

*Weber  
Woman's  
Wrevenge*



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1993 Jean Weber

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Editing, occasional proofreading, design, layout, and printing by  
**Jean Weber,**  
7 Nicoll Avenue  
Ryde, NSW 2112  
Australia  
phone (02) 809 4610  
or (047) 51 2258  
(overseas prefix: 61)

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

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## The Rubbish Bin

Last issue I mentioned I had started a new job, which was expected to last about 4 months. Mostly I quite enjoyed it, despite my lack of enthusiasm for bureaucratic stupidity (of which there was plenty, mostly to do with IBM's planning requirements and the record-keeping requirements associated with Standards Australia's quality management accreditation. Then the project, which was running late, got extended until the end of December; later it was extended again, until mid-February '94. The workload increased as well. Still no problem. Then the axe fell – the last week in October, the project was cancelled completely! Redundancy notices all around. And here I'd been telling everybody else that I was entirely too busy to even consider their job until next February at the earliest.

That probably sounds rather more grim than it is. I've got a reasonable amount of money in the bank this year, so I can afford to have an unscheduled vacation, and I've got lots of things I want to do in this free time. By the time you read this, no doubt I'll be juggling 2 or 3 jobs again and complaining about not having enough time.

I've done rather more travelling this year than in recent years. Besides the trip to Perth at Easter (for SwanCon) and the trip to New Zealand in June (for DefCon), in September Eric and I zipped off to Brisbane for 4 days, one of which I spent interviewing for a job at a research company associated with the University of Queensland – we drove all around the area sightseeing the rest of the time. Then in early October, Eric and I were off to Melbourne for 4 days, to attend Anzapacon and see old friends. I also had an interview with a publishing house regarding some possible projects for 1994.

Meanwhile I continued publishing the quarterly journal of the Australian Society for Technical Communication (though I'm resigning from that unpaid job at the end of this year), and I became involved with editing the journal of WISENET, the Women and Science Inquiry Network (another unpaid job to take up my 'spare' time). I managed to publish one issue of my science-fiction fanzine and write a column or two of book reviews for an SF journal.

I'm also continuing the never-ending house and garden renovations. All the rooms are now repaired, repainted and usable, and I'm doing the odd jobs like installing a new screen door at the front and building bookshelves.

– Jean

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## Art Credits

Sheryl Birkhead, 7, 10; Ian Gunn, 3; Craig Hilton, 4, 13  
Peggy Ranson, 8, 10, 11; Taral, cover

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## Contributors' Addresses

Sheryl Birkhead, 23629 Woodfield Rd, Gaithersburg, MD 20882, USA

Ian Gunn, PO Box 567, Blackburn, Vic 3130, Australia

Craig Hilton, PO Box 430, Collie, WA 6225, Australia

Lyn McConchie, Farside Farm, R.D. Norsewood, New Zealand

Peggy Ranson, 1420 Valmont, New Orleans, LA 70115, USA

Taral, 245 Dunn Ave, Apt 2111, Toronto, ON M6K 1S6, Canada

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## Notes from rural New Zealand

by Lyn McConchie

### Indian summer

Right through June this year we had an 'Indian Summer'. Temperatures crept up again and the rain was less. It confused a lot of the local flora, and out in the dam paddock my young ram was also convinced Spring was in the air. He began jumping with enthusiasm on the nearest ewes. Since many of them are due to lamb in another month, this was not appreciated. Norton was powerfully reminded that it was up to them when they bred, and he could just trundle his hoop. He trundled it disconsolately off to sulk in a corner.

On my front lawn, Curly Gander also became convinced that Spring and egg laying had finally arrived. His wives simply looked at him and refused. So far as they were concerned, their Lord and Master had gone off his trolley and they were taking no part. Rapidly convinced (once again and as usual) that he was surrounded by conspiracy, Curley rose in wrath. *Someone* was to blame for this!

There's nothing quite like having a paranoid gander on the lawn (I'm happy to say). For days he became a pest as he moved from uxorious, to confused, to furiously convinced the world was out to get him. I called him a feather-brained idiot as he slunk about. The chap who arrived to drop off half a ton of beef from the cow I'd killed called him something else entirely. He leaped out of his truck, picked up a huge box and then dropped the lot as he was attacked at the back of his gumboots. At which point he noted that my so and so gander was a something menace and if it was his he'd blow its blank head off. Furthermore if it bit him again he'd kick its condemned beak up his highly condemned arse! I deplored the language but agreed with the sentiment.



### Foiling the stock rustlers

My geese continue to intimidate visitors. However, I heard from a friend up the coast that this doesn't work all the time. She has a farmlet close to a large city. The placed is very close to the main road and a target for burglars. At different times she has lost wool from the woolshed, sheep from the yards, and fruit from the trees between the sheds and house. After a dozen sheep went missing one night and it was apparent the thieves had run them into the pen and used the loading race, she dropped in to purchase three geese. Maybe they'd do the trick; they certainly had worked for me so far. I had half a yard full of half-grown goslings at that time. So I decided to see her my original trio and keep three of the babies for myself. She departed gingerly carrying a honking sack and I hoped her stock would stay put from now on.

A week later she rang, almost incoherent with rage, to say that *now* the burglars had stolen the damned geese! After that the losses accelerated until she was within a few days of putting the place on the market. Not that she wanted to leave. But it's difficult to run even a farmlet when your stock continually evaporates almost before your eyes.

I made sympathetic noises and thanked God I didn't live close to a city. It's been pretty clear since I moved here that anyone who even lives on a main road has this trouble. Charming and desirable farmlets there seem to change hands all the time. Sometimes the

new owner must have barely had time to unpack before the place is being advertised again. If it isn't stock rustlers, it's somebody's pet dog allowed to run loose. I was taken to one side when I first arrived in the district and had these points explained. After that I wouldn't have taken a main road farmlet if it was cut price. Not that any were. Most were so charming and otherwise desirable there'd always be someone to pay full price. And then watch their stock vanish or turn up dead.

My friend was in despair by now. She couldn't afford to replace the animals all the time, and some were pets anyhow. She hated to think of their being eaten. I was in the covered yards one afternoon when something was said that made me pause. It's always know it (well, since I started farming) but never thought much about it. Now I headed for the phone. With laughter at both ends of the line, we decided she had nothing to lose. At that week's sale she acquired six ewes cheap. Then they were tucked down the back for a couple of weeks before being brought to the front paddocks again. They vanished four nights later. But they were the last to go since that night.

What had we done? Dosed them as heavily as we could without killing them, with various sheep drenches. To eat meat drenched like that makes humans very sick. It seems to have worked – but I'd have hated to be one who shared that meat!

## Renovations

My farmhouse is old. The original part was put up in 1872 and added onto from that date. As a result parts are now starting to fall down. When I moved in, I listed these and planned to do something about them – when I had the money.

Luckily the appearance of small amounts of cash coincided with my next door neighbour's husband finishing for the season at his employment. This meant he was free to wander over with appropriate tools to do a few alterations.

Originally the room where my sofa, armchairs, and enclosed fire live was the end of the house. Then a large kitchen was added on and eventually the whole area was made into 'open plan'. However, where the two rooms joined I still had a mess where the original hearth had been.

Now I was about to change it. For an entire day my neighbour hacked out lumps of ancient concrete, river boulders, and various pieces of wood all fitted into nooks and crannies in an effort to simply block the draughts if nothing else. Once the top part of the ancient hearth was removed, we discovered that it had gone in further than I'd thought. I now had a gap some three feet wide and seven feet long. With this lot removed, the draughts, delighted at the opportunity, positively whistled in, but not for long.

The gap would have to be evened off by having a portion of builtup floor done to make it all level with the edge of the two steps down into the kitchen. We hauled in planking and cement. Working like a beaver, my neighbour sawed the planking to length and nailed it into place. Then we did the concreting.

We used readymix so the concrete dried fast, but by evening it was still a bit too green to risk pawprints. I kept Tai shut in the bedroom, but by teatime we'd both had enough of that. Eating my evening meal is impossible with Tai trying to help. So I allowed

him out while watching to see what he would do. I needn't have worried. He approached the damp cement with a *very* dubious look. Peered, sniffed, peered some more, then came to a decision. It was a cat trap of some kind and he wasn't having any of it.

For the next couple of days until I returned the writing table to a position over most of it, he circumnavigated the patch with great care. Even a week later he was keeping an eye on it. You never know what that sort of thing might do if you don't watch out.

A few days later we installed a cat door for Tai. It meant that he no longer had to stay in at night so I could safely lock the house door into his enclosed yard. Of course it might not have been likely that a burglar would scale the six foot trellising, but stranger things have happened, and I wasn't taking the chance. So every night before I departed finally to bed, I locked the door, put the chain on, and endured Tai complaining about it all.

I had checked on prices and discovered to my dismay that commercial cat doors not only the price I'd expected to pay for the door plus installation, but they were of an odd construction, like an iris that sort of opened up in a spiral. I was sure that facing an iris-opening car door, Tai would refuse point blank to learn its use. I remembered the cat flap we'd put into my previous house. Tigger, my 16 pounds of tabby-furred bone and muscle with a real brain, had

still taken awhile to acclimatise to that. And he'd been used to human inventions.

I consulted with my neighbour. Long suffering and obliging, he agreed that a cat flap seemed to be the thing. He wandered off to town and returned with a small neat bolt, two 'work both way' hinges, and a perspex cat flap. I blinked at the low price. He explained that some small outfit in town was making some sort of half globes pressed out of perspex for something or other. He'd heard about them, checked, and found they had a dud one. Instead of being pressed out as a globe, on this one the machine had merely impressed a shallow saucer in the square. He'd been given it for \$5 and it was exactly the right size. An hour and a half later all was in place. The cat door opened readily to a light push in either direction, and could be bolted if I wanted Tai to remain inside.

At first Tai was wary. Being able to see through the door helped though. He peered, poked with a paw and backed away again. I encouraged him outside, then shut him there with his breakfast enticingly just inside the door. With a lot of encouraging he managed to push the door open – and there was his meal. After two days of having to come through to eat any meal, he had the idea. He just wasn't sure how keen he was on it. But on the third day the light really dawned. He spent the whole day pusing in and out of his door, looking up to make sure I saw how



clever he was. I'm giddy watching, he's giddy doing. But we're both happy. Now he has access to his yard any hour of the day or night and I don't have to worry about the unexpected appearance of burglars in the night.

Recently I saw another side of my animals. Tai was out in his park sunning himself happily. On the other side of the trellis my pet house cow had been turned out after milking. She strolled down the trellising and peered in. Tai sat up. His park! Go away! Bet stared at this furry object now yelling loudly in siamese. She didn't speak the language. Perhaps he was chatting? She drifted closer, closer.

From the door I watched, hiding a grin as Tai dithered. He was on his side of the fence. She couldn't reach him. Er, no, of course she couldn't. He stood, shifting from one white paw to the other, eyeing an approaching cow who outweighed him by a factor of perhaps 50. Bet put her nose down to the trellis. Gingerly a small pink Tai nose can down and forward to meet it. Then - Bet licked. Taken aback, Tai dabbed with his tongue in return. I ambled back inside unnoticed; behind me a fawn cow and a semi-siamese cat communed. Garden of Eden stuff that gives a nice warm feeling to the viewer.

### Goosed again

I intended to zoom down to the shop on my four-wheeled farm bike. I wandered out, dumped the mail in the box for collection, and left the front gate open. (It's difficult to open it from on board the bike.) I then went back inside for a couple of minutes to grab my shoulder bag and change shoes. I was standing on one foot when the sound of a convention of infuriated cyclists broke out on the front lawn. I know that noise. It means the watchgeese have a problem - or someone does. I scurried out, second shoe in hand, just in time to see a small fox terrier fleeing for his life as the trio of feathered fiends took fast grabs at his short tucked-in tail. In the far corner the

hens were announcing in tones of horror that they'd been molested.

I had to smile. The little dog had been wandering about our road the last two days. Attracted by the sight of my free-range hens sunning themselves on the lawn, he must have slipped in through the open gate. Possibly he intended no more than a dash at them for fun. However, the geese hadn't seen it as a harmless amusement for a footloose dog. He'd been cornered, soundly beaked, and sent packing. My geese are pretty noisy but usually harmless. But they could be dangerous if they were ever really challenged, I suspect. I have heard tales from overseas of wild geese breaking people's arms with a blow from a wing. Mine only nip, leaving small deep painful bruises at worst. So far they have never attempted to strike with their wings. But if they were really roused to genuine rage, I think it possible they could do real damage.

At the moment the front lawn is rather full. I have two geese sitting on eggs, an assortment of lambs and sheep sitting on grass, and a gander sitting on a grudge.

Curly's problem could be summed up thus. His mission statement goes: 1) to protect his wives/eggs/goslings at all costs; 2) to keep the lawn clear of anyone or anything that may have evil intent towards the items listed in (1), and 3) to keep himself undamaged at all costs while carrying out (1) and (2). Since there is often a conflict here, Curly does a lot of yelling without much action. It seems that in the end (3) is the most important.

After a day of driving rain with occasional patches of hail, we shifted the sheep with small lambs. Too many of the babies were starting to droop, hunched and shivering, even in some shelter. The front lawn is larger than it sounds and due to the mild winter to date, the grass has continued to grow. With half the woolshed emptied, most of the ewes could settle their shivering offspring in the dry and sheltered interior.

Sunday was bad for Curly.

There was a visitor in the morning, then my next door neighbours were back and forth half the afternoon while we nursed a lamb which had found the weather all too much. This involved milking the ewe three times a day into a jar and then bottling the milk into the baby while she relaxed in the house. Quite a performance, and the ewe didn't appreciate it any more than we did.

Nor did Curly. Here he was, the cares of the world, two wives, two batches of eggs, on his shoulders, and we kept coming and going, disturbing a fellow each time things had quietened down. In fact, he was so infuriated that in the end I had a call from another friend. She had wanted me to do some photocopying for her, but at my gate, she'd been met with such surprising ferocity that she'd desisted. She knew that gander was usually all bluff and bluster, but this time she'd had the feeling he meant it. The copying to be done was in the mailbox and she'd be grateful if I put it back there tomorrow so she could collect it.

I wandered out to bring in more wood and discovered what she was talking about. Luckily I was wearing heavy trousers and boots, otherwise I'd have sustained a couple of good bruises. Curly had flung the habits of a lifetime to the winds and was assaulting everything that moved. Cheered on, I might add, by his wives. I re-filled the woodbox and retired to a window to watch. Then I grinned. My unhappy gander had run into the same problem as he had the previous year. It was just that this year there were some thrity sheep instead of a couple. Sheep with a reasonable coat of wool don't feel the beak of a gander. So there poor old Curly stood, savaging a sheep to move it on. And there the ewe stood, moving slightly to get the scratching in just the right place as his beak thrust and scabbled at her neck and flanks. What I had was a gander half mad with frustration. Since the flock is there for several days, he should have a nervous

breakdown my mid-week – and I'll be getting everything in the mailbox instead of at the door.

## Lambing

Lambing has started and it's clear that, good weather or not, this season is about to be a royal pain. Several ewes had difficulties.

When Teardrops lambled, I heard crying and shot out to see why. Later we could reconstruct events. Teardrops had lambled under the trees to the east. She cleaned the lamb, then wandered off to have the second some 50 yards away. In the meantime the ewe we call The Babysitter had appeared and gathered the first lamb into her collection. It followed, as newborn lambs will. Unfortunately while she was happy to babysit it, she refused point blank to offer dinner. When I steamed up the paddock, the lamb was crying miserably as the ewe alternatively licked and comforted it, then thumped it silly when it tried to drink. I removed it, returned it to its correct mother, then watched in fury as she too rejected it firmly. 'Didn't want that,' she grunted. 'Passed his use-by date, and anyhow he was going off, wrong smell.'

I persisted only to see the lamb knocked flat for the umpteenth time. I signed and picked them both up to head for the shed. Once there I tried Teardrops to the fence and hooked the rejected one up. He sucked industriously. This was more like it. I untied Madam only to see the lamb knocked flying once more. I grabbed her, tied her up again, and head for next door. They have a spray you can use on the ewe's nose and over both lambs. In theory everyone smells right and she'll accept them both. I sprayed energetically. Pet lambs are a real bind. They have to be fed at all hours and usually have trouble reintegrating with the flock once they are weaned. Then I released Teardrops and departed, fingers crossed.

A couple of hours later I came back. To no avail. So far as Tear-

drops was concerned, she'd spoken her last word on the subject. The poor lamb was curled miserably in a corner alone, while his mother snuggled her other offspring. Out of hard yellow eyes she glared at the intruder. He wasn't hers, she wasn't taking him, and that was that!

But this is my fourth lambing. By now I've learned a trick or two. I bailed her up in the corner, tied her firmly to the gatepost, and brought up the unloved one. He had the idea at once, latching on to a teat with much tail wagging. I've no idea why lambs waggle their tails madly as they drink, but it is a useful indication that they have the right place. So he waggled, Teardrops stamped and glared, and her other lamb ran about indignantly trying to push in.

Normally this works in a few days as the lamb takes on the ewe's scent from her milk. In this case Teardrops was too old and wise. She knew this one was surplus to requirements – hers. As a result I am now bottle-feeding a small black ram lamb four times daily. This is a perishing nuisance but the alternative is murdering a 3-day-old lamb or allowing it to starve. A lot of the major farmers would. If they cared like that for every lamb in this position, they'd do nothing else. But having only 18 acres and being an animal lover to boot, I can afford the time and (sigh) put up with the aggravation. Reject, as he is now known, thrives.

The only drawback (apart from having to wander out into a dark paddock and baa like a sheep to call Reject for his 9pm bottle) was Tai. It didn't take his lordship long to discover that someone was getting more attention than he was. As a result, my feedings of Reject were enlivened by loud siamese wails through the trellis. I got fed up with that after a week and now shut the door so Tai can't come out to complain. I have to admit though, it isn't all bad knowing your cat loves you and is jealous.

The other night I forgot to shut Tai in and he disconcerted a ewe,

poor soul. His crying sounds just like a lamb and convinced her it was one of her in trouble, stuck behind the trellis. While I fed Reject and cursed my dear little cat, a distracted ewe scuttled rapidly between her own sleeping twins and Tai, bawling his heart out from his park. It wasn't until Reject finished and I returned inside that she was able to make some sense out of her confusion. It took her ages to sort it all out and settle down again. Thank heavens my only neighbours are friends and they don't get that bothered about weird goings-on here.

And talk about alarming the neighbours... Sat up from my book and realized that it was after 9. Time for Reject's bottle. I filled it and strolled out into a lovely moonlit night to provide for him. The usual system is to baa. Like any intelligent lamb he knows the voice that means food. I baa'd and heard the scurry of hooves. They did sound a bit loud, but then it was a very still night. Then for one surprised moment I thought I'd been engulfed in a stampede as six coloured lambs all arrived at once. Reject's friends had also thought it was a nice night – for a gallop along with him just in case the end result was profitable. Once they found there was a human at the end of the race, they hastily sheered off. Reject attached himself to the bottle and sucked happily.

Unfortunately the other lambs were now bereft of mothers. They straggled away crying disconsolately as anxious mums answered in deeper tones from all over the three acres. Half an hour later, the last mum had yet to find her missing offspring. I redonned boots and sallied forth to restore him. My neighbours shot out to query the torch zig-zagging across the paddock again. I explained, to the accompaniment of desolate cries from the miserably separated. We did some fast restoration work and silence fell. It was wonderful! There are times, just occasionally, when I wonder why I ever went in for sheep.

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## Books

Notes by Jean Weber

When the towering piles of books-to-be-reviewed topple over onto me when I sit down at the computer, I do get the message that it's about time I did something about catching up. This has been occurring frequently over the past few weeks. Mind you, I cheat. I take down some of the books, scrutinize them thoughtfully, say 'no, I won't bother to review you' and put them in the box to go up to Eric's to be put on shelves... or I put them in the box to be sold, given away, or otherwise disposed of. But there's still a lot of them left, looming over me. Guess I'd better start reviewing.

### Additions to last issue's reviews

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**C.J. Cherryh, *Rusalka*, 1989; *Chernevog*, 1990; *Yvgenle*, 1991; all Del Rey**

My comments last issue on this book left out a rather important point. Cherryh has done a fine job of examining the possible consequences of one of the major curses: 'May all your wishes come true.' (Also phrased as: 'May you get everything you wish for.')

This book reminded me a lot of Cherryh's early works, which were very heavy on psychology and light on action. I used to like that style; I'm not quite sure why I've didn't like these books. Maybe I just wasn't in the mood at the time I read them.

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**Norman Spinrad, *Russian Spring*, Bantam, 1991**

This is the kind of book that sends me into simultaneous enthusiasm and depression. Enthusiasm because I can empathise so much with people who have something so important in their lives (usually something to do with space exploration) that they are willing to give up everything else to pursue their goal, yet they are ethical



enough to try to do it 'right' (by persuading, rather than forcing, others, for example) and hence they tend toward naivety and don't notice all the politicking going on around them and frequently get trampled in the process... not to mention getting into the most awful catch-22 type situations, where no matter what they do, they violate some important part of their ethical code.

Depression for most of the same reasons, plus the fact that I have never been blessed (or cursed) with such an enthusiasm myself, being rather more of a dilettante. I suppose I'm glad to have been spared the ethical crises, and the backstabbing from others, and so on... but then I've missed out on the great sense of accomplishment, too. Ah, well. It's books like this that make me think about things like that. (See also Bova's *Mars* and Robinson's *Red Mars*, reviewed somewhere later in this issue.)

This is a terrific book. I'll bet a lot of Americans didn't like it, because it points out many of the flaws in their decision-making system which has stalled and stymied the space program for many years. The Russians, on the other hand, have plenty of talented, knowledgeable people with dreams and nothing to lose, plus a bunch of hardware that could be used to get into space and Do Something. So what should a young man with a dream do: waste his best years in the bureaucratic morass, or join the dynamic thinkers and movers (and be labelled a traitor in the process)? Is loyalty to one's country and people more important than loyalty to the future of humankind? Answers to the questions are not easy, though some might think so.

### New & interesting women writers

A flood of new women writers has appeared on the sf scene in the past two years, along with strong stories by established writers. Many, though not all, of the new writers have been published under Del Rey's 'Discovery' label, and I've found it a useful guide to interesting books.

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**Pauline Ashwell, *Unwillingly to Earth*, Tor, 1992**

An amusing and enjoyable adventure following the life of Lizzie Lee, a teenager raised on a mining planet and tricked into attending university on Earth, where she definitely doesn't want to be. 'But she can never resist a challenge either, whether it's solving a murder mystery on the moon, negotiating a hostage crisis amidst a collapsing civilisation, or preventing a global war.'

This book appears to have been originally a collection of related short stories, but succeeds despite that. I always enjoy stories which have strong female characters (even if too good to be believable) and which manage to question many beliefs of our society without such questioning getting in the way of the story. Ashwell does a fine job.

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**Michelle Shirey Crean, *Dancer of the Sixth*, Del Rey, 1993**

An interesting psychological adventure which I enjoyed, but rather too 'set up' to be believable. 'Dancer, second in command of the military intelligence unit called the Sixth Service, was a hotshot fighter pilot known for her utter fearlessness. But there were things in Dancer's past she could not face -

and much she could not even remember. For her own good – or for their purposes – the Sixth Service has long ago conditioned her to forget. But then Dancer came face-to-face with her past... (in circumstances where) something was definitely not right.' She has to solve a mystery with serious consequences for a great many people.

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**Margaret Davis, *Mind Light*, Del Rey, 1992**

Another Del Rey 'Discovery'. The Michaelsons, a family of interstellar traders, take on a pilot who turns out to have serious problems: his memories had been tampered with after he stumbled upon a secret that the powerful Space Corps would do anything to hide (the existence of aliens). But other people want him to remember, so he can testify against the perpetrators and help forge links with the aliens.

Then there's the head of the Michaelson family, Kiley, who's a bit too much of the 'woman afraid of her own success' for my taste, although no doubt she's a realistic character. Not surprisingly, Kiley falls in love with the pilot, but can't admit it to herself. And the rest of the family has difficulty coming to terms with the pilot's problems and their unintentional involvement in them. Davis manages to carry all this off, and produce a dramatic and involving story, but the heavy psychological bits sound a bit too textbook-pat to me.

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**Jane S. Fancher, *Groundties* (1991), *Uplink* (1992), *Harmonies of the 'Net* (1992), Warner (Questar)**

The focal character of these books, Stephen Ridenour, is a brilliant but disturbed young man from a planetary background, who was educated among spacers. Spacers typically have quite racist views about Recons (people genetically reconstructed from pre-spacer cultural groups, who are

allowed to colonise planets and live semi-traditional lives), and those views are typically reciprocated.

As the story unfolds, the reader becomes aware of the horrors of Stephen's life, the abuse he suffered at many hands, his self-loathing arising from that abuse, and the mental survival mechanisms he developed. This disturbed young man is, however, the key to solving a great mystery: something is threatening the communications network that links all of human space. Data is disappearing off the net, a phenomenon believed impossible. Admiral Loren Cantrell must find out who's doing it and how, and stop them. Stephen is her only hope.



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**Karen Joy Fowler, Sarah Canary, *Zebra*, 1991**

This award-winning book is utterly fascinating, combining historical fiction and science fiction in an adventure that 'offers intriguing insights into the extravagant myths and legends of the past which have evolved into the pillars of (US) national heritage' and has a lot to say about sexism and racism. A woman appears to a group of Chinese workmen in a forest camp in the Pacific Northwest, in the winter of 1873. She is dressed strangely and speaks in an unknown language. As the story unfolds, stranger things happen.

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**Karen Joy Fowler, *Artificial Things*, Bantam, 1986 (reissued 1992)**

A collection of excellent short stories, previously published in *Asimov's*, *F&SF* and *Writers of the Future*.

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**Nichola Griffith, *Ammonite*, Del Rey, 1992**

A well-written, thought-provoking book that covers a lot of familiar topics. Again, I enjoyed it despite its flaws. There's this planet, see, with a small recently-established human colony and a large number of descendants of a long-ago human colony that was decimated by a virus that changed the survivors irrevocably. For one thing, they are all women. Sound familiar? So the main character, an anthropologist, makes a long journey around the planet visiting different groups of women and studying them, trying to find out their biological secret. This gives the author lots of opportunity to make a lot of very good points, but it is a rather over-used technique. On the other hand, mostly the book is quite believable, and certainly the people are as varied as any group of humans, with strongly-held but differing opinions on many important issues, including whether fighting between groups is acceptable behaviour.

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**Maureen F. McHugh, China Mountain Zhang, Tor, 1992**

This award-winning book is actually a collection of connected short stories (some of which I'd read in one of the magazines). The title is the name of the main character. The stories give magnificent glimpses into the possibilities of life in the 22nd century: some good, some bad. A world where the Chinese have the upper hand. I was very impressed with the book.

Human-powered kite races over Greenwich Village. Arctic research outposts in fragile, independent Canada. Opulent bastions



of world learning in cosmopolitan Beijing, cheek-by-jowl with illegal cybernetic speakeasies where wealthy urbanites tempt death. Austere disciplines that harness ancient wisdom to the raw power of the silicon chip. Communes on Mars... A world of fear and hope, of global disaster and slow healing, of progress in the cracks of an old, decaying hegemony. A world where a determined young man might, just might, make a difference.'

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**Susan Palwick, *Flying In Place*, Tor, 1992**

Not science fiction, and only partly fantasy, this hair-raising book tackles the subject of child sexual abuse in a no-holds-barred, yet very readable, fashion. I was several pages into the book before I realised what was happening, so skillful is the writer. Emma is twelve. Her father abuses her. She escapes in her mind, because her body cannot escape. She meets her dead sister, who helps her learn how to escape physically, too (without dying). Other people try to help Emma, who must struggle not only with her father's abuse and her mother's refusal to accept what's happening, but also with her own feelings of guilt.

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**Mary Rosenblum, *The Drylands*, Del Rey, 1993**

The drought has devastated 21st century North America.. 'Crops failed, refugee camps overflowed, and riots raged across the country – and the Army Corps of Engineers had the dirty job of rationing what little water was left.' In the Pacific Northwest, farmers are being accused of sabotaging a pipeline, but they are simply pawns in a strategic power game. To expose the real problems means giving away some secrets of the drought survivors. A compelling and believable book. Another Del Rey 'Discovery'.

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**Melissa Scott, *Dreamships*, Tor, 1992**

Another well-written tale of the powerful and the powerless. When you live in an environment where not even the air is free, everyone can be traced through their credit cards and passes, and the penalty for challenging the powerful may be as simple as being put 'outside', being a rebel (or even a minor conformist) can be rather more difficult than in our society. This story of rebels and nonconformists is full of believable characters living in a very realistically depicted future.

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**Elizabeth Vonarburg, *The Silent City*, © 1981 (Bantam edition, in English, 1992) and *In The Mothers' Land*, Bantam, 1992**

Translated from French by Jane Brierley. Two most impressive and thoughtful books, set in Europe. *The Silent City* takes place 300 years in our future; the second book several hundred years later. There are two sets of survivors of a nuclear war: those who holed up in underground shelters (cities) and who continue to have access to very advanced technology; and those who survived outside and have only low technology and a fairly feudal society. The story focuses on Elisa, the last child of a city in decline. She was created through bio-engineering to have remarkable powers of rejuvenation, with the intention that she could save the cities and the knowledge and science they guard. However, Elisa becomes interested in the world outside.

*In The Mothers' Land* looks at a well-developed female-run society that has risen from the ashes of the old world. We see it through the eyes of a child as she grows to adulthood and slowly learns that things are not always quite what they seem. She questions many of the principles on which her society is built, and while examining those principles, she (and we) discover both good and bad reasons for

things being the way they are, and must think about the good and bad points of the alternatives.

It's been awhile since I've read a convincing 'feminist utopia' type of book that really examines the issues, rather than simply being a 'what if' or 'wouldn't it be nice if' fantasy.

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**Sheri S. Tepper, *Slideshow*, Bantam, 1992**

If you've read any of Tepper's recent adult sf, you'll know she writes complex, well-developed, thoughtful and believable fiction. This book is set in the same universe as several others and makes reference to the worlds in those other books (most notable, Hobbs Land from *Raising the Stones*), but it is a stand-alone book; you don't need to be familiar with any of the others to understand and appreciate this one.

'On the planet of Elsewhere, the Council had always enforced the governing of each province in the manner the people had chosen, so long as each respected its neighbors' local customs and so long as the people remained within their home-lands. Generations later, inhabitants have begun to question this tradition.' Especially when the traditions conspicuously favored one sex over the other, or one race over others. 'Freewill and the reality of God are just two of the timeless issues this courageous band of humans must confront as they strive to decide if complete tolerance and leaving others alone is ever evil... and what they should do if it is.'

This is an excellent examination of the questions surrounding the 'cultural interference' issue on Earth; for example, is it right to ignore the pleas of African women for help to free them from the custom of infibulation (so-called 'female circumcision') on the grounds that it's a religious and cultural issue? Is it right to ignore slavery on similar grounds, when the slaves ask for help?

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**Sheri S. Tepper, *Beauty*, Bantam, 1992**

Superficially, this book is a retelling of the 'Sleeping Beauty' fairy tale, but it's much more than that. '...a thought-provoking and finely crafted novel that thoroughly involves the reader in the life of ... Beauty. On her sixteenth birthday, Beauty is seemingly able to sidestep her aunt's curse. Instead she is transported to the future. Here begin her adventures as she travels magically back and forth in time to visit places both imaginary and real. Finally she comes to understand what has been her special gift to humanity all along. For in Beauty, there is beauty. And in beauty, magic. Without our enchanted places, humanity is no more than an upstart ape. And this, we realize, is why Beauty must be saved, both in the fantastical world of Tepper's novel and in the actual world in which we live.'

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**Deborah Wheeler, *Jaydlum*, Daw, 1993**

I had very mixed reactions to this book. For the first few chapters, I thought it was entirely too much like Anne McCaffrey's *Crystal Singer* books, and was not impressed. Then Wheeler injected a totally different twist, sending her characters adrift into time and alternative realities. What she does then is quite fascinating, although at times a bit overburdened with ethical messages.

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**Men write good stuff too**

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**Ben Bova, *Mars***

One of the many good things about Bova's book is that he doesn't gloss over the likely real problems of an exploration expedition to Mars: not just the technical problems, but the personal-interaction (and political) issues you'd expect to find in any group of people confined in close quarters for several years. Bova makes all of the characters (and most of their points of view) quite believable.

There's plenty of drama and action for those that want it, and his science and technology are, as always, excellent.

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**Charles de Lint, *The Little Country*, Tor, 1991**

This fantasy is, in the words of Patricia McKillip, 'an intricately structured novel, full of a wealth of detail about music, Cornwall, and things magical and arcane.' Couldn't have said it better myself. I was, um, enchanted. (Sorry about that.)

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**Charles de Lint, *Spiritwalk*, Tor, 1991**

This book is the sequel to *Moonheart*. 'Tamson House, in modern, urban Ottawa, is a rambling, eccentric curiosity of a house - and a place of hidden Power. Built at a point where the leylines meet, upon land that was once a sacred site, it is the gateway to a spirit-world where Celtic and Native American magicks mingle and leak into our own.' I am doubly enchanted by this volume!



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**Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Mars*, Grafton, 1992**

An big, sweeping, impressive, realistic, believable book, both encouraging and discouraging - encouraging because of the vision it offers of the exploration and settlement of Mars; discouraging because of the all too realistic depiction of the differences of opinion and of motivation that can contribute to the destruction of a society. I cannot do it justice in a few words, but I loved it and look forward to the two sequels, *Green Mars* and *Blue Mars*.

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**Vernor Vinge, *A Fire Upon the Deep*, Tor, 1992**

A very impressive book, worthy of the Hugo it won. Most authors would have been doing well to tell only one of the two major stories interwoven in this volume, but Vinge has managed to do both stories justice.

One story involves an alien species which has group minds. Each individual 'person' has 4 to 6 'members', physically distinct beings that work together as do the various parts of the human body. Any 'member' on its own has only part of a mind, and tends to be either insane or of minimal intelligence. If a member dies, the individual can obtain another member to fill the gap; thus the mind undergoes transformations but can live for hundreds of years. Vinge does a fine job of depicting a society based on such group-mind individuals, into which two human children are thrust by a major catastrophe.

The second story involves the catastrophe (the unleashing of an evil, powerful entity on the universe) and its effects on some parts of the space-time continuum and the species within it. Vinge's vision of the 'zones of thought' and their relationship to faster-than-light vs slower-than-light travel, amongst other things, is breathtaking.

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**Carol Severance, *Storm Caller and Sorcerous Sea*, Del Rey, 1993**

Sequels to *Demon Drums*. Set in an island world similar to Earth's South Pacific. Powerful, dramatic fantasy *not* based on Celtic mythology.



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## Letters

### Comments on WWW #42

**Pamela Boal**  
4 Westfield Way  
Charlton Heights  
Wantage  
Oxon OX12 7EW, U.K.  
30 June 1992

My blood pressure is now being managed with (I'm annoyed to say) prescribed drugs. It has been my experience that the drugs doctors have prescribed me over the years have caused more problems than they have cured.

After years of putting up with unhelpful medical intervention, I determined to find my own solutions. Often an adjustment to diet and life style eases unpleasant symptoms, and a chiropractor has eased my pain far more than any drugs, and without side effects. So far I have not found an alternative to the drugs for my high blood pressure.

Reports from establishment medical practitioners have meant that I have never been able to get insurance or (if I have been accepted by an insurance company) the premiums were weighted way beyond our ability to afford the insurance. My chiropractor has a group insurance that allows me to take out cover at the same price as everyone else (£2.60 a month), which not only covers my chiropractor's charges but also covers much of my dentist's and optician's charges.

The thing that most irritates me about medical practitioners in Britain is their tendency to make a diagnosis based on their ill-informed assessment of the patient's social and psychological standing. I could quote several examples, but the two that most rankle with me are the following.

Firstly, when I was a child, my ecthyma was diagnosed as impetigo. I was sent to a centre for antiseptic baths, which of course made my ecthyma much worse. The doctor had barely looked at



me; the fact that I was an evacuee from London and attending the clinic on my own (without a supervising adult) was all the evidence he needed.

Secondly, when we were living in Cyprus, I decided that I should see a doctor because persistent flu-like symptoms were interfering with my activities to an unwarranted extent. British Armed Forces doctors are even more prone to the social diagnosis than civilian ones. I was told that if I had a few hobbies or interests, I would probably feel better. Needless to say, then as always finding the time to fit in all my activities and interests was a problem. The doctor 'knew' that Airmen's wives overseas are prone to boredom and that I must have time on my hands as two of our three children were in boarding school. It soon became evident that my symptoms were caused by the fact that I had started the menopause. Even if the doctor had paused to listen before making his snap judgement, being a male he may well not have realised the problem as I was only 36 at the time. That of course was before the days of HRT (hormone replacement therapy) and the medical profession (even those few doctors who believed in menopausal problems) had no help to offer.

*{There was an article in the paper just last week about the fact that very few medical practitioners, even today, can recognise menopause symptoms in a woman under*

*the age of 45 or 50, simply because it never occurs to them that it can happen a lot earlier. And of course when menopause is diagnosed, the woman is often given HRT whether or not she wants it - the 'drug cure' again. - JHW}*

**Eric Mayer**  
PO Box 17143  
Rochester, NY 14617  
USA

26 June 1992

I've really enjoyed reading Lyn McConchie's articles. Life on a farm sound like fun - so long as someone else does the farm work!

New York City has a horrible reputation. I lived there four years and found it to be basically unlivable. But I did not find the average New Yorker to be unpleasant. The problem was that with so many people crammed together, in encountering so many people every day, you tended always to run across a jerk of some sort. But most New Yorkers are amazing considering the grace with which they endure the city's hardships. And I never encountered a rude cab driver. They were invariably chatty and friendly, provided they spoke English. (They often needed to be given directions, however.)

I was recently back in New York City, for the first time in many years, to interview young adult author Nicole St. John (who writes under the name Norma Johnston among others). It was the

weekend of the LA riots and Nicole, fearing trouble in the city, had elected to meet at a spot she considered, rightly I suppose, immune to lower-class rampages – the tea room at the Helmsley Palace. This was not the sort of place I frequented during my years in NYC.

This had been decided upon when I called her from the Amtrak station earlier in the morning, so I was not dressed appropriately. Here are these gaudily uniformed minions opening the taxi door and I'm dressed in a shirt and tie (at least), running shoes and a big fanny pack holding my tape recorder. They let me in anyway. It was a huge, gilded room, a couple stories high; piped in classical music, waiters in monkey suits, guys in \$300 suits, women in evening dress...

I set the recorder on the table and we talked. She's a very nice, friendly person, kind of grandmotherly but very worldly too. It was a good interview. We had tea. A pot of Earl Grey for each and the monkey suits brought around little trays with finger food. Water cress and cucumber sandwiches (very nice), crackers with stuff on, bread with stuff on, scones with clotted cream. It came to a mere \$76. The magazine is supposed to pay for the meal and the train. Of course, they haven't paid me yet for the article that ran in January, or the one that ran in October...

### Comments on WWW #43

**Kim Huett**  
PO Box 679  
Woden, ACT 2606  
Australia

25 April 1993

I would agree with Joe Nicholas about the blandness of your writing. I'm interested to see this is a deliberate policy.

*{Gee, Kim, that's an interesting interpretation, that my policy is 'blandness', rather than I write what I want, the way I want, and some people find it bland. – JHW}*

**Patricia McKinley**  
15 Barker Street  
Ipswich, QLD 4305  
Australia

1 October 1993

To take up where I left off, with Orson Scott Card:

I tend to jump in with intuitive opinions (whatever that may mean) about people situations, anything that crosses my path really, and then look for evidence to back up these opinions. The main reasons I was complaining about Card was to motivate myself to search for a bit more evidence.

Sorry my letter sounded ambiguous – I wasn't talking about morals at all. Yes, Card sounds like he puts a lot of time and effort into day-to-day Christian living. My confusion is more theological. My gut reaction to the Mormon religion is that it is fairly fundamental, and chats with the eager young missionaries and someone who has a Mormon relative have only made me more sure of this (although no-one has convinced me totally – yet). Eventually I'll find someone who can answer that question to my satisfaction; till then, it's a pretty fundamental sort of church!

And I am convinced that intelligent people in fundamental religions are either deluding themselves or happy to go along with the crowd because whatever else is offered/gained makes it worth keeping quiet. Card's apparent obsessions with salvation, suffering and child prodigies, his urge to rewrite masses of previous work, and his inability (maybe) to *finish* either the Alvin Maker or Ender series make me suspicious of his position on the fundamental fence.

That's my opinion anyway. I'm a very keen amateur psychologist, will debate (usually not very logically) motivations and intentions of just about anything at almost any time. My job is perfect for this sort of obsession – usually my (intellectually disabled) clients can't tell me, not in so many words anyway, whether I'm talking rot or not – and dissecting/abusing the

intentions of one's co-workers/bosses is such good therapy – at least that's what we tell ourselves.

### Comments on WWW #44

**Pamela Boal**  
(address above)

8 September 1993

I always enjoy and appreciate photos in a zine... The hot tub room looks most attractive, however I am puzzled... there is a difference between a circular high sided wooden tub and our lower sided oval ceramic baths. Is there a difference in function? ...or is it perhaps filled with hot natural mineral waters?

*{I don't think there is any major difference in function between a spa bath and a hot tub. A spa bath is usually more shallow, and one essentially reclines in it, whereas one sits upright on the benches in a hot tub. I prefer the sitting-up variety because I get better massaging action from both the water jets and the air bubble jets, than in reclining-type spas. (My sister's hot tub, while similar in shape to mine, is made of fiberglass.) The water in mine is tap water with a bunch of disinfecting chemicals in it. – JHW}*

On the subject of transsexuals, there has recently been some media attention to the female athletes who were stripped of their records, medals and further opportunities to compete because they failed sex tests. Apart from the death of their sporting ambitions, their lives were devastated by being told that they were not truly women. One medical expert demonstrated not only the unreliability but the downright absurdity of the sex tests. The expert handed a certificate to a person who not only looked like a man but obviously considered himself male and had lived as a male all his life. The certificate listed the results of tests used by the Olympics testing team that proved the man was a female and eligible to be a member of his country's female athletic squad.

The man wasn't sure how he would shape up as an athlete but commented that he knew he was going to enjoy the changing room. The man was obviously happy and confident in his gender and able to ignore his chromosomes and hormone level comparisons.

I wonder thought if society's gradual enlightenment and greater tolerance is helpful to those who feel unhappy in the gender role that was applied to them from birth? There will always be people whose physical ambiguity is greater than the norm, and for such people society's understanding and acceptance and if need be medical help can only be a good thing. Does the media attention to sexuality and the action of pressure groups forcing opinions about gender roles and sexuality upon ever younger minds create emotional confusion among athletic girls (used to be called tom boys) or creative boys? Society doesn't tell such children you are perfectly normal, that if you seem to have skills and interests more often attributed to a person of the other sex that makes you a more balanced individual or that can be an advantage in your career. Society tells them it is proper to wonder about your sexuality and gender. An awful lot of little girls at some time say I wish I had been a boy; now they say I wonder if I am really a boy.

*[Many feminists are of course pushing hard for society to tell children that a wide variety of skills and interests are 'normal' for both sexes; but getting the message across isn't easy, especially when many elements of the media seize upon the more sensational notions of sexual identity. - JHW]*

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

1 October 1993

50 years old! Wow. I will be 49 on 4 October. However, I must look a bit older. Last night I came home from work, too tired to cook up supper, so I went out to a local Kentucky Fried Chicken place to try their new roasted chicken. One-fourth chicken plus corn came to \$3.88, after which the clerk rang up \$3.50 for me to pay. Only when I was eating did I look at the receipt and discover I had been given a senior citizen's 10% discount. Sigh... must have been the gray hairs in my beard.

What can I say about Sue Peukert's article? It certainly applies to me, as far as piles of stuff go. I think this may be one of the reasons I am still not in any kind of sexual relationship, since sooner or later my old bachelor habits crop up... 'If you can still step over the pile, there is no need to pick it

up.'... 'Try mind over matter; if you don't mind the mess, it doesn't matter.' My only consolation is that many other male fans I know are just as bad or worse, but some have indeed found partners who can either put up with it, or are messy themselves. Yet it is true that women tend to be more tidy, compulsively so much of the time, than men. Is this cultural or instinctive? Or a combination of both?

*[Considering the number of women I know - including myself - who are not tidy, I'd incline towards the cultural conditioning idea myself, because with some of us it clearly hasn't 'taken'. On the other hand, I suppose that females have always been in charge of the camp/cave/tent/whatever, and have often needed to be able to pack up and move quickly, so tidiness might have been a survival trait. Men were only responsible for their own junk, while women had to deal with the children and their junk, and the older relatives if there were any. Gosh, ain't speculation fun? - JHW]*

Going on to the letter column, I should note that the race riot has had a lot of after effects, especially in the area where I work, the GMC in south-central LA. Some rebuilding has been going on, and some has not. Several of the mini-malls and shops have been rebuilt and opened, enough to provide a minimum of food and services to the population.

One of the biggest problems has been the Korean liquor store owners who want to rebuild and reopen their liquor stores. They paid lots of money for the licenses and fees, and are desperate for money to live on. But there is an effort to ban more liquor stores, on the grounds that they are the cause of many of the problems. This in an area where drug dealing is conducted openly on the streets after dark, and sometimes during the day, with gangs all over the place. So blame the liquor store owners. I get the impression that the Koreans are now the convenient



scapegoats that the Jews once were.

To update my letter, we also had enough rain from January to April this year that the drought is considered over in northern and central California. Southern California still officially has water shortages, although nothing is being done about water conservation.

*(Harry also sent a copy of 'Eve Ackerman's Fannish Twelve Steps', a take-off on the Alcoholics Anonymous 12 steps. - JHW)*

**Eric Mayer**  
(address above)

Approximately October 1993

I got a kick out of Sue Peukert's article. It kind of took me back... not back to anywhere I would want to be again, but definitely back... to the house I live in now... which now is neat but which, a few years ago, before my divorce, was ... not.

Kathy, my ex-wife, was a pack rat with a credit card. And after she'd lost all the credit cards, she went to the thrift stores every day to buy stuff. Any stuff. Every day, for ten years, she'd bring home a box of stuff from the thrift store. Maybe old books, or old records, or puzzles, or jewelry, or bottles, or telephone pole insulators, and clothes... any kind of clothes. It was like that old joke about what's heavier, a pound of lead or a pound of feathers... only she couldn't figure out that it cost as much to spend a dollar at the thrift store as at the department store.

But it is clutter we're talking about. So imagine... a box of stuff every day, week after week, month after month. Except for the kitchen

and bathroom, you couldn't see the floor... For a time we tried to clear paths. At last we just gave up and the stuff lay there. You walked over layers of stuff - a kind of uncooked lasagna of personal possessions. You get used to it.

I also noted your discussions about doing your best while writing. I generally agree with Joseph's statement, as quoted, but I admit to giving myself some leeway by the manner in which I define the task at hand. For instance, in the last issue of *Groggy*, I defined my portion as a letter substitute, and to my way of thinking that requires less polish than an article. (Just as I don't rewrite locs, which I define as conversation.) When I write fanzine articles, I put no less effort in them than in writing I know I'll be paid for. Maybe more. A magazine article has some worth just by earning some money, whereas a fanzine article has worth only insofar as it has some intrinsic merit and someone actually enjoys it.

**Lloyd Penney**  
412-4 Lisa Street  
Brampton, ON L6T 4B6  
Canada

5 November 1993

My education into the human condition has been furthered by two transexual fans who live in Ottawa. They are (now) Marie van Dusen and Dyane Bruce, two young men who have decided that they are really female, and are taking psychological and hormonal treatments to make the transition complete. They run one of the conventions in Ottawa, and their

changing of sex hasn't changed how other fans treat them. They are simply changing sex, which has become a new part of life.

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

13 October 1993

Bernadette Bosky has a point on mediocre work. Used to be, my professional writing got 2 or 3 drafts and my fan writing got one. In Yandro, everything I did was typed directly on stencil. These days I've worked up to doing a second draft on fan writing, but then I have more time now. (And I'm not at all sure that the second draft helps.) Two drafts on the pro book reviews; one to get down what I want to say, and a second to figure out how I want to say it. Who needs more?

The problem with Nicholas is that the 'accepted rules' for travel writing are put down for professionals who are writing for an audience of strangers. Fan writing, if it's going to be remembered, should be far more intimate, because you're writing for a smaller audience and one that, mostly, knows you. The difference is the same as that between speeches and conversation.

**I also heard from:** jan howard finder, Judith Hanna, Karen Herkes, Janice Murray, Pete Presford, Ben Schilling (COA: 2615 Madrid, Apt. 1, Madison, WI 53713, USA).

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