

Weber Woman's Wrevenge

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

The Rubbish Bin

Once again I'm overwhelmed with material for this zine. I'll confess that things already in electronic form (such as Paula Johanson's article, took precedence over things I need to type up, such as Lyn McConchie's farming stories. I also had a huge backlog of books and letters! So no photos this time. Getting this copied before Eric and I leave on yet another trip to the USA is going to be difficult enough, without having too many pages to cope with. (Oh, life is sooooo difficult!) — Jean

Contents

Diary notes, Jean Weber.....	3
James Tiptree Jr Award.....	6
Letters	7
Sex dance, by Paula Johanson	12
Books	13

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Aussiecon Memory Book

September 1995

56 pages, 70 photos, plus cartoons and other illustrations. Reprints and new articles. One highlight is a piece from Ursula Le Guin updated her 1975 Aussiecon GoH speech.

Available now from **Jean Weber**.

Published by the committee of the Aussiecon Reunion Convention (ARCon).

Prices (air mail postage included):
A\$13 or equivalent in NZ\$ within Australia/NZ;
A\$15 or equivalent in the rest of the world

Make cheques out to Eric Lindsay for Australian or US dollars, or British pounds. We can also take Australian, Canadian, US or NZ cash (notes only), but that is strictly at your own risk. No coins!

Diary notes

Work stuff

The first deadline for my project at ISSC (Integrated Systems Solutions Corporation) was February 3. Six books and two large sets of online help had to be done by then. I had two writers and a part-time editor/writer working with me. We were supposedly doing relatively minor revisions to the books and help, but in the course of doing that we discovered vast numbers of errors that had remained undetected over the past year or more. Professional pride required us to do our best to correct the errors as well as making the revisions based on changes to the software itself.

When some bean-counter came around asking for justification for why there were twice as many people apparently producing the same amount of documentation as before, I whipped out my running list of problems detected and snarled, "because the writing team on this project has been under-resourced for the past three years, and we're trying to clean up the mess!" The product has now gone from being a locally-used one to being used worldwide by IBM as a strategic tool, so everyone's paying a lot more attention to quality at all levels. About bloody time!

By now, however, the novelty has definitely worn off my job. I really don't like being an employee! The good news is: (a) I got a \$400 (tax-free) award for my efforts on the project that finished the end of February; and (b) I now have 5 writers on my team, and they are all doing a fine job, even in my absence. Oh yeah, and I'm now managing one writer on a second, related project.

Just before I went on the March-April trip to the USA, I had a lot of hassles with a few people on the project, but things sorted themselves out and it was pleasant for awhile.

Maybe the tantrum I had just before I left had some effect!

However, when I returned from the trip to Tasmania, I found that a low-key disagreement between the one man in the group and all the others had escalated into a more serious problem, which I had to deal with. Just a case of an otherwise good worker who didn't fit into a particular group. I could really sympathize with his situation (I've been in enough similar ones myself), but that only helped me keep things in some sort of perspective, it didn't solve the problem.

My manager fairly quickly found another job for the man, a job which makes such good use of his knowledge and abilities that I suspect the manager might have taken the man away from my team even if he weren't a problem there. The replacement writer, a woman whom I've known for some years, and who is quite talented, has fit in well.

Not long after that was sorted out, 3 of the 4 other full-time members of the group started complaining about the 4th (Sandra), who has rather irregular working hours and habits. I've worked with her for years and gotten used to her habits, and I know that she does superb work and is very dedicated. Two of the other women don't know this from experience, and the 3rd is someone who hasn't gotten along well with Sandra for years. Fortunately I get along well with both of them, so I can manage to keep some semblance of order, but I do that mostly by keeping them apart as much as possible.

The latest drama involved our department's manager, who has been handling all sorts of personnel issues very badly lately (no one knows what his problem is, but everyone has an opinion). I'm annoyed because he took one of my

writers away on no notice (and did it on a day when I was working at home, without even phoning me, which suggests that he didn't want to deal with my reaction; he then went on 2 weeks leave and I couldn't contact him). Of course I've coped, but I'm not impressed. Several other people have had the same problem with him lately.

Today we learned that the office is moving to another suburb (St Leonards) in January (not the manager's fault, that). The project I'm managing is not moving, which is probably a good thing. I won't commute to the new location, at least not more than once or twice a week, so I'd probably have to resign if I don't stay on the current project into the new year. That's okay... I think I've been looking for a good excuse to leave.

Yeh, I know, I walked into this with my eyes open.

Travel and visitors

Adelaide

Eric and I went to Adelaide for five days over the Christmas break (1994) and had a most enjoyable time doing very little.

We stayed with John Foyster and Yvonne Rousseau, who live within a block of the first suburban stop on the "busway", a bus-only public transport system. I'd seen it before (though I hadn't ridden it), but it was new to Eric.

For the benefit of readers unfamiliar with Adelaide, the busway runs through something called the "linear park", a long, thin park running about 20 km from the suburbs to the edge of the city center, which is surrounded by parks. The linear park follows a river (that continues on from the city another 20 km or so to the sea) and features a bicycling/ walking path. In some places the park is fairly narrow, but in the bits that I walked

through, it's quite wide and you can't even see the busway or any roads from the path (except for roads that pass over the park on bridges).

We walked around part of the botanic gardens and along the river as it passes through the city. Very pleasant! I spent most of my time sitting under a shady tree near the river, reading a book, while Eric went into the city and did a lot of shopping. Normally he hates shopping, but for some reason he really got into it this time. He had to buy a new piece of luggage to carry all his loot home in!

USA

In March and April Eric and I took a trip to Seattle, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Las Vegas. Corflu Vegas was a major highlight of the trip for me, especially meeting dozens of people I hadn't seen in years or hadn't ever met.

Tasmania

In June, we traveled to Tasmania to attend the Australian NatCon (Thylyacon). We went a week early so we could travel around the state a bit (Eric had never been there: I had been once, about 10 years ago, with my parents).

We had a good time, despite being thoroughly rained on at Cradle Mountain (which was to be expected, especially in early winter, but one can be lucky and get a fine day). Also the rental car was vandalized one night in the hotel parking lot (so we had to go get another car), and I broke my reading glasses. Haven't had so many minor disasters so close together in years!

On the positive side, Hobart was cold the first weekend (high of 0°C one day) but clear, sunny and beautiful. We spent a day there, then several days driving around, including going over to the west coast and taking a cruise on the lower reaches of the Gordon River, one of the rivers coming from the

World Heritage Area (another beautiful but cold day).

As we set out from there to drive to Cradle Mountain, a weather front moved in. The overnight temperatures rose due to the cloud cover, but the mist was very thick when it wasn't raining. This lasted for several days, so we didn't see as much as we would have liked. Back in Hobart on the last weekend (10-11 June) we attended Thylyacon, which was fun. During the two weekends in Hobart we managed to eat a lot of yummy seafood. I decided not to be stingy this trip, so we went to some decent restaurants for a change.

One visitor at Thylyacon was Karen Joy Fowler. I enjoyed meeting her and talking about, among other things, the James Tiptree Jr Awards. The GoH was Kim Stanley Robinson, who was an extremely interesting speaker. For the Saturday following the convention, I had helped organize a half-day event in Sydney featuring Robinson and some local speakers. It was held at the Powerhouse Museum (a science and technology museum) and most of the work (except for a bit of publicity) was done by a fan who is also the Curator of Air and Space at the museum.

Then Pat and Roger Sims, the DUFF winners, were here at my place for two nights following Thylyacon. It was really great meeting them!

Canberra

On a somewhat less ambitious note, Eric and I went to Canberra in May for 4 days, and had a good time despite a *huge* wind-and-rain storm on Saturday. The weather was otherwise quite mild for that time of year so we didn't even need our winter jackets. Eric talked to a former boss of mine who now works at the Australian National University (doing much what Eric does at the University of Technology), and I looked at houses.

I didn't find anything I wanted to buy, which is probably just as well. Although buying a property in Canberra while the market is depressed is probably a good idea (given that we are seriously discussing moving there—see below), I don't really feel like borrowing a lot of money again.

Melbourne

At the end of September we attended ARCon, the Aussiecon Reunion Convention, held in Melbourne. I had a great time! And it was wonderful to see lots of old friends again. Two people I definitely had *not* expected to see were Derrick and Christine Ashby, who put in a brief appearance on Saturday. Unfortunately I was out part of the day and they left soon after I returned, so we didn't have much time to chat.

I thought the con was a nice mix of nostalgia and looking forward. As well as the people who showed up, it was lots of fun seeing the second Antifan film again, and the slides of past cons. Let me put in a plug here for the **Aussiecon Memory Book**. If you were an ARCon member, you'll have received one (or will get it in the mail). If you weren't a member, I suggest you rush your order to me so I can airmail a copy to you (see ad at back of this zine). I'm biased, of course; I produced the book.

University teaching

The University of Technology invited me to teach the same course that I taught last year, but I begged off, saying I was too busy in my new job and also was going to be doing so much travelling that I wouldn't be there for too many classes.

I have been giving the occasional guest lecture, however. I spoke to a group of engineers one week and twice I've spoken to groups taking the same course I taught last year. Fortunately I didn't have to do much preparation for either of them; I just

had to find my overhead projection slides.

Domestic trivia

Eric has been clearing out a lot of stuff from his place, in case his mother has to move in. To help with this effort, I've spent a couple of days throwing things away and moving a lot of my books and other junk to my house. (And then building or buying bookshelves to put it in.)

Eight years ago at the end of January, I left Canberra and moved to Sydney. At that time I was moving into a very small apartment, so a lot of my stuff went to Eric's house. I've now been in the Nicoll Avenue house for five years, so it's about time that I consolidated my junk.

Especially since we are talking (fairly seriously) about moving back to Canberra in the next two years. Many of our friends have moved there, or are planning to do so soon, and I like the place. I was astonished that Eric would even consider moving from his house (he's refused to even discuss the possibility for the 12 years that we've been together), so I guess he's *really* fed up with the situation at the University. (And is trying to deflect me from pursuing my interest in moving back to North Queensland.)

Over one weekend, we developed quite a few possible scenarios for when to move, where to live, what sort of house to buy (big!!), how to earn money, and all the other details. I won't bore you with the details... stay tuned for progress reports.

Meanwhile, I bought a dish-washing machine as a Christmas present to myself. It's a small, counter-top model which I could build in under the counter if I wanted to. It's pretty nifty, but I quickly discovered that the catfood bowls don't fit in very well, so

Minou may have to get used to eating off plates.

New computing gear

I got a new 486 computer and promptly ran into all sorts of problems trying to install OS/2 Warp, which didn't like some of the hardware in my machine.

Eric eventually discovered several combinations of hardware that OS/2 would install on, we swapped some bits around, and OS/2 installed without any problem. Now I'm wrestling with declining performance; at first all my Windows programs ran faster than ever before, but now they've slowed down to, if not quite a crawl, at least a walk. One of these days I'll do something about this.

Faithful friends

I bought a heated cat bed for Minou, who at first regarded it with deep suspicion and now can hardly be budged off it, except when a suitable lap is presented.

Miscellaneous writing

I've submitted two papers to the Society for Technical Communication's conference which will be held in Seattle in May 1996. If I can get at least one accepted, I've got an

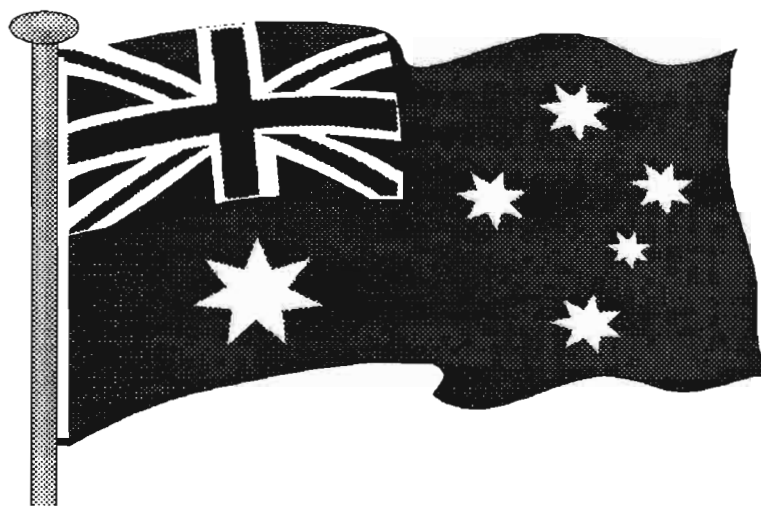
extremely good chance of getting work to pay my way to the conference.

I'm still waiting to hear whether my essay on "why I am childfree" (submitted to a publisher in California) has been accepted.

Medical things

It's been about 7 years since my last checkup on my face, to see if any problems have come up, like a recurrence of the tumor I had removed in 1983. (Those of you who weren't around then... it's a long story.) I had a C-T scan done last month and nothing was found that shouldn't have been there.

At the same time they scanned for a possible tumor affecting the hearing in my left ear. I've had a minor hearing loss for about 20 years, so I wasn't expecting any big dramas here. I was a bit surprised that the doctor suggested a scan until I read about someone suing their doctor over not doing a scan and thus not finding exactly the sort of tumor he said could, but probably wasn't, associated with the problem. These sorts of malpractice suits haven't been very common here in Australia (in dramatic contrast to the situation in the USA) but they are becoming more so.



James Tiptree, Jr Award

Information in this article is taken from various sources given to me by Lucy Sussex, including photocopies of fanzine articles and a file on the Internet supplied by ArtBrau@aol.com (sorry, I don't know any more than that). Any mistakes in transcription are entirely my own.

The James Tiptree, Jr. Award is for the work of science fiction or fantasy published in one year which best explores or expands gender roles.

Each year Founding Mothers, Pat Murphy and Karen Joy Fowler, appoint a panel of five judges to read and discuss among themselves the merits of gender-bending fiction published in the previous year. Anyone and everyone is invited to forward recommendations for novels and short fiction to Karen Joy Fowler (3404 Monte Vista, Davis, CA 95616), who will request copies for the judges from publishers. Publishers are encouraged to alert Karen about soon-to-be-published gender-bending fiction.

At the end of a year of reading and deliberation, the judges choose a winner who is invited to the Tiptree Award ceremony to accept their award and prize money.

Although the judges choose not to release a list of nominees before the actual award, thus creating an artificial set of "losers," they do publish a "short list" of fiction to which they wish to call readers' attention.

The 1992 Award

Judges: Suzy McKee Charnas, Sherry Coldsmith, Bruce McAllister, Vonda McIntyre, Debbie Notkin (coordinator)

Winners:

- Eleanor Arnason, *A Woman of the Iron People*, William Morrow, 1991
- Gwyneth Jones, *The White Queen*, Gollancz, 1991

The Short List

- John Barnes, *Orbital Resonance*, Tor 1991
- Karen Joy Fowler, *Sarah Canary*, Henry Holt & Co., 1991
- Mary Gentle, *The Architecture of Desire*, Bantam Press, 1991
- Greer Ilene Gilman, *Moonwise*, NAL/Roc, 1991
- Marge Piercy, *He, She and It*, Summit Books, 1991

The 1993 Award

Judges: Eleanor Arnason, Gwyneth Jones, John Kessel, Michaela Roessner (coordinator), Pamela Sargent

Winner:

- Maureen McHugh, *China Mountain Zhang*, Tor, 1992

The Short List

- Carol Emshwiller, *Venus Rising*, Edgewood Press, 1992
- Ian MacLeod, "Grownups," *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine*
- Judith Moffett, *Time, Like an Ever-Rolling Stream*, St. Martin's Press, 1992
- Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Mars*, Harper Collins, 1992
- Sue Thomas, *Correspondence*, The Women's Press, 1992
- Lisa Tuttle, *Lost Futures*, Grafton, 1992
- Elisabeth Vonarburg, *In the Mother's Land*, Bantam, 1992

The 1994 Award

Judges: Steve Brown, Susan Casper, Jeanne Gomoll (chair), Ursula K. Le Guin, Maureen McHugh

Winner:

- Nicola Griffith, *Ammonite*, Del Rey, 1992

The Short List

- Eleanor Arnason, *Ring of Swords*, Tor, 1993
- Margaret Atwood, *The Robber Bride*, Bantam, 1993

- Sybil Claiborne, *In the Garden of Dead Cars*, Cleis Press, 1993
- L Timmel Duchamp, "Motherhood", *Full Spectrum* 4, Bantam, 1993
- R Garcia y Robertson, "The Other Magpie", *Asimov's*, 4/93
- James Patrick Kelly, "Chemistry", *Asimov's*, 6/93
- Laurie J. Marks, *Dancing Jack*, Daw, 1993
- Ian McDonald, "Some Strange Desire", in *The Best of Omni III*
- Alice Nunn, *Illicit Passage*, Women's Redress Press, 1992
- Paul Park, *Coelestis*, Harper Collins, 1993

The 1995 Award

Judges: Brian Attebery, Ellen Kushner, Pat Murphy, Susanna Sturgis (chair), Lucy Sussex

Winners:

- Nancy Springer, *Larque on the Wing*
- Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Matter of Seggri", *Crank*, Spring 1994

The Short List

I can't find a copy of the short list, so I'll put it in next time.



Letters

John Newman
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27 February 1994

Recently I read a book by Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan called *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (I think), which explored the role of testosterone with respect to physical aggression and more complex competitive behaviour through much of the animal kingdom (not just primates). Although wordy and over ambitious the book was interesting, tracing the position of these primitive but now inappropriate behaviour archetypes in the development of higher lifeforms in general.

It seems to me that whether rape stems from sexual desire in the heat of the moment or from a need to assert and control is a debate about forces "driving" a man to rape. In date rape we seem to have a different situation, where a specific strategy is chosen to achieve a sexual goal (which may be a step toward a larger social goal).

That is to say, force, along with "sweet talk and candy", is accepted by some sections of the populace as a legitimate strategy in the dating game, which is supposed to lead to sex, marriage and the rest of the participants' lives. Clearly this is just not OK!

Some men will use the ambiguity of women's responses (in other situations) in some cases to discount the meaning of "No" to "only if you push me into it". This is often not because they wish to proceed this way, but because they really believe that women require that level of aggression in their approach.

There is a real communication problem here, and any development of feminism which further polarises the sexual debate makes it harder to show developing males that they can

and should come to terms with women as individuals instead of as ciphers which are supposed to respond to this or that approach.

Force leading to rape as a way to get laid, or even to create a relationship (some men are that misguided) must be seen as unacceptable anti-social behaviour and punished.

Rape as a result of uncontrollable urges for sex or power is an indication of mental illness, and I'm not convinced it happens all that often.

Last year there was a court case in Melbourne which indicated the level of hysteria regarding rape even in this country. A man who had been misrepresenting himself as a movie producer in order to use the "casting couch" to his advantage was charged with rape. I regard this as an outrage.

Two people, each playing the system, each dishonestly dealing to get something they wanted and weren't entitled to. She could perhaps be seen as doing things "the way they're done", just like the confused boy who thinks he has to conquer his girl to show he really wants her. The "producer" is a con man, for which there are plenty of established penalties. But instead, because he had conned for sex instead of money or fame, he's called a rapist.

And all the women who have been brutalised and beaten or killed by rapists are grouped with a woman who had consensual sex she thought was in her own interest at the time. Now that's tacky. I don't know how the case ended, but this episode reminded me that modern feminism often looks like old fashioned prudery.

Graham Stone
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7 February 1994

I could without the ... I won't say art work. Graphics? Mostly they are quite pointless and nothing much to look at. When you have a case where one picture is worth ten thousand words, sure, let's see it: but that's not often. Or for a giggle, like "Vlad the Inhaler". The rest—no. [*Obviously this is a matter of taste; I prefer zines with some graphics, however pointless, to break up the constant flow of words. But thanks for offering your opinion. —JHW*]

As for all the stuff on the war of the sexes, I don't value it very highly. We all know the facts. We all have attitudes tied into our personal world view which we're not likely to change. So it all goes round in circles. My view is that the war should be called off...

True, the traditional arrangement was abominable. It has weakened a lot in my lifetime but still has a long way to go. We all know that, but society does not change just because we want it changed...

Also, we don't know everything. Personally, I think that the differences between males and females are a lot less profound than we assume, that they are mostly due to the culture, that they can be greatly reduced and ought to be by deliberate policy... I think the traditional marriage, or mutual slavery, was all right when men were strongly and unquestionably dominant and women accepted it; it is not appropriate any longer and should be not even abolished, forgotten. But I notice that so far there is not an accepted system covering venery, reproduction and acculturation, and I think there

should be one. No one seems to be thinking about this.

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25 November 1994

I heard about a woman who hit menopause in her 30s. Our PBS station occasionally plays an excellent show about menopause.

George Flynn
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9 December 1995

American ignorance about overseas phone calls has probably increased since the breakup of AT&T. At least, I seem to recall that there used to be fairly complete directions in the phone book, but now all it says here is, "To place and [*sic*] international call you must first contact your long distance company for information on how to use their service for international calling." There is a table of country prefixes, but no mention of the "+" at all. (Though I doubt that most Americans have much occasion to make such calls anyway — other than those with relatives in the Old Country, to whom a fair amount of advertising is directed by the phone companies.)

I heard about the scientific errors in *Green Mars*, and I found them easily enough when I then went looking for them, but curiously, I hadn't noticed them when I first read the book. A compliment to the flow of the narrative, I guess.

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23 December 1994

You've included some nice pictures in this issue [47]. The one of John Foyster looks an awful lot like Harry Turtledove. Although some were a little fuzzy, it was nice to see some of the places you visited.

Maia and I have been to England three times, and we have decidedly *not* rented a car. We are used to driving on the "right" side of the road as we do in the States, and I would have trouble (I know) attempting to drive on the "proper" side, particularly in the city.

I understand what you mean about narrow traffic lanes and aggressive drivers. On a trip I made several years ago I spent almost a week driving back country roads in the Northeastern United States. Then I returned to "civilization" in the form of the roadways of Boston, Massachusetts, and the shock of so many cars and tailgaters was traumatic. I survived, but slept fitfully that night dreaming of car accidents.

Re "being successful": I suppose people would call me successful. I have a good teaching job with reasonable pay (for the level of private school I teach at, my salary is above the median, though not by much), a house, two cars, and a number of collections that have made people gasp. I was never part of the "hippie" movement, and never got into the computer age as deeply as some of my friends have. I have been on the peripheral of most trends in the electronic age (it has only been this year that Maia got me a CD player, and I got my e-mail account), but in many of my most important endeavors (i.e., teaching), I have been doing things well in advance of the educational trends. My classes all write papers for me; they work in small groups, they even take tests in pairs at times. And I have had positive feedback from students who have graduated.

As for success in fannish circles, well, that's another story. If you can call fandom a "counterculture", then

I can claim a small measure of success in a counterculture. I've been awarded two Hugos, have been Fan GoH at several conventions, and Toastmaster (and sometimes Lifeguard) at others. As you and Eric and many other fans can say—I know at least 1000 other people around the world outside of my job.

Thinking of it that way, it can boggle the mind of some non-fans.

Re planning for trips: I let Maia do most of that. She enjoys doing that sort of thing, and it gets done well in advance of us leaving for places overseas, or even Worldcon excursions. Because she likes to plan so far in advance, we make sure we have the cash money to pay for it, and not run up charge cards that we have to pay off later (I do that well enough by myself without trips costs to add to it!). But it is nice to go off somewhere with everything paid for in advance, and knowing exactly how much one can spend. No worries then.

Re being burgled: That is one fear I have, as I accumulate more rare books, videos, and computer equipment. Having a house has increased that anxiety, but we manage to cope. Making friends with the neighbors helps, and having a fannish friend 5 doors up the block who is willing to check our house and take in our mail and newspapers while we are gone for an extended period, is a great help. We thank him by bringing back gifts, and an occasional bottle of Scotch. So far we have only lost a gargoyle—removed from its pedestal by the front porch in the week of graduation for the local high-schoolers. We have a replacement one now, back by the garage. Eventually it will be placed in the garden—and be our "gardengoyle".

Re health and fitness: I have seen-sawed with my plans to lose weight and become fit... the time commitment is a problem; having too many interests and not willing to cut

any of them doesn't help, especially if I add on more things to do.

Congratulations on the job and (semi)permanent position. It does help to have a steady income. Maia tried freelancing for a while, but that was a bit too precarious for her. When she got the offer to sign on at Electronic Data Systems (EDS) she did. She works editing training manuals and really likes her job and the people she works with. I hope the same is true for you. (Side note: She got in well after H. Ross Perot left the company; she would not have worked there if he still did.)

[My attitude towards employment (for myself) is that it's a bloody nuisance and while freelancing is more precarious, it pays better per unit of time worked, so commiserations would be more in order than congratulations. You may guess that I'm not real thrilled with work at the moment.—JHW]

I enjoyed many of the other things in this issue: book reviews, locs, and Lyn McConchie's "Farming Daze". I've always thought that I might want a small farm, since I do so much vegetable gardening in the summer, but including animals and some of the chores that would have to be included, as Lyn described, make me have second thoughts. My friend Rusty Westbeld has an enormous garden which she uses as a source of income when the carpentry work is at a standstill in Pittsburgh, and has been successful at it. I don't know if I could make that sort of commitment to make it as successful. Lyn's and Rusty's comments tell me not. Still, I enjoyed reading about her adventures.

The "salesman" story was amusing, and a little disturbing. That he knew so much about Lyn before showing up with his "pitch" made me feel uncomfortable. Is there a Better Business Bureau for salesmen such as he that she could complain to?

[What should she complain about? That he'd done his homework well and was trying to do his job, which is to sell things? Obviously the information about her was available somewhere—she could perhaps complain about its availability, but I don't think one can legitimately complain about someone using available information. Now if he'd not taken no for an answer, and kept coming back to annoy her, that would be another matter.—JHW]

Paula Johanson's two selections were superb. The "Ghost Story" was absolutely chilling, and I agree that such a story related by Alex Shomberg is something that could shame a lot of what gets published nowadays. Paula's narrative style is extremely good, and her descriptions sensual; I wish her luck in finding publication.

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4 January 1995

You were really lucky in your burglary or semi-burglary as it seems.

I have reached a positively American level of blind-right-wingness in response to assaults on my assets in the last few years.

(Not that I think increasing penalties deters crime, as do so many Americans, just that if we hunt them down and lock them up and throw away the keys then there must be a reduction in the number of thieves available, and it could be almost as economical in crime reduction as actually educating people. Besides, making the suggestion creates a lot of debate.)

I wonder to myself how you find the time to read so many books. "What am I doing when you are reading?" I ask myself.

I've had to do so much driving in the last year I've taken to

listening to books on tape. (Reduces the aggro as well as entertaining the mind.) Seems like this is the majority of my literary input!!

(I did read "The Secret History" but it took all the spare time over the Christmas holiday.)

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9 January 1995

Good Lhord! Was everybody in Adelaide this summer? Karen and I, along with a dozen other Victorian fans attended the Yoyodyne New Year party (outnumbered only slightly by the 15 South Aussies). This year's theme was Shakespeare; lots of Romans, Witches, Hamlets; Karen went as a minor fairy and I was the Wall from Midsummer Night's Dream, suitably graffitied with such choice verbiage as 'Mark Antony woz ear', 'Titania does it with donkeys', 'Oberon is a fairy' and 'Puck Off!'. A difficult costume to fit through doorways. Several days were spent relaxing with friends and exploring Adelaide. Prior to that was the MSFC continuous Christmas party at the usual three venues (Xmas Eve at Jane Tisell/Danny Heap/Beky Tully's, Xmas at Derek Screen/Sharon Tapner's and The Boxing Day Leftover Exchange at our place) with the added bonus of Murray and Natalie MacLaughlin over from NZ. Still recovering.

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11 January 1995

[I use the] Internet mainly for gossips with my father and brother, or arranging lunch dates with friends, etc. I'm all in favour of technology that is useful to me and

can also be used by me. I'm not particularly techno-knowledgeable, but have learned that I'm streets ahead of many. In fact, I am now a work group administrator for our network. A grand title for a grubby job.

24 January 1995

I've got higher duties in another branch. More money, a chance to get to know different people, and the opportunity to try new tasks. How could I say no?

Due to work requirements and/or money considerations, I haven't attended any cons for ages. However, I'm getting my thrills from s-f and fantasy reading.

Fortunately, I share a house with a confirmed s-f bibliophile who doesn't shudder at paying full hardback price for books she wants. (I prefer the thrill of the chase through 2nd hand bookstores. Consequently, my bookshelves look somewhat older and tired!)

I've been re-reading Lois McMaster Bujold's Vor series. Says something for her abilities that I enjoy the books just as much on the third or fourth reading. Some of the dross I've read in the last year was definitely a once-only read, if I bothered finishing the book at all.

I like your lengthy Diary Notes. Perhaps that means I'm a natural stickybeak? I write regularly in my own diary, tho not for publication! And I also like autobiographies and biographies. It sounds kinder to say I'm a student of human nature, rather than outright curious! To an extent, tho, it's accurate, because I greatly enjoy studying psychology, always having more questions than answers, and happily reading and researching for my own interests.

2 February 1995

I've been given a permanent promotion to an ASO 3 position in my previous branch — the Legal and Parliamentary Branch. I'm meant to be the personal assistant to

the Assistant Secretary. However, the job is going to be rather more than that. They said it would be a pity to ignore my skills in writing, analysis and research, so a fair amount of the boring admin tasks will go to another person and I get the interesting stuff as well as organising the branch. I'm quite happy to have my organisational skills utilised.

The desire to have things working smoothly and the capability to put structures in place to assist that is apparently genetic. You should see my mum! (Mind you, my father and brothers insist that the house is a lot more relaxed while Mum is on business trips! They just have to remember to tidy up the worst of the grime before she gets back!) *[I don't think it's genetic; it's training and conditioning. — JHW]*

I've been very brave and have started to do things to increase my aerobic fitness. The most drastic thing was giving up smoking, and it's nearly driving me barmy on occasions. My GP told me that in my case nicotine patches weren't appropriate or necessary, since it appeared to be a psychological addiction. Mind you, I now don't have any fingernails to speak of, and I have to keep my galumphing appetite in rein.

In comparison with all that, going to a gym and having a fitness program worked out was quite easy and relatively painless. I quite enjoy going to the gym, since I loathe going for walkies. I also do aqua aerobics, since I figured that land aerobics would probably kill my knees and ankles until there's a bit less of me to throw around!

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24 January 1995

As a puzzle addict I score rather well on IQ measurements but even

so I share your reservations about them. In all fairness though I should point out that various institutes working on psychometric measurement constantly update and improve the tests. Such institutes strive to remove cultural bias or specify the groups to which tests should be applied and that the tests have a poor correlation if applied outside the given group.

In Cyprus I was supervising testing sessions with culture fair tests which were taken by Greeks, Turks and Britons from very varied educational and employment backgrounds. Although the tests were all visual I was still a little concerned that the individuals taking the tests may not be equally clear about the instructions. As the world at large accommodates the linguistic idleness of English speakers, all those taking the test spoke excellent English; even so I acquired additional example for each section and allowed more than usual time for going over the examples.

Properly used IQ tests can be useful indicators; misapplied in education or employment they could be unfair, even damaging to individuals.

I'm inclined to agree with Gary Grady that jealousy is not an indicator of love. Indeed I don't think cats "love"; they condition their providers to give good service and are intelligent enough to remember and repeat behaviour that stimulates the greatest degree of comfort giving. Not that such academic considerations have anything to do with Lyn McConchie's wonderful stories. Lyn knows well enough that animals are not people, but she is artistic enough to express their contrary (to human needs and expectations) activities in human terms so that her readers can comprehend and enjoy.

I was enchanted by Paula Johanson's "Northwest passage". To be honest I was far less

impressed by "Ghost story". Her admiration of Schomburg is not justified by his run of the mill story of childhood pranks with an oft used and unbelievable tag line. It may well be a case of needing to be there to understand the impact of the events. If so Paula failed to take me there. I share your hopes that Paula finds a commercial publisher soon, for despite my criticism I think she has a talent that deserves to be encouraged by sales.

Harry Andruschak
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27 January 1995

I have given up all hope for the National Space Society and other pro-space organizations, which are still thumping the NASA manned space program as the only way to go. Had I stayed on at JPL, I would have had to face the destruction of the planetary exploration program at work. Now I can just watch it from the job security of a post office worker.

I now have a home computer system of my own! I access a local BBS [but] I'm not sure if I will otherwise go on-line with e-mail and the Internet... Obviously, all this is going to take a lot more of my Copius Spare Time.

jan howard finder
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Do tell Craig McBride that it is not only Americans that can be parochial. Granted we make inviting targets, but... I find it amusing and a little bit, dare I say it, parochial on his part to assume that if someone doesn't do it his way they are narrow minded... Yes, many Americans are indeed parochial, but then so are 95% of folk in any country... By the way, it would be nice ... if Australian correspondents, this includes

businesses, would include the State. Now maybe it isn't needed by your post office, but I see no reason to give them any additional reasons to screw up delivery.

Lloyd Penney
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25 February 1995

The employment situation is hairy once again. The company I was at, Interactive Media Group, let me go after 9 months on the job. I was copy editor, subscription manager, and assignment editor for a magazine called Express. The company's other publishing ventures, transcribed ads from their telephone services, were brought in to replace the ads I transcribed and edited, and so I was made redundant, and so was my position. However, I've had a number of good interviews, including one with Maclean-Hunter, the largest publisher of magazines in Canada.

[I trust that by the time anyone but me reads this, you will long since have found suitable employment. — JHW]

I'm hoping to meet a lot of Australians in Los Angeles for the 1996 Worldcon. Yvonne and I will be in charge of the fanzine lounge.

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11 April 1995

[WWW] is the one fanzine that my spouse Lori has to read each ish, as it relates so much to her technical writing career... [She] is headed to the Society for Technical Communication's annual convention... She is looking forward to ... things like "Information Presentation"... a topic Lori has often mentioned as something many technical writers do not take into account, that is, realizing who their

audience is going to be. Lori will also be picking up an award of merit for her work as managing editor of the STC's area chapter's newsletter.

I am probably like many of the former long haired hippies who frequently fandom a decade or so ago who would still be... were it not that the long hair is now all internalized. The feelings are still there, but the hairbrush isn't.

The US-centric part of me needs to be reminded that citizens here are not the only ones being burgled, and there is no True Security as such left in many places... And congratulations on going fixed-term! *[See my comments to Lan, earlier. — JHW]* I am awaiting a temporary job with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, meaning a permanent position. They don't call the jobs permanent because that would legally imply they would have difficulty ever firing you, even with just cause, as it is a union position, and for the union, there is no cause just enough. *["Permanent" jobs here are now usually called "indefinite appointments", probably for exactly that reasons. — JHW]*

Mae Strelkov
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14 June 1995

"Northwest Passage" ... I've a daughter at the Edmontom University doing cancer etc research. Her husband has a small farm raising cattle for sale now, and every couple of years they fly here on a visit with their two little boys.

So I liked doubly the colorful descriptions Paula gives.

I Also Heard From

Ellen Butland, Buck Coulson, John Foyster, Teddy Harvia, Eva Hauser, Joy Hibbert, Debbie Hodgson, Adrienne Losin, Denny Lien, Richard Lynch, Perry Middlemiss, Janice Murray, Roman Orszanski, Marc Ortlieb, Lucy Schmeidler, Alan Stewart, Lucy Sussex, Julian Warner.

Sex dance

By Paula Johanson

Editor's note: These essays are excerpted, with the author's permission, from the manuscript Modern Ritual.

The only modern ritual I ever saw was a Sex Dance, Art said.

Well, it was based on a Rain Dance.

(We were talking in the community building, a group of six or seven talking about modern rituals. Our voices echoed under the high black ceiling and the smell of coffee and cigarettes filled the room.)

When I was a treeplanter, Art said, we couldn't go out into the clear cuts and plant trees when the weather was too dry. There'd be a forest fire warning, and we would have to hang around camp. After several days with no work — earning no money — we'd get bored and want to get back to it. So we'd hold a Rain Dance. We'd call down the rain, and it would usually rain a day or so after that, and we'd be able to get back to work.

The Rain Dances started when we had a professional drummer on our crew. All of us were really something else in real life — I was a student — we were earning money at a summer job. This musician didn't have all his percussion equipment with him, but he'd juryrigged himself an entire drum set out of the odds and ends around the camp — oil cans, gas cans, garbage can lids. He liked to make music. One day we were all bored after a couple days off for a forest fire alert, so he found some other equipment so people could jam with him.

We ended up calling it a Rain Dance, you know, like a take-off on rain dance rituals, but we really wanted to get back to work. The music session was a lot better than

being bored. It took the pressure off, and then hey! it did rain.

So we called our music sessions Rain Dances after that. The only time we had time for them anyway was when the dry weather kept us from working.

(He stopped to drink from his coffee. Some of the others had been treeplanting too — all of us had been out in the back woods for days at a stretch, and we knew the dry heat he was talking about, and the soaking rains that ran down into dry soil where the tree roots drank it up.)

One time we decided to have a Sex Dance. Two of the guys on the crew were going to be fathers soon, and they both hoped that their wives would have girls. Each of them already had a son, and having a daughter would be particularly nice. (He laughed. I laughed too, knowing the particular joy of having a boy and a girl when my twins were born.)

Besides, it was an excuse for one hell of a party. We got those two guys, the expectant fathers, set up in the place of honour, the centre of attention in our camp's gathering place. The professional drummer had his gear set up nearby, and the other people drumming with him had gas cans, paint cans, anything to beat on to make a sound.

The drummer led it for us — started us off with the rhythms and tones, and he cued each of us to join in with our sounds. He was, like, our focus and centre: he kept it going, changed it, brought it on and kept us together.

When he had it going well and it was all right, it was time for the dancers. (Laughter echoed under the high ceiling, half-mocking, half-envious, full of delight. No! Really?)

Yes, dancers. They were in shorts — it was, like, really hot, sun

beating down — and work boots. You know that fluorescent orange ribbon loggers use in the woods to blaze trails? Well, they had pieces of it tied round their arms and wrists and knees and elbows. They'd painted their faces and chests like war paint — it was a takeoff, but it worked because it was, like, us, this was the stuff we used: trailmarking ribbon and zinc oxide ointment for sunburn.

They carried treeplanter's shovels — you know, with a long handle and narrow blade — and when they came out, the movements of their dance were the movements of treeplanting.

Take a big step — shovel to the ground. Turn up the earth. Take a seedling from the bag hanging at your hip — slide it in behind the shovel blade. Pull out the shovel and step on the loose earth to tamp it firm around the little tree. Take a big step.

It was the real moves we did every day, working and it was all in fun. They danced all around the centre place where the two expectant fathers sat on rounds of wood that we usually used for seats around the campfire. We didn't have a fire going right then; it was too hot and early in the day.

The dancers worked all around the two expectant fathers and the music kept building and changing. It wasn't just dull drumming. There were lots of musical tones in the instruments and cans we'd put together, and the drummer would cue one or another of us so the tones would be changing.

He'd keep the rhythm going, and change it, to make it simpler or more complex.

I don't know when it stopped being so much a takeoff, sort of laughing at ourselves like always and when it began cueing into

something more, something that really reached into us. But by this time it was real.

There was no sarcasm in it, no joking: it was honest and we were in a ritual experience.

Those who weren't playing drums were dancing. Those who weren't dancing were drumming. And in the centre the decorated dancers moved in swirls of fluorescent trailmarking ribbon, with their shovels moving, dig the air and plant the imaginary tree, turn and step all around the fathers at the centre. And the drummer where he could see everybody, calling on one or another of us, cueing us to the rhythms that were building us together.

The music grew wilder. We took a girl and tied her to a pickup truck. (He mimed it, arms spread in a crucifixion with rope under the chromed truck company name on the grill.) The tension back and forth with the dancers between her

and the men was incredible — it built and built going frantic with the energy and the beat and the dancing motions that were still the moves of treeplanting.

It got more and more wild, the sounds went louder and harder and higher and then a guy went with a torch to an oil drum set up in the gathering place where we were dancing and drumming. He lit up the oil drum, which had been filled with wood and trash and some lighter fluid and it went up with a great whoosh! of flame. And that was the climax, with a sound coming up from all of us and the dance was wilder than ever.

The drummer just went wild — then he slowed it a little, and brought us down, and slowed it some more, and brought us back little by little. The girl was untied, the dancers were moving still, slower with the sweat running down them, and the drums getting calmer and quieter. The fathers were still in

the centre of it all. The fire crackled in the oil drum, burning up and burning down. Then only the drummer was playing, quieting us all down until he was silent. No one said a word.

No one said anything for ages; we just sort of wandered away to be quiet for a while. Later some of us lined up afterwards at the first aid station — hours later we were finding that we'd beat our hands raw and bruised on the rims of gas cans and such. Hadn't felt it when it was happening, blisters rising on sore hands. Didn't feel it for hours.

It was a quiet night and it rained soon after that, so we got back to work. That was a time! That was our best Rain Dance ever, the Sex Dance, and we were the envy of all the camps of treeplanters around who didn't have our kind of music.

Art added: I heard later that at least one of the two men did have a new daughter — anyway both the kids turned out fine.

Books

Notes by Jean Weber

Australian authors

Once again I have a collection of books by Australian authors. If you want to find out what's happening in Australian science fiction and fantasy, try some of these. It's not a complete list, but it will get you started. You could also subscribe to one of the quarterly magazines, *Eidolon* and *Aurealis*. Some addresses:

- *Aphelion*, P.O. Box 619, North Adelaide, SA 5006, Australia
- *Aurealis*, Chimaera Publications, P.O. Box 2164, Mt. Waverley, Vic 3149, Australia (this is a new box number)
- *Eidolon*, P.O. Box 225, North Perth, WA 6006, Australia

(If all else fails in obtaining Australian publications, or if you want to make your shopping easier,

contact Justin Ackroyd at Slow Glass Books, GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, Vic 3001, Australia.)

George Turner, *Genetic Soldier*, Avonova, 1994

Another brilliant look at the future of humanity by Turner. A starship returns to earth after 500 years have passed on Earth, but only 20 on the ship. Thus 21st-century humans come to confront a very changed society, and they are perceived as a threat to it.

Sean McMullen, *Voices in the Light and Mirrorsun Rising*, *Aphelion*, 1994, 1995

Books One and Two of *Great-winter* (to be followed by *The Miocene Arrow*). A fascinating

future in which most technology has degenerated from what we know today. For example, the mighty Calculator of Libris is a large room full of people furiously working abacuses, each doing one little part of a big mathematical problem. Then it starts to make strange errors...

There's also the "call" that attracts humans and animals across the desert to the cliffs of the Great Australian Bight, where they cast themselves into the sea to feed the beasts waiting below. (This concept was introduced in stories collected in *The Call to the Edge*.) McMullen has developed some fascinating ideas in these books.

**Greg Egan, *Permutation City*,
Millenium, 1994**

This is an amazing book which I cannot find the words to describe, so I'll let Brian Stableford say part of it more me: "Reveals wonders with an artistry to equal his audacity." Other jacket-blurb comments: "Greg Egan is dynamite. His work is the fiction of ideas; his imagination, apocalyptic. Encompassing the lives and struggles of several people, *Permutation City* steps beyond the boundaries of the human mind and into eternity." "The human mind can be scanned and downloaded into virtual environments. Copies [are] virtual people, all memory and identity intact, dependently only on the stability of world computer nets. Which leaves them vulnerable. Paul Durham has a vision—the creation of an untouchable virtual sanctuary, which he sets about selling to the world's ultra-rich, ultra-powerful Copies.... Paul might be mad. Or the knowledge he possesses, ultimately, just might transcend space, time, evolution, the nature of matter, the life of the universe. Paul Durham's vision could be the stuff of the dreams of God." And I must say Greg Egan writes so convincingly that even the most sceptical reader could almost be convinced that the Creationists could be right. If humans could effectively create another reality, complete with evolved species, how can we say our own reality could not be the creation of something? Very thought-provoking book.

**Peter McNamara & Margaret Winch (eds), *Alien Shores*,
Aphelion, 1994**

A collection of short science fiction (mostly not previously published) by 29 Australian authors. If you want to keep up with who's hot in Australian sf these days, this is one of the books to read.

Lucy Sussex & Judith Raphael Buckrich (eds), *She's Fantastical*, Sybylla Press, 1995

The first anthology of Australian women's speculative fiction, magical realism and fantasy, featuring 23 writers (some reprints) and with a foreword by Ursula K. Le Guin.

New Zealand authors

Andre Norton and Lyn McConchie, *The Key of the Keplian*, Warner, 1995

This fantasy novel is well-written and enjoyable. A young native American woman flees into the Witch World where she makes friends with some of the Keplians, who are telepathic and highly intelligent equines with a reputation for being evil. In fact they serve the Light, and in this book they get their vengeance on the true forces of evil.

Phillip Mann, *Master of Paxwax*, Victor Gollancz, 1993

Part One of *The Story of the Gardener*. "It is the far distant future. Humanity has spread across the galaxy, systematically wiping out, imprisoning and enslaving every alien species, hostile or not. Now the galaxy is ruled by the Eleven Families, each supreme in its own, vast realm.

"But beneath the surface of one dead and obscure planet lie the seeds of rebellion. For here, the survivors of the ravaged alien races have taken refuge, to plot their revenge on their barbaric conquerors — and the downfall of the human empire.

"One man is chosen to be the instrument of their vengeance — but he doesn't know it. His name is Pawl Paxwax...and this is his story."

Other authors

Sheri Tepper, *A Plague of Angels*, Bantam, 1993

You could be misled (from the cover blurb and illustration) into thinking this is a fantasy novel, but it's sf. It's bizarre, complex and rich in characters and ideas, as I have come to expect from Tepper. It's also not easily summed up, so I won't even try.

**Bruce Sterling, *Globalhead*,
Bantam, 1992**

Thirteen stories are collected in this volume. I like Sterling's writing and look forward to meeting him at the 1996 Australian NatCon in Perth.

Nancy Springer, *Larque on the Wing*, Avonova, 1994

Winner of the James Tiptree Jr award for fiction exploring issues of gender, this book follows a woman going through a messy mid-life crisis. She confronts her "child within" when the child assumes physical form, then she confronts her sexuality when she is remade into a younger, stronger, more courageous male. I've heard that a lot of male readers didn't like this book. I suspect it speaks to women of a certain age more than, perhaps, it speaks to others. It's very well written, regardless.

Joan Slonczewski, *Daughter of Elysium*, Avonova, 1993

Set on the same planet as *A Door Into Ocean*, but some centuries later, this book looks at the interactions between several groups of humans, each with its own notions of what's right and wrong, and how civilised people should act. A brilliant book.

Melissa Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*, Tor, 1994

I picked up this book around the time (in mid-1995) when there was lots of kerfuffle about trying to police the Internet and rid it of pornography and obscenity, etc, and some totally dickheaded bill passed through the US Congress or Senate (all you Yanks can tell me the details, I'm sure, but I'm not really interested).

At any rate, the jacket blurb on this book was very timely: "Less than a hundred years from now [!], the forces of law and order crack down on the world of the computer nets. The ... adverturers who get by on wit, bravado, and drugs, and haunt the virtual worlds of ... cyberspace, are up against the encroachments of civilization. It's time to adapt or die. Trouble got out just ahead of the feds ... Now someone has taken her name and begun to use it for criminal hacking. So Trouble returns."

Despite all that purple prose, this is a very readable book, combining elements of the detective novel with one sort of cyberpunk. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Mary Rosenblum, *Chimera and The Stone Garden*, Del Rey, 1993, 1994

Two more excellent books by the author of *The Drylands*. Both books explore the dichotomy between the powerful and the powerless; in both cases the focal figure is an artist and there's a fair amount of intrigue and mystery. Otherwise, there's little in common between these books — Rosenblum has taken quite different approaches in them. The complexity of the stories and characters show that she's an excellent writer.

Nancy McKenzie, *The Child Queen and The High Queen*, Del Rey, 1994, 1995

This Del Rey Discovery of the Year is yet another retelling of the King Arthur-Guinevere-Launcelot

story, this time from Guinevere's point of view. Well done and interesting, but I haven't much interest in that lot so I didn't enjoy it as much as I could have.

Lisa Mason, *Summer of Love*, Bantam, 1994

Having visited San Francisco in the summer of 1968 (the year after the Summer of Love) and moved there in 1970 to live on the fringes of the Haight-Ashbury, I could readily relate to many of the scenes and events in this novel.

Mason has given a no-nonsense picture of the downside of the Summer of Love: the undernourished teenagers subsist-ing on drugs, sex and rock'n'roll; the exploitation of teenage girls, the unhappy home lives that drove so many to run away that year and in following years. She's also shown the positive side of the caring and compassion shown by many of the older residents of the area, who care about the victims of the summer.

And just to make it a thoroughly different book, there's the young man from the far future, there to find one particular girl who will have a great impact on the world he comes from. A complex and fascinating novel.

Lisa Goldstein, *Tourists*, Simon & Schuster, 1989

Goldstein "sets the internal dislocations of a family against the external one of being in a land so foreign that... the very configuration of the stars is different... from its alphabet to its news medium (a deck of cards with pictures on them) to its public monuments... to its religion and politics, Amaz is a country in which genuine magic happens. Into this country comes an American family... each of whom thinks he or she knows what reality is. And each of them gets to experience that one moment of uncertainty that tells

them the world is a lot stranger than they thought."

Charles de Lint, *Svaha and Dreams Underfoot*, Tor, 1989, 1993

Svaha is another of de Lint's excellent fantasies set in Canada, drawing on the magical beliefs of the native Americans. "The shamans taught that any human could learn the Walk and understand the Wheels. The reason the knowledge wasn't passed on to those outside the People was simply that few of them had ever professed an interest before... Those who weren't of the People always seemed to find it easier to take than to give. Could that change?"

Dreams Underfoot is a collection of de Lint's short urban fantasies, set in the town of Newford. "Welcome to the music clubs, the waterfront, the alleyways where ancient myths and magic spill into the modern world."

Esther Friesner, *The Sherwood Game*, Baen, 1995

The story of a computer "geek" who creates a terrific virtual reality game on company time, then downloads the main character (Robin Hood) into a robot body, whereupon his tenuous control over the game gets rather more tenuous. I skipped many of the gaming sequences but overall I enjoyed the book, somewhat to my surprise because gaming doesn't interest me. But the author has a wry turn of phrase and other writing skills that carried the story along for me despite the bits of no interest.

Helen Collins, *Mutagenesis*, Tor, 1992

In the 27th century, "Dr Mattie Manan had come to the long-lost colony of Plain to try and recover strains of grasses long extinct on Earth. But the patriarchal settlement leaders refused to deal with the

Earthmen unless Mattie was kept on the ship.”

Mattie discovered that the women of Plain are curiously child-like and docile, though many have considerably talent for art or working with mechanical things. The men of the landing party aren't interested. “Now she has escaped into the ... plains of Anu, along with a group of native women... they journey ... towards the mysterious Eastcountry, whose scientists are hard a work to change the nature of the human race...”

C.J. Cherryh, Foreigner, Daw, 1994; Tripoint, Warner, 1994

Foreigner casts one lone human ambassador among a group of aliens who are using him as a pawn in their own intrigues as well as their conflict with the humans. He's a bit too trusting at first, but learns to think more cunningly and strategically.

Tripoint is the latest Merchanter adventure in the setting of *Downbelow Station*. A young man from a family ship, who is the product of a rape, gets captured by men from his father's ship, and gets drawn into a complex web of inter- and intra-family intrigue.

Pat Cadigan, Fools, Harper-Collins, 1992

I couldn't get into this well-written book. Maybe some time when I'm in a different mood, it will grab me. But not this time.

“In a world of brainsuckers and bodysnatchers, you can't take anything for granted. Not even your own identity. When Marya, a struggling Method actress, wakes up in a hologram pool in an exclusive priv club with fancy new clothes and plenty of money, she knows something is strange. When a memory of murder starts tugging at her, she knows something is very strange, and that she'd better find out whose life she's living. Fast.”

Emma Bull, Finder, Tor, 1994; War for the Oaks, Ace, 1987

Finder is an excellent story of a young man with a telepathic talent for finding people and things. He lives in the Borderlands, a place where the lands of Faerie and humans overlap. When his elf friends begin dying of a mysterious virus, he cannot avoid getting involved, both with the problem and with the cop who is working with him. He must confront himself and his past as well as the present.

War for the Oaks features “Eddi McCandry... lead singer in a rock'n'roll band... her ... life is about to be turned inside out, as she's drafted to fight in a war that's going on just beyond the edge of sight... a faerie war that needs a mortal to make it all too real. Urban fantasy. I loved it.

Greg Bear, Moving Mars, Tor, 1993

Another fascinating book about the colonisation of Mars, and the conflict between the colonists and the people on Earth. When the crunch really comes, one solution is to move Mars to another solar system—an audacious endeavour indeed!

John Barnes, Mother of Storms, Tor, 1994

“A breathtaking blend of gripping thriller and ... sf” says the cover blurb, and I'd agree with that. As a disaster novel, this one's brilliant, and the depictions of the best and worst that the disaster brought out in people were very convincing.

However, I didn't appreciate the detailed study of a sadist who gets off on snuff films, and I wish he'd left that out — it's important to bring child abuse to the attention of people, but this was a bit much and thoroughly revolting. It also didn't seem relevant to the main story, because it wasn't a reponse to the disaster, but started long before it.

Series and spinoffs

Elizabeth Moon, Sporting Chance and Winning Colors, Baen, 1994, 1995

Sequels to *Hunting Party*, these books continue the adventures of Heris Serano and her shipload of disgraced ex-military people and adult children of wealthy political powers. Moon is a terrific writer and her stories are always full of twists and turns, wry asides, amusing events and deadly seriousness. I just wish she hadn't spent quite so much time telling us all about horses, fox hunting, and related matters.

Anne McCaffrey, Dolphins of Pern and Freedom's Landing, Bantam, 1994, 1995

Dolphins takes place after the people of Pern have rediscovered their origins and conquered Thread, but it's set in a community that's not much touched directly by the new revelations, except that many old habits are being questioned by the young, now that Thread is no longer a threat.

Landing is the first of a new Catteni “sequence”, and it's not bad. Mercifully free of the telepathic crap in the *Rowan* series, this book follows a group of humans who have been captured by aliens and plunked down on a planet to survive if they can. Some of it's rather Boy-Scoutish survival stuff, but a mystery is injected partway through, to hold your interest.

Wilhelmina Baird, Clipjoint, Ace, 1994

Sequel to *Crashcourse*, this book continues the adventures of Cass and Moke as they seek revenge for the death of their friend Dosh. But is Dosh really dead? Someone's sent Cass a vidclip of the latest hit cyberfilm, starring an actor who bears a striking resemblance to him.