not reply, at least in any form meaningful to me. Needless to say, there is no place in Canberra where one can buy a phono lead at 8:30 pm. Grumping, I read a book instead.

Wednesday, following another hectic day at work, during which I slipped out to buy a lead and some extra disks, I plugged everything in and started learning how to use one of the 3 or 4 word processing programs Eric has provided me with (Apple Writer II). I was astonished to note that I didn't have any problems, though I got a bit confused at times (that's to be expected).

Today I tried to use the printer. No luck. Eric had warned me that I might have to remove a card from the guts of the printer, so I phoned him to find out how to do it. After that, and a few false starts, I got it going okay. So here I am, starting a diary on disk.

5 March. I've about decided to give up on the contact lenses. You would not believe the hassles I've had - weirdly enough, not so much when wearing the lenses, but after I take them off! About an hour later, my eye goes all bloodshot and swells up, itches like crazy, and shows other hyper-allergic type symptoms. This does not occur every time, but often enough to be a concern, and mostly when least convenient. And of course, never when one could see a medico about it. (I saw one specialist, but after 2 weeks delay getting an appointment, I had no visible symptoms and he was most unpleasant about my "wasting his time".) I have got new glasses, with frames that may be wearable despite my nose. I sure hope so!

After I'd been formally advised by the Australian Museum that they could not make me an offer (last Tuesday, in the midst of all the other excitement), I found I was actually rather relieved. I've been complaining about wanting to move to Eric's ever since I've been back in Canberra, and looking for a suitable job in Sydney (suitable = part-time, interesting, in an part of the city easily accessible by train, and well paid; I don't want much). This one would have filled all my requirements if only they could have come up with the money. But when they couldn't, I realised that I was just as glad. I didn't really want to move at all (though I still want to live with Eric).

11 March. I'm fairly sure I'm being sucked back into spending a lot of time working for WEL (Women's Electoral Lobby, the Australian equivalent of NOW for you Americans). Mind you, after 2 (or is it 3) years of forcefully and successfully saying "no", I suppose it's about time. Most of my readers probably don't know that I was one of the founding sisters, as it were, of the national office of WEL, way back in, um, 1978 (WEL itself was founded in '72, before I even arrived in the country, but didn't have a national office until '78). We've had 3 National Coordinators since then, and I've been a sort of unofficial adviser /office manager to them all. I was also the National Treasurer and de facto fundraiser for 3 years, before I retired in exhaustion. The most recent Coordinator, Pamela, retired on Friday, the day after International Women's Day and two days after the sex discrimination bill passed the House of Reps (it passed the Senate last year). So there were all sorts of celebrations the latter part of the week, and a fair amount of lobbying within the group as to who was going to do what in the next 6 months or so.

On Thursday, a lunchtime celebration was organised by WEL for the lawn in front of Parliament House, to celebrate both IWD and the passage of the Bill. The morning was chilly, overcast and threatening rain, but Joanne Fisher and I drove over anyway. Pamela asked me to help by opening the champagne, and I had a great time lobbing corks 10-15 metres over the parked cars into the roadway (fairly devoid of traffic; little chance of hitting anyone). The TV crews loved it, but I didn't make the evening news on any of the Canberra channels. Just as the official speeches (mercifully brief) were about to begin, the sun broke through the clouds and smiled on us all. The Goddess must have been pleased.

In the evening, various functions had been organized, but I was too tired to attend any. On Friday Joanne and I went for drinks at a recently-opened women's bar and restaurant near my home; we ended up staying for dinner and were very impressed with the place. It (Tilley Devine's) managed to get a lot of adverse publicity the week I was at Eric's, when several unaccompanied men were ejected for disorderly behaviour. The men (and certain segments of the media) tried to make a big deal of the "discrimination" against men (only admitted if accompanied by a woman). Some people had tried to make analogies between sexism and racism (fair enough), but kept trying to equate women-excluding-men with whites-excluding-blacks. Of course, this is incorrect. Men, and whites, at least in Australia (and the USA, amongst other places) are the power groups; women and blacks - among others - are less-powerful groups. Thus special facilities for women could be seen as analogous to special facilities for blacks: assistance to a disadvantaged group. (I'm not meaning separate-but-equal facilities that are used to keep one group unequal and "in its place", but affirmative-action type things run by members of the disadvantaged group and designed to assist the group to overcome its disadvantages, or deal with its problems in its own ways rather than having a powerful group dictate solutions.

Over the following weekend, despite interruptions, I almost finished insulating and panelling my new office in the garage (I would have finished except I ran out of insulation). Saturday night I really wanted to fall asleep

at 8 pm, but had promised to go over to Pamela's for dinner and a meeting with several women involved with the WEL national office. We got our business over with early and had an enjoyable natter over a delicious dinner fixed by Pamela's husband, Professor Donald. Having had such success getting people to take over the local branch books for WEL, and the books for the Women's Centre, I decided to take on (temporarily) the National WEL books once again, and put some effort into finding someone else to do them, too.

Little did I realise how easily I'd fulfill that chore. Today there was a luncheon social gathering of WEL at the home of a member, about 4 houses from where I live. It was a gorgeous day, so I took a break from carpentry and wandered over. Got talking to a woman I'd never met (who I learned later had been one of the unsuccessful applicants for the National Coordinator vacancy), and asked her if she'd be interested in the Treasurer's job. "Yes," she said. No need for persuasion! Perhaps it's time I tried my hand at fund-raising again, after all.

Meanwhile I did a lot of dithering about whether to nominate for one of the union representative's positions at work. I don't really want to, but I do want to see that certain things I consider important come to pass. This moral dilemma seems to have been resolved by two people who I think would be really good (i.e. they agree with me!) deciding to nominate, so I shall restrict myself to volunteering to assist on the committee preparing submissions. After the last few days, I've fairly much decided to spend what little "spare" (ha ha) time I have on fundraising and other work for WEL.

19 March. Another frantic week just passed. Most of the activity centred around work deadlines, but I also managed to finish the garage, so that Eric and I could move in my office furniture when he was visiting on the weekend. On Thursday evening, Carole Nowarhas and I went to Tilley's for drinks and dinner, and on Friday I was over at Joanne Fisher's watching videotapes of recent episodes of Dr Who which I'd missed. By then I was exhausted, and just barely managed to stay awake until time to pick up Eric at the train at 10:50.

Saturday we were up early to pick up my new bicycle, which I rode home. It was quite a change from my old bike (which I had sold to Eric), having a unisex frame, straight (rather than racing) handlebars, a female seat, and ten (rather than five) gears - not to mention the frame being the correct length for my legs. Then we shifted furniture. In the evening we went to dinner with Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown, trying out a non-smoking vegetarian restaurant they recommended. The fact that I almost fell asleep over the sweets had nothing to do with the quality of the company!

Sunday we moved more things and got the computers set up. Joanne Fisher came by with her Brother CE-60 electronic typewriter and computer interface, to see if it would work off this Apple. It did, with no trouble at all. We added some lines to a test stencil I'd previously typed on it, and ran off the stencil. The results were well within the acceptable range, so it looks like a possible way to print *Wrevenge*.

5 April. My interest in working for WEL (or anything else) has rather dwindled during the past month, as I have found myself too rushed to enjoy what I do make time to do (such as typing installments of this diary). A lot of what I've been doing has been enjoyable, but quite a bit has been more of a chore. Never mind the details - I can't remember most of them anyway! They've included such things as harvesting figs, covering the tomato plants for the night to save them from early frosts, and other non-delayable garden work; trying to get settled into my new "office", sort things out and get caught up on correspondence; typing, editing and printing *Wrevenge*; organizing things for ANZAPA (the apa I collate); attending my Small Business class; getting the WEL books in order and turning them over to someone else (hooray!!); meetings about grant applications for workers for WEL and the Women's Centre; convention organizing (more on that later!); an incredible amount of running about the city on various errands; my "real job" - eh? sleep? yeh, a bit of that too... oh, and I've even been ~~ughasp~~ watching television.

I also saw a film for the first time in some months. It was an hour-long Australian-made feminist film called "On Guard", made I think with money from the Australian Film Board or whatever it's called. The show is about a group of women who are concerned about the activities of a research company that they believe to be developing methods for development of fetuses outside the womb - a logical extension of *in vitro* fertilization work. One thing that upsets them is that many women appear to have been used in the studies without their consent - much less informed consent. They have been gathering evidence from patients, health workers, and other sources, and are preparing a film on the topic. They are also planning to erase the computerized records of the company by giving them a massive jolt of electricity. First, of course, they must break in to the security area.

The guerilla action is meticulously planned. The film focuses on the women involved: their feelings and fears about the course of action as they plan it; their relationships with each other (several, if not all, are lovers). The climax of the film is the break-in itself, a fast-paced and tension-filled sequence. The film overall isn't as polished as a studio film, and tries to do a little too much in only an hour, but was well worth seeing for its content. It's obvious the film-makers (all women, need I say?) felt very strongly about their subject matter; in fact, the level of message-conveyance is a bit intrusive. I imagine that must be one of the hardest things for a writer or film-maker to learn to do: not let the message overwhelm the creative work. Of course, some works are specifically for the purpose of presenting a message (the film-within-a-film being compiled by the characters is an example); that's fair enough. But "On Guard" appeared to be trying to do more than that. It reminds me a bit of Gillian Armstrong's early films. She has matured into a superb director (e.g. *My Brilliant Career*); perhaps the makers of "On Guard" will do likewise.

NATTER & ANTI-NATTER

MARC ORTLIEB, GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne Vic 3001, Australia
11 January 1984

Joy Hibbert's comments on non-exclusive relationships ... I think that she is ignoring the fact that most of us have been conditioned into an acceptance of exclusive relationships, and that there is seldom enough reason to abandon that particular conditioning. ... I know that my reaction to Joy's proposition would be exactly the same as she documents in other blokes, even if I were in a non-relationship situation. Still, I guess I am basically into monogamous relationships. They tend to be more hassle-free than other types. Given another thirty or forty years, once non-exclusive relationships become more institutionalized and the rules are established, they might work better, but, given current conditions, I'm surprised that Joy finds the behaviour she describes as annoying. I would have thought that predictable would be more the term.

((Surely the two are not mutually exclusive, Marc. A lot of predictable - and even quite understandable - human behaviour is still annoying. -- JHW))

Let's now break a long-standing tradition and comment on the review section. I cannot agree with your evaluation of Steven Bieler's pamphlet. Though it has its faults, one being that Steve has obviously ripped off a little too much from Cliff Wind's "Fred Dagg" records, it's one of the funniest looks at science fiction writing that I've seen in quite awhile - the section on robots was particularly enjoyable. As you point out though, much of this does depend on the reader's sense of humour, and mine seems to mesh rather nicely with Steve's. He is one of my favourite fan writers at present, despite his interest in cars and baseball.

SAM WAGAR, 861A Danforth Ave, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4J 1L8

27 January 1984

That piece by Paula Johanson was so powerful that I was shaken. That's the kind of truth that I don't expect to find in fanzines, even Wrevenge. It makes many of the other musings on power that you printed seem pretty vapid.

DIANE FOX, 9 Anderson Ave, Bullaburra NSW 2784 Australia
15 March 1984

((Diane wrote a bit about the move to their new house in the Blue Mountains (note COA above) and the long commute to work. She also talked about her personal experiences with PMS, but includes: "Actually I feel that PMS is one of my lesser worries - the thing I really fear is migraine." Finally, Diane offers a long list of (a few of) the allusions in Julian May's Saga of the Pliocene Exile. Fascinating. I knew I'd been missing a lot. --JHW))

Joy Hibbert's comments about an open relationship being a frightening idea for many men ... to an extent it's to their credit that they were nervous about having an affair with a woman who already had a permanent partner! There are some characters who would get considerable ego gratification out of having it off with "another fellow's woman" ... but they might well be even more terrified by the sort of situation Joy describes ... the husband or partner knowing ... and approving. Possibly the fellow with a grab-it-by-stealth approach might feel the husband/partner was somehow scoring over him! (The woman's attitude would be quite outside his comprehension.)

The foot-and-mouth extortion scare really had me worried. Not because I feared it might be released (I didn't feel this was likely), but I remembered the notorious Reichstag fire in Germany before Hitler came to power... Big Brother arranges an atrocity and then makes sure the blame falls on political dissidents. I think the first recorded use was by Merc... Bjelke Petersen is the sort of person who would try this if he thought he could get away with it.

((Taking lessons from America's Tricky Dick Nixon, no doubt. --JHW))

CATHY EASTHOPE, 113 Abbey Rd, Erdington, Birmingham B23 7BB, U.K.

5 February 1984

I think what impressed me most ((about Wrevenge)) was the openness and honesty of your contributors, as for example in Paula Johanson's article, which reminded me a lot of the sort of writing which appears regularly in the Women's Periodical ((the British women's apa)). I've recently seen

an evolutionary scheme proposed for fanzine production and it runs along the lines of 1) apa membership, 2) perzine production (with the type of personal analysis shown in Paula's article), and 3) genzine production with "funny" or general articles. I couldn't disagree more with this idea because I see the perzine as the peak of achievement, especially if the editor is capable of trusting her readership enough to talk about "sensitive" topics. WeberWoman's Wrevenge seems much more like a perzine from this respect even though you have outside contributors, because they all seem able to talk about themselves in some depth. It doesn't seem like a genzine at all. You get over the feeling that you're writing for your friends, and that's an atmosphere few fanzine editors can achieve. The only other person who I think did it really well was Susan Wood.

((Er, well, I certainly wouldn't consider my writing, nor most of the writing in my zine, up to Susan's standards. But the "atmosphere", eh? Must confess I've not read a Susan Wood fanzine, though I have read many of her own articles. Which makes a good opportunity to put in a plug for The Best of Susan Wood, available from Jerry Kaufman, 4326 Winslow Pl N, Seattle WA 98103, USA --JHW))

It was interesting to hear how the organisers of the demo outside a uranium mine were trying to ensure non-violence by training people in passive protest methods, because as you probably know the way this is often achieved over here is requesting men not to take part. The most visible example of this strategy is at the US cruise missile base at Greenham Common, and it's a policy which has often been criticised... I'm very supportive of the women at Greenham, but I also know a lot of gentle harmless men who feel hurt to be excluded from such crucial expressions of support for life. Perhaps if we're to save this planet it needs everyone, men and women, to say what we feel together.

CHRISTINE ASHBY, PO Box 175, South Melbourne Vic 3205, Australia

10 January 1984

I think Eve Harvey is mistaken if she imagines that in the "good old days" menstruation was "women's business" and nobody ever mentioned it. The physical process was not understood until surprisingly late in the nineteenth century, ... but the fact of menstruation and its consequent "uncleanliness" was pretty basic to the view of women as second-class citizens. PMS was known to the Elizabethans, by the way, as "raging womb", and the recommended cures included horse-riding and having a baby.

I agree with you that it's a good thing to know that there is a physical cause for cyclical mood changes, and I also agree that the sufferer is not excused from responsibility for her actions. ... There is a researcher at Melbourne University who claims that men also have monthly cycles, which will tend to match those of the women they live with, but of course they usually aren't aware of what's going on - in that respect women are better off, provided of course that they don't suffer from the more extreme physical symptoms which must be hell. In that case, as you point out, it's really a sort of disability.

LYNC, 11 Denman St, West Brunswick Vic 3055, Australia

10 January 1984

((LynC describes in some detail her experiences with menstrual problems, then continues...)) I noticed after Dave left that I had most difficulty coping with that rejection on the two days immediately prior my periods. Previously I'd thought I didn't suffer PMS, but I suspect that, because the event itself ((menstruation)) was so bad, I hadn't noticed the lead up, till I was emotionally fairly unstable anyway.

For me, the revelation that this was PMS and not something I was wholly responsible for, was a great relief. I mean yes, it was accentuating an already existent depression, but I could cope with that, because my depression was copable and this would pass. If I could handle it for two days - just two days - I'd be normal again.

Above all, knowing about PMS, that it's just a part of life, makes it so much easier to get the determination to cope. I've a fairly simplistic philosophy regarding such things: "It's life, and life has to be coped with." But even without that, knowing what it is, means also knowing it will end, and that it's not something to worry about unduly. All women suffer it to a greater or lesser degree, and for me this is very reassuring.

Another point about Eve's article ... she harks back to the "good old days" of ignorance, when, according to her, people just simply left a woman alone during PMS, and the servants bent over backwards not to worry her any. But what happened when the maids or the housekeeper got PMS or period pains? Or being just working class were they supposed to be exempt?

JULIE VAUX, 14 Zara Rd, Willoughby NSW 2068, Australia

31 January 1984

Talking about the monthly cycle is one of the hardest taboos to break, perhaps because it is one of the oldest. I can de-condition myself to talk frankly about racism or sexism or middle class attitudes or class attitudes and prejudices, but not actual sex and the monthly cycle. By the very silence on the subject, one has it engraved within the mind that it is a women-only subject, unmentionable to men.

((Julie also commented, as did quite a few other writers (Christine Ashby among them), on the "personalities" of dogs and cats. -- JHW))

ERIC R LINDSAY, 6 Hillcrest Ave, Faulconbridge NSW 2776

?? February 1984

Moods certainly vary, even without PMS. I find myself home from work today, only partly because I'm still recovering from some sort of flu. I could certainly stay on my feet long enough to get through the day (well, maybe not), but my efficiency would be well and truly below the unreasonable 100% Eve mentions. Now, since I don't enjoy my work, it might be that application would overcome that problem. Not so. I thought to use the time productively by writing a program for my SF library catalog, but found I simply couldn't do it well enough to continue. Since I have in the past few weeks written several others of about the same

complexity, this clearly indicates that at least one man doesn't always function at 100% efficiency. ... Eve's letter seems, to me, to partly blame the sorts of lives we now live for some of her problems. I agree. I also think a change in the way we live would be more suitable than lightly dosing millions of women with all manner of chemical and hormonal gimmickry.

Diane Fox is not making enough of the power of being a nuisance. There is a lovely book called "Getting Even" that explains how being the underdog merely brings out the fiendish in some people. Diane would love it, I'm sure.



JESSICA AMANDA SALMONSON, P O Box 20610, Seattle WA 98102, USA

I don't think Wendy and I have any of those "power, submission" game-playing things Paula Johanson addresses; in fact, four years now, and our relationship seems ideal in every way. It is an enormous relief to have a gentle, unshowy, non-violent, loving relationship with someone who is also an artist and not jealous of the solitary way I work because she works the same way. And we share the work obviously, since Wendy is sometimes illustrating my writing; and she helps with my anthologies and we're even thinking of doing one together where input to selection is equal. I sometimes feel as though artists have a compatible potential greater than non-artists, as there is very little time for games of dominance and submission if art is being shared. But, of course, in many families one artist is successful and the other is not, so that would be tough; or it seems helpful not to share the exact art and being in direct competition in a household.

I'm enormously lazy and the only power-trip laid on me nowadays is to make sure I do the dishes sometimes; and the only one I lay on Wendy is to browbeat her into getting more of her artwork completed. These things can be pretty intense. But unlike sexual power, these other things don't define a relationship in any ongoing way. Perhaps women, too, have a greater potential for equal relationships, having no outside imposition of role hierarchy; but, of course, I know some very manipulative lesbians in very role-structured relationships, and sadomasochism is surprisingly common, such relationships seeming to me to be the ultimate case of sexual power defining personality and relationship to a partner.

((Your description of your relationship with Wendy, and the sorts of things you browbeat each other about, sounds very much like my relationship with Eric. I do not think it is a female thing, though I would agree the potential for an equal relationship - with a minimum of power games - should be greater in a same-sex relationship. --JHW))

The other thing I sometimes think is that almost everyone, straight or gay, happens to be pretty screwy and messed up in their relationships, and four years of abject compatibility with someone is just a fluke in this society and I'm enormously lucky.

MATA COWAN, 652 Cranbrook Rd #4, Bloomfield Hills MI 48013, USA

29 February 1984

A friend of mine has observed that most of the women he knows have, at one time or another, endured a Beastly Boyfriend. Not all of them overtly dominated the way Paula Johanson describes; many were "aggressively dependent", expecting the women to do everything for them, including make decisions. But whatever the "technique" (and in using this term I don't mean to imply that it was a conscious ploy), the outcome is that the man is determining what the relationship is going to be, by his behavior, and the woman is adjusting accordingly. There are several points worth making about this. A major one is that for the most part the relationship did not endure, more often because the women learned better than because the men abandoned them outright. Another is that this domination isn't only men over women - there are also plenty of women who play power trips. Maybe women are more likely to talk about the problem (especially after they've gotten out of it). And finally, after I got out of such a situation, I could see the ways in which I encouraged it. This doesn't make the man's behavior any less reprehensible, but it's important to realize the "rewards" that we may get from being in such a relationship, and the things we do to participate in the situation, if only to avoid falling into the same mistake the next time.

PAMELA J. BOAL, 4 Westfield Way, Charlton Heights, Wantage, Oxon OX12 7EW, U.K.

9 February 1984

A lovelorn son ... and a desperate daughter (a victim of the no decent work can't afford accommodation, no decent address can't get work cycle that is affecting thousands in their 20s) ... both turning to Mum ... has made me somewhat distracted... Past experience and the wisdom of hindsight can not help our son. Lack of money and the fact that there is no employment in our area can not help our daughter. The recession (though why not call it a depression, with 3-1/4 million officially out of work and well over 4 million actually out of work) does not seem to get mentioned in zines. There are hints to be found in British zines, but from Australian zines there is no hint that the people of the antipodes are even slightly affected. We can't emigrate because Australia does not let disabled people in unless attached to a breadwinner highly qualified in an area of skills the country thinks it needs. Not that we were

thinking of doing so, but there are places we have seen where we could happily stay for many months, and some unseen where we think we could stay happily - but England is home.

((The recession and high unemployment has certainly affected Australia, though not to the extent as in Britain. The newspapers run stories all the time, and a severe housing shortage in Canberra is even now being highlighted by the takeover the abandoned former South Vietnamese Embassy by 200 unemployed people. Rents are so high in Canberra at the moment that even employed people often have trouble meeting them. I think the reason you see few if any mentions in Australian fanzines is that those of us who can afford to send copies overseas have good jobs; certainly the topic comes up in apas and some smaller zines. It hasn't been discussed in Wrevenge because other issues - rarely discussed in other zines - interest me more, not because I've made a conscious decision to avoid the issue. I must confess I don't think about it much - but then I don't think about the threat of nuclear war, or numerous other important issues, very much either. --JHW))

KATHLEEN GLANCY, 21 Barony St, Edinburgh EH3 6PD, Scotland
?? February 1984

In response to Terry Frost and beauty contests, we have one in Britain which is worse than anything he mentions - though very likely they have just as bad if not worse yet in the USA. This contest is called "Kiss Pears" and is sponsored by Pears Soap. The contestants are, on average, 2-1/2 to 3. There was a television documentary about it, and it was really revolting. There were all these poor toddlers, hardly more than babies, dressed up like Queens of the May, being pushed into posing for photographers. I suppose the one plus about it is that the sponsors being who they are, and one of the main requirements for entry being a flawless skin, they were spared the indignity of make-up. But I noticed several had their ears pierced.

The mothers, of course, all stressed that the children loved the contest - the children's faces failed to convince me, though some had been taught to smile on cue. I felt a degree of respect for one child who, do what they might, howled steadily through her arrival in London with her parents, the photocall, the contestants' visit to the Zoo, and the final selection. Several times she started off a chorus among the others. Her mother, unable to claim she was enjoying every moment with the evidence so stacked against her, was reduced to saying she never cried usually. ... Little brief that I normally hold for male domination, I would just that once have loved to see an angry father arrive to snatch his daughter away from this circus - the mothers, alas, were all for it.

((The fathers, alas, probably were too. Presumably the prize money would be a major attraction, as well as any thoughts of the possibility of an ongoing lucrative "career" as child model or a chance to go into films, or whatever motivates people. Given the economic situation, and high youth unemployment, it is sad but not unreasonable that parents might want to start their children off as early as possible on prospects for their future. --JHW))

LESLIE DAVID, AC of S Services, HQ 19th Supt Comd, APO San Francisco 96212, USA

4 February 1984

How does Terry Frost come to his conclusion that all the women who participate in beauty contests are so stupid? Actually they're quite astute. Since quite a few of them are trying to break into modeling or acting, the exposure (no pun intended) may be exactly what they need to get their careers going. Some of the prizes offered at the beauty contests are in the form of scholarships, which doesn't make sense if the contest only stresses beauty.

((I will dispute your comment about scholarships, because of the parallel in scholarships for (primarily male) athletes who are not necessarily very bright. Yes, I know some athletes are quite intelligent, but I recall only too well my University days, when the jocks on "athletic scholarships" were well known for their lack of ability to perform academically. They, too, were "quite astute" in doing collegiate sport, since they often wanted to break into professional football or other sport. Surely things haven't changed all that much. This is not to suggest, of course, that all college (or pro) athletes are dumb - far from it - just that the presence of a scholarship, and the awarding of same, may have nothing to do with intelligence. --JHW))



SUE THOMASON, 9 Friars Lane, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria LA13 9NP, U.K.

11 February 1984

Power in relationships. Yes, I do agree with you about the ideal state being one where each person is both giver and receiver. I like the idea of dynamic equilibrium, yes. The energy slope analogy is a personal, not necessarily a political, one; and of course it's an approximation at best, and not true all the time of anyone. Going back to the quantum idea, it's easy for an individual to change energy states up and down - on an emotional level it happens many times a day. I get an unsolicited (and good) piece of artwork for my fanzine in the post. This bumps me up an energy level and I grin all the way to the launderette, and whizz through the boring washing without really noticing it. On the other hand, I have trouble changing my bike light batteries, which makes me feel stupid and incompetent: I then step on the cat, drop a full cup of coffee all over a half-written article, and sit staring at the mess for minutes until I can cope with the idea of cleaning it up. Bleh! A good day to go back to bed and start all over again.

Something that surprises me more and more by the sheer power it exerts over my life is the Pathetic Fallacy - that's the one that says when you're depressed, so is the weather. My emotions colour my life (I know this is a cliché, but it's taken me years to realise, really realise, that it applies to me). But I don't feel that "I" (the conscious or rational bits) am ruled by my emotions, or that I ought to try to control them. They are me.

(I wrote a note to Kevin McCaw as follows, regarding his article in Wrevenge 17.

"I realise that a short summary of a personal experience often cannot convey the subtleties of that experience, but the impression I got from your letter is that you were reading an awful lot into that relationship that simply wasn't there. It sounds as if the woman were trying to tell you it was lost cause for you to pursue your "love" for her, but that she didn't know how to just tell you to get lost in a kind way. She may have tried to be kind but was just the opposite. Perhaps she wanted to keep you as a friend but did not realise that anything she did would be interpreted as evidence that maybe, just maybe, she might love you a bit. And maybe she did, but not the way, or with the intensity, that you loved her. When I was somewhat younger, and even these days, I find myself hurting men when really, truly, I do not intend to, but I just don't realise or understand how they feel, and so hurt them inadvertently. (Not because they're men, but because it's difficult if not impossible to truly know how another person feels. One can only interpret based on one's own experience, so even when the other person tells me how they feel, the words may mean something different to me.) Perhaps some of what happened to you was in that category, rather than conscious power games. After all, in circumstances of two adults, where one does not have economic power over the other, I think it takes two to make the sort of relationship where one gets hurt by the other. Surely the one-sidedness of the situation told you something? Why pursue a lost cause? (Okay, I know why, I've done it myself; I'm not trying to be nasty or holier-than-thou, just wondering.) It also sounds to me like a case of what I'd call infatuation on your part, rather than what I'd call love, but that's probably just semantics." --JHW)

KEVIN MCCAW, 20 Dodd St, Hamilton Hill WA 6163, Australia
22 February 1984

I'm sure that you are at least partially accurate in your evaluation. I do though think that she thought she loved me, as that is what she told me. I am not an accomplished writer, and I put my thoughts and feelings into writing only with great difficulty. The letter I sent you really should have been re-written. I did try, but each successive version was becoming increasingly resentful and bitter, which was not the point I wished to make. There is no doubt though that in the end I was being manipulated (willingly, considering they way I was).

Why pursue a lost cause? In the beginning, there was infatuation. But unfortunately it grew to become love. We were good friends but found each other too attractive for a number of reasons (intelligence, etc). I think I was far too naive to really understand what was happening, so I have learned from the experience (it doesn't do my self-confidence much good though). I pursued a lost cause because it is very hard to give up on someone you really love (if I had been just infatuated it might have been easier). Perhaps it was as you say, that it was not conscious power games. I still do not really know. Still, I do not like being "used", even if unintentionally.

I have received a number of letters from Dave Rowley & Joy Hibbert, plus one from Margie Gillis, about the letter of mine in Wrevenge No 15 (Vol 3, No 3). It has been a great help to me to have the thoughts of others on the matter. It's nice to know you are not alone.

MARC ORTLIEB (address above)

3 March 1984

Kevin McCaw, I think, misses the point in his "Women Play Power Games Too". I don't think that anyone bar the most optimistic hard-core feminist would disagree with his statement that women are not all nice people. However, the fact that some women are shits doesn't make the fact that some men are shits any prettier. It certainly doesn't justify Kevin's statement that women's power games are nastier than those played by men.

Kevin's experience is more a warning against letting one's feelings over-rule the common sense, and in this respect both men and women suffer. I have a horrible feeling that just about everyone makes one or more drastic mistakes in their love life. Kevin's story is no different from the rest. If I were feeling really sadistic, I'd describe in detail how I felt when I was first involved in such an arrangement, but, on looking back, I was as much to blame as the woman involved, and, though I felt that I'd been badly hurt, I think now that she has every reason to feel that she was too. However, perspective is the first thing to vanish when one is emotionally hurt, and logic soon follows perspective. If I were Kevin, I'd be pleased that the relationship didn't proceed any further. If it was that bad as a relationship, think of how much worse it would have been as a marriage ...

As for feeling guilty about being a man merely because of what other men have done, well, that's just silly. Guilt is a non-productive emotion even when applied to one's own actions. To feel guilty because of what others have done is totally pointless. I mean, you might as well feel guilty over being right-handed because of the damage that right-handed people have done to others. (Trying to make up for one's own misdeeds is something else again, but I think that that can be done without having to bring guilt into it.)

LARRY DUNNING, P O Box 111, Midland WA 6056, Australia
?? March 1984

I was depressed to see Kevin's and Lyn's stories of pain and fear. Whilst not depreciating or devaluing either tale, I sometimes wonder if such things are really that bad, considering the extent of hunger, torture and murder that occurs in other countries. One person's sad tale may be tragic, but what of the countless millions who suffer and die without the bat of an eyelid in the more developed nations?

(I cannot relate to the suffering of countless millions, but the pain of individuals does have meaning for me. I don't think any of us can judge whose pain and suffering is worse; we can only know what seems worse to us, given our values. --JHW)

STEVE GREEN, 11 Fox Green Crescent, Birmingham B27 7SD, England

MAIA COWAN (address above)

29 February 1984

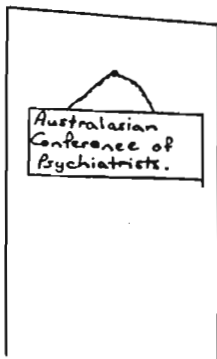


20 March 1984

Very intrigued to read the discussion on "power games"; recalled for me a letter Ann and I received from Joy Hibbert shortly before our marriage. Joy's essential point was that we should be on guard against unconscious attempts at domination, bearing in mind my admitted power drive (I enjoy the responsibility to a degree - it isn't rampant lust for control - and I most definitely do not get off on the "games"). Ann's own independence of will counter-balances this in normal circumstances. However, for the first few weeks after she moved in with me, Ann was unemployed, and the sudden increase in the number of arguments we had during that period shows that Joy's warning wasn't entirely misplaced. It wasn't all tied in with unconscious pressure - the same kind of thing happened with two very close friends of ours, again a consequence of unemployment. But Ann has admitted she felt less confidence in herself during this between-jobs void. She was out of work for too short a spell to draw unemployment money - it has to be more than six weeks - so I was the only "breadwinner", and whilst it's obvious that housework is every bit as tiring - if not more - than my work at the newspaper office, the fact that it's unpaid seems somehow to make it appear less substantial, and therefore less important. Thankfully, we're both at work at present and the tension has disappeared, but it forced me to seriously reappraise my intention to some day quit this job and try writing fulltime. Ann is willing to support me financially, but I now fear the possibility of the tension and arguments returning, albeit with the roles reversed.

I'm completely puzzled by Debi Kean's statement in the July '83 issue that Timothy Zahn is one of the prime perpetrators of "zine schmalz", the perpetuation of stereotypes and reinforcement of the status quo. Obviously we've read entirely different stories by him, since this is not the impression I have at all! I recommend his novellas "Between a Rock and a High Place" and "Cascade Point" in particular, as counterexamples to this accusation. Since Lan and I are fairly good friends with Tim, his wife Anna, and their son Corwin (and Tim is a full-time father!), I find it even harder to believe that he would harbor such attitudes.

One answer to Debi's overall point would be to refer to Stan Schmidt's editorial, "In Praise of Dumb Blondes", in which he answers this same accusation by pointing out that the appearance of a character who matches one stereotype or another is not necessarily advocacy of that stereotype - unfortunately such people Really Do Exist, and a strict avoidance of such character types would be just as unrealistic as using them exclusively. My favorite example of this principle is the film Alien. Veronica Cartwright's character was a weepy female who screams a lot. Stereotypes, right? But Sigourey Weaver's character is commanding, intelligent, and tough, not a stereotype. So is the film pushing the stereotype or rejecting it? Or simply portraying a variety of personalities?

The Rabbit's Progress
by Lyn McConchie

	<p>My Lecture today is "The Irrationality of the Layrabbit as Evincd by Certain Client Examples."</p> 
<p>.....so client X rushes in and says "I'm in Love!."</p> <p>I said "you mean, the cognitive-affective state characterised by intrusive or obsessive fantasizing concerning reciprocity of amorant and feeling by the subject of the amorance."</p> <p>And the client burst into tears, said that I'd spoiled everything, and cancelled all further appointments.</p> 	

(As you suggest, one cannot judge a work, or a writer, by one character. If, however, a story portrays only stereotypes, or a writer's output is primarily along stereotyped lines, or the stories selected for an anthology or a magazine are primarily stereotyped, then I think one could make a case (as Debi did) from the pattern that emerges. Of course that pattern is further filtered through the observer's preferences and prejudices ... ---JHW)

After becoming excessively irritated by the portrayal of women in a few stories, I stopped to think if men become equally irritated by the way they are sometimes portrayed. I've asked quite a few, but those haven't really thought of it. It may be a good question to toss to your readership.

((Readers, consider yourselves asked. --JHW))

I've perceived an odd feature of portrayals in some stories (I'm thinking specifically of the Andy Offutt/Richard Lyon collaborations I've read). In quite a few cases, the roles of female characters are considerably expanded, but the personalities are not. A woman in a story may be the captain of a starship or an eminent scientist or an assassin or the head of government - but she's still primarily in the story so the hero can lust after her, or rescue her. Is this a little bit of progress, or a whole lot of tokenism?

((I'd say the latter, plus a whole lot of lack of imagination or understanding on the part of the author. I think you've really put your finger on what annoys me most about many female characterisations. --JHW))

Although Glen Crawford is apparently out in left field for most of his letter (missing the points entirely), there are a few grains of truth in his comments. It is possible to take offense where none was given, and other factors besides "political correctness" in determining a story's, or a characterization's, worth. On the other hand, he seems to be making the fundamental error of thinking that description is prescription - just because things are that way (superheroes and fainting females) doesn't mean they always should be!!! And there are people, by far not only in the feminist movement, who become so obsessed with explaining why they're oppressed that they never take the next logical step of correcting the problem - or they put all their efforts into opposing the "enemy", so that the enemy's continued existence becomes central to their perceptions and behavior. ... People often don't realize it's both possible and necessary to do something.

Hm. I'm obviously treading a narrow line here... I don't believe that people bring their troubles on themselves, and that all it takes is an effort of will and a positive attitude, to solve them. But neither do I believe that we're the helpless victims of circumstances when things go wrong. We are active participants in our own lives, and it's not always something out there that causes all the problems. Our responses - to dominating boyfriends, discriminating bosses, what have you - will either make it easier or harder for "them" to continue the oppression. We

may not be responsible for the things that happen to us, but we are responsible for doing something about them! It's true, as you point out, that external circumstances can make it more difficult or even impossible to change things; but what makes it even more difficult is focussing on the problem instead of on the solution! (I've been in many a situation where I went ahead and quietly corrected a problem, while other people were still busily trying to determine whose fault it was and why it happened.)

ANDY ANDRUSCHAK, P O Box 606, La Canada-Flintridge CA 91011, USA

13 December 1983

They can now detect the genes for Huntington's Disease. If you have the genes, you will get it. And your children will have a 50-50 chance of getting it. (The gene is dominant.) I saw a friend die of it. And I wonder... if I knew my parent had it, would I want to know if I had the gene? Or maybe live on in hope and not knowing if... And suppose I tested positive and we tested my kids? If they too test positive, when should we tell them?

((I think I'd prefer to know, if only because I wouldn't waste even as little time as I do now planning for my "old age". As for telling one's children, I'd say as soon as they are old enough to understand, because it would be best for people to realise what risks they are facing, so they can make decisions on things like whether to have children at all. Like maybe 12 or 13, certainly by 16. --JHW))

21 January 1984

I wear a Medicalert bracelet, which tells three things to any medical person: I have diabetes, I have high blood pressure, and I wish to be an organ donor. I also have a card pasted on the back of my driver's license. It confirms that I wish to be an organ donor in case of a fatal accident. Now when I mention this to fans, they are generally amused. But when I mentioned this to my co-workers at JPL, they were taken aback. The thing that worried them was, if I was on the borderline of life and death, would the doctors allow me to die so as to get my organs? Don't laugh, this was a serious worry with them, and the main reason cited why they did not want to become organ donors.

Well, if I was ever in that situation, they can have my organs. A person in that shape, like Eve ((Harvey))'s father, is more likely to wind up a liability to everyone around them. Indeed, it may well be better to be dead.

((I quite agree on that! --JHW))

BEV CLARK, 744 Belmont Place E, No 203, Seattle WA 98102, USA

24 January 1984

I think the issue of adoption and sealing adoption records is not as simple as it might seem, because the people involved are not all the same. If all mothers who gave up children for adoption felt as Debi Kean did, or if there were not the adoptive families to consider as well as the birth mother and the child, perhaps it would be. But there are three parties to any adoption ... and there are a multitude of attitudes among these people.

I've been involved only indirectly, in two cases. One was a friend in graduate school who traced her birth mother, only to have the unpleasant shock of discovering that her birth mother had absolutely no desire to see her or have anything to do with her. She was upset, her birth mother was upset that she had been found, and her adoptive family was upset because they interpreted her desire to find her birth mother as rejection.

The other case is that of my sister and her husband, who are unable to have children of their own and are trying to adopt. They are already worried about the possibility of losing an adopted child after the adoption is complete, and they admit that it would be hard to watch a child they loved no different from their own child trying to find a real parent, even as they realize that most adopted children will want to. It does hurt to lose a child you love, whatever your birth relationship to the child.

((I don't quite understand what you mean by "lose a child" in this context. If an adopted child finds his or her birth mother, the adoptive parents haven't "lost" the child, they've just gained some other relatives. Or are you suggesting that sometimes birth mothers try to get their (minor) children back? That's an entirely different issue. --JHW))

My personal view is that the decision to seal adoption and birth records should be made jointly by the birth mother and the adoptive parents, though either party could request that their end of the arrangement be left open; and unsealing them later should also require a joint decision. This is ideal; however, especially if the records are sealed, finding the parties involved after awhile could be tricky. And of course medical and other background information about the child's family should be available to the adoptive parents and the child.

((I would think the ideal is for people not to be so hung up about "whose" child it is, as if children were possessions. Then all these issues of whether or not people feel rejected would be minimized. Certainly a birth mother has a right to privacy if she chooses, but if our attitudes towards children and sex were different, this desire for privacy would probably be minimized too. Perhaps the records could be "unsealed" for the child, with the identity of the birth mother coded for privacy in some way. As you say, it's a complicated problem because of the differing and sometimes conflicting needs and desires of all parties involved.

ELAYNE WECHSLER, Madison Square Station, P O Box 1609, New York NY 10159, USA

?? March 1984

On the whole, it delights me to come across another publication that takes complex, often controversial subjects and expounds upon them, round-robin fashion, intelligently and with "open" minds... I think you've managed to gather not only a geographically impressive but widely ranging variety of opinions on these subjects. My only gripes with your pub, and minor ones at that, have to do with the

apparently narrow worldview of most of your audience, and also with the tendency toward self-indulgence on their part and your own at times. To expound upon the former first: I am curious as to whether all of your readers are science fiction fans. ((No, but the vast majority are. --JHW)) ... I wonder how much more variation and learning could be gained from expanding the scope of your publication to include those mutant minds not participating in fandom.

((An interesting point, because I have upon several occasions given copies of Wrevenge to non-fan friends and encouraged them to contribute. They were quite happy to talk with me about it, but not one could be persuaded to actually write something - even a letter or a book review, never mind an article! Maybe I just don't know enough people, but fans - and only a few of them at that - are the only people I know who don't think writing for pleasure is weird. Writing to sell, or be published professionally, is understandable. I've even had people suggest my hobby is "sick", presumably because it's done purely for ego gratification, and that's a suspect motive. --JHW))

On the other hand, I am no stranger to the sins and excesses of the demon Self-Indulgence... It is a sad fact that people who might yearn to exercise power and cannot, often create in their minds, and perhaps to their immediate circle of friends, a situation in which they claim a false sense of grandeur, which provides them with the necessary feelings of immediate self-gratification... This attitude emerges, albeit to a much lesser degree, whenever you refer to Wrevenge's audience as "my readers". I do not know whether you intended this as a term of affection, a motherly sort of endearment ((it's actually just a shorthand way of saying "readers of my fanzine" --JHW)), but if not, there is an inherent danger present. As the catalyst behind a publication myself, I may consider Inside Joke "my baby", but at the same time cannot bring myself to take creationist's credit for whatever success the pub may enjoy. I feel it of utmost importance to differentiate between the artist and the publication, as much as to draw definite boundaries between one's private life and one's in-print "public life". The non-delineation in both these instances seems to run rampant in fandom, so I may be out of line, or even missing Wrevenge's point entirely. Inside Joke, unlike Wrevenge, centers around its major subject matter (currently comedy, satire, surreality) rather than its creator; it may indeed be your intent to have the opposite focus with Wrevenge.

((My aim with Wrevenge is to focus on subject matter, but the subjects are intensely personal ones: human relationships, sexuality, personal power - how people act and how they feel about what they do and what happens to them. In order to create the atmosphere for such personal revelations and discussions, surely the editor must inject her private life into the publication! --JHW))



WEBERWOMAN'S WREVENGE EIGHTEEN

(Volume 3, Number 6, May 1984)

Registered by Australia Post, Publication No NBH4389, ISSN 0728-3792.
Publication dates will change in Volume 4 to quarterly: August,
November, February, May.

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US\$1.50 or equivalent per issue (air mail extra). I prefer some sort of
personal response.

This issue typed on a Taiwanese copy of an Apply II microcomputer, using
the word processing program AppleWriter II, printed on an AMust 80 DT
dot matrix printer, and photocopied. Collating and envelope-stuffing
assistance by Eric Lindsay.

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Illustrations Credits

Alison Cowling, 4, 7, 12

Julie Vaux, cover

Dover Publications' "Women: A Pictorial Archive from Nineteenth-Century
Sources" (1978), 1

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