

WeberWoman's Wrevenge

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Coming - ready or not!

Weberwoman's Wrevenge 50

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Aussiecon Three

The 57th World Science Fiction Convention

Thursday 2 September thru Monday 6 September 1999
Melbourne, Australia

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Guests of Honour

Gregory Benford
George Turner
Bruce Gillespie

Diary notes

May 1996 trip report

I spent most of May in the USA, visiting Seattle, the San Francisco Bay Area, Colorado Springs, Minneapolis, and Madison, Wisconsin.

Seattle. The trip started with 2 days at my parents' place, where I attempted (unsuccessfully) to time-shift 7 hours before attending a professional conference on May 5th. While there, I managed to fry the card modem in my laptop computer by attempting to collect my e-mail, completely forgetting that my parents' phone line is on a switchboard at their retirement community. Eric and others had given me copious warnings about the dangers of hotel switchboards, but I never even thought about it at my parents', even when my mother said, "Don't forget to dial 9 to get out." *sigh*

I attended a Vanguard meeting at Jane Hawkins' and Vonda McIntyre's house in Seattle on the evening of the 4th, stayed that night with Cliff Wind and Marilyn Holt, then transferred to the con hotel on Sunday. Marilyn took me to a Future Shop where I bought a replacement card modem (on sale, obsolete 14,400 speed) for my laptop, but I couldn't get it to work. I made the first of a series of long phone calls to the IBM help line to try to find and fix the problem. Fortunately I was able to use Cliff and Marilyn's modem to keep in touch with the world.

The Vanguard meeting was fun. Janice Murray had not told everybody I was coming, as she usually does, since she wasn't organising the party this time. So lots of people weren't expecting me, and got quite a surprise when they recognised me across the room. I interpreted the shrieks of "my god, it's Jean Weber" as delight rather than horror, given

that they were followed by friendly hugs.

The conference (Society for Technical Communication) was fun also. (See later for more details.)

After the conference, I spent another few days with my parents, including Mothers' Day, and helped my mother celebrate her 75th birthday a few days early. She and my father (who is 78) are both doing well and planning a 6-week trip through Canada in their RV, leaving in early June.

Then down to the San Francisco area, where I hung out with Alyson Abramowitz, Donya White and Allen Baum, and visited my sister. Two more phone calls to IBM elicited the opinion that the modem I'd bought was a dud, and they would ship me a replacement. This arrived just before I left California for Colorado. There I tried the new modem, which worked as advertised just fine, plug-and-play.

One reason I'd been so keen to get my email is that I was negotiating for some editing work to start soon after I got back to Australia. This seemed to be a good start to also negotiating to work at home once I actually get the contract. (Update: I got an interview, but not the job, because they had a small budget and we agreed they couldn't afford me.)

While in California, several people told me that there were jobs going begging in technical writing and other parts of the computer industry in that area. One person I visited said that she'd emailed me to say if I did want to work while I was here, she had plenty for me to do—but her email never reached me! Alyson said she could have found me work, too, but I hadn't mentioned any interest to her, so she hadn't attempted to tell me so.

One day I drove down to Monterrey to visit a friend. It was an easy, pleasant drive, but long, and it rained off and on, sometimes heavily. In fact, the area had rain for 3 days, much to the surprise of the locals, who say it *never* rains in May. Fortunately I was not planning on any long walks, and the day I did walk all over Stanford campus it didn't rain, though it was quite overcast.

I also discovered, to my surprise, that the speed limit was 65, not 55. Alyson explained about the repealing of the federal law setting a nationwide 55 mph speed limit and returning the matter to the States. (After 23 years or so.) I hadn't heard about this, but then I don't pay much attention to the news, and I don't know whether it was reported in the Australian press or not, but I don't recall even reading about it in fanzines. Anyway, the change hasn't made any discernable difference to the driving habits of Californians, but now they are driving at a legal speed, or only 5 or 10 miles over the legal limit, rather than driving at 15 or 20 miles over the limit.

I survived remarkably well, despite the adventure of trying to read a map while ripping along at 70 mph in traffic. Fortunately I'm fairly familiar with the main routes I take in that area, so if I studied the map well enough before I set out, I didn't have to check it much if at all on the way. The confusing bits are local streets, but the speed limit tends to be 25 mph locally, so it's not such a drama.

Colorado. I stayed with Elaine Normandy and Jack Heneghan. They have a satellite dish and a 27-inch flat-screen TV. Jack had it tuned to the NASA channel so I spent a lot of time watching video

(often live) from the latest shuttle mission. The sequence of unpacking the satellite they were using for experiments was pretty impressive, particularly with the earth turning in the background. Unfortunately I missed the bits on rendezvousing with the satellite and collecting it again. I had never before had the opportunity to watch the NASA channel, much less a shuttle mission, so I was really rapt. I also met their animals: 5 dogs (one of which had been bitten on the muzzle by a rattlesnake the day before I arrived), 3 cats, and 2 or 3 horses.

For entertainment on the drive from Denver to Colorado Springs, there was a big forest fire burning in the Rockies. It was spreading a huge cloud of smoke eastward. From a distance it almost looked like a cloud, but closer up you could see the reddish tinge of the smoke. And when passing under the cloud, the smell was quite distinctive, and also quite different from the smell of burning Australian bush.

Sunday Elaine and I went walking in the Garden of the Gods, an area of interesting rock formations (not one of the most spectacular, but quite nice). The sky was clear but the temperature had dropped to pleasant. Monday, when I'd intended to take the cog railway to Pikes Peak, was very overcast so I didn't go. Only a few drops of rain fell, which disappointed the locals, since there hasn't been the usual amount of rain this year, and they normally don't get much anyway. I wasn't sure how I'd do at that elevation, but I didn't get significantly more wrecked than normal. (It's been many years since I've been much above 800 meters.)

Elaine tells me there's also lots of work in Colorado Springs for technical writers. I talked with an SGML training group on Monday, about the possibility of helping them bring their courses to Australia, and

they told me lots of interesting gossip about the industry in this area, most of which has sprung up in the last 5 or so years.

Next stop was **Minneapolis**, where I stayed with Joyce Scrivner, went to dinner with Jeanne Mealy and John Stanley, and spent the days hanging around with Geri Sullivan. Joyce hosted a small potluck gathering one night, at which I saw a whole collection of people including Linda Lounsbury. The first day there was sunny and pleasant; the second day was overcast. On the third day, Joyce and I drove to Madison; it rained.

Madison was **Wiscon**, the annual feminist sf/f con. This was its 20th year, and the lineup of my favourite writers was overwhelming. There wasn't time to meet all of them, even in passing. (The collection of fans I know and love was huge too.) Overall, I was seriously impressed with the convention, and count it as one of my two all-time favourites (the other was Corflu Vegas). I actually attended as many program items as I could fit in, as did many other attendees.

Then **back to Australia**, first driving to Chicago through a torrential downpour (bloody storm has been following me across the country), then waiting for the plane which was nearly 2 hours late (because of the weather), rushing madly for the connection in LA, and finally failing to get a place to lie down and sleep on a very uncrowded plane (the early arrivals had nabbed all the multiple seats).

STC conference

The STC conference started on Sunday 5 May and lasted through Wednesday. I enjoyed it even more than I expected, despite the jet lag. It was held in the Seattle Convention Center, which I believe is the site being bid for worldcon in '02. It was a good venue.

The conference had many similarities to a SF convention, as anyone who attends professional conferences probably knows. This was my first *big* one (over 2,500 attendees). I was scheduled to lead a session at 0830 on Tuesday morning. My body still thought it was around 0230 and that I hadn't had much sleep, so I don't know how much sense I made. Fortunately my role was to introduce my topic (managing a team of telecommuting technical writers) and get the group to talk with each other on the topic. I managed to do that, and everyone seemed to enjoy the session, so I guess it was okay.

One thing (of many) that impressed me at the conference was the number of older women (over 50, many over 60 or 70) who attended. Some of them are retired technical writers or editors; one was the 78-year-old mother of a prominent member of the Society. I chanced upon a group of women discussing their obligations in caring for their parents. One joked that they were the unofficial "Parental Care PIC." PIC= Professional Interest Committee, the STC's version of SIG (Special Interest Group). The 78-year-old woman mentioned above was on vacation from caring for *her* mother.

I met a couple of other really interesting women and several conspicuously uninteresting men. Considering the number of attendees, I don't consider any of them a representative sample.

Telecommuting was a hot topic at this year's conference, but the "hottest" topic (not surprisingly) was anything to do with writing/editing/publishing on the Web. I didn't even try to get into any sessions dealing with the Web; they were standing room only, I heard.

American citizenship

The "big news" is that in mid-April I got a letter from the US State Department informing me that they were re-instating my US citizenship. (I had filed a request last October, just in time for it to be buried in the non-essential piles during the US government shutdown.) Anyway, I hustled right down to the consulate to get a passport in time for this trip. So now I have dual citizenship.

I had heard several years ago that the US had changed their rules and dual citizenship was now possible, but I had put off doing anything about it until Eric had nagged me enough about "having more choices" if I had dual citizenship.

So now I can work legally in the US again, I can vote in the Presidential election this year, and I can file US tax returns again. Oh joy! If I had forgotten this delight (which I hadn't), I wouldn't have remained ignorant for long, because along with the passport was an invitation to step down the hall and talk to the IRS representative.

The good news was that I wouldn't have to file until next year, for the '96 tax year, and most of my income should not be subject to US tax. The bad news is that my consulting income is subject to Social Security tax at 15+%. Yow! I must have looked really shocked, because the IRS man said, "most people in your situation form an Australian company and get around it that way." I've been considering for some years whether I should form a company; now I may have a reason that's too compelling to refuse.

Work stuff

Last issue I mentioned being "between jobs". I soon picked up a contract to do two people's worth of work in the 6 weeks before I flew off on the May trip. I managed to get as much of the work done as

possible, and rather more than I thought I'd have time for. The client was apparently happy with what I did, and I assume was suitably impressed with my ability to meet a deadline, because as soon as I got home, they wanted me in to do some more work for them.

I also have some work for a laser printer R&D group at Lexmark. They bought out Gestetner Lasers, who had taken over Impact Systems, the laser printer company I worked for in '87-'88. Some of the Impact Systems R&D people have stayed with the company as it changed owners, and they keep calling up my former boss to ask him to do the occasional manual for them. He's usually too busy, so he subcontracts the work to me.

Cape York trip

In September I finally did something I've wanted to do for 20 years: take a 4WD camping tour of Australia's Cape York Peninsula (the pointy bit in the northeast, above Cairns). I took copious notes, but I don't have the ambition to write it all up now. Suffice to say that I had a great time, and it was the perfect time of year for that country: dry, warm weather (not hot and humid). I saw lots of interesting stuff and had plenty of time to relax and enjoy myself.

Computer gear

Awhile ago I bought a scanner. It worked well for a couple of weeks and then developed some nasty problems. It went back to the shop for warranty repairs. I got it back last week and gave it a test run. The problem was still there. Back again to the shop. I am not impressed.

While I was away, Eric installed a sound card in my computer, but we haven't got it to work yet (long technical story, finally diagnosed as a dud disk; we're now looking for a replacement disk — the company

Eric bought it from has disappeared). He also installed a tape backup, which does works and another 16 Meg of memory, bringing the machine total to 32 Meg. Some software runs conspicuously faster now.

R.I.P. Minou

Exploratory surgery on 28 September revealed a large intestinal tumor. As Minou was unlikely to live much longer, and probably in considerable discomfort or pain, I instructed the vet to put her down. She was 14 and had lived with Eric and me for 13 years. She will be much missed.

Paralympics

Eric and I went to Sydney airport on 27 August to welcome back the first contingent of the Australian Paralympic team, mainly because Canberra fan and friend Jim Nomarhas was in the group. Jim won a silver medal in pistol shooting. This is particularly significant because no Australian has won a medal in pistol shooting in either the Paralympics or the able-bodied Olympics since 1974, we're told. (Australians have won rifle shooting, but not pistol.) We made a sign that said "Welcome home, Jim Nomarhas, you straight-shooting son of a gun." We got a lot of media attention, and every channel filmed us, but none of it got on TV except for a split-second glimpse in the far background. NSW Premier Carr was there, greeting people, but didn't come over to speak to Jim (he spent his time with the really impressive group of multiple medal winners with more conspicuous disabilities). We suspect that pistol shooting isn't exactly a politically correct sport at the moment in Australia.

Folk music

by Paula Johanson

*Excerpt from the manuscript
Modern Ritual*

I walked on the moon one night, in a city where I had been low for two years. The general detached attitude of people in the cold city around me had shut me out and shut me down for so long I had felt oppressed by the million people in the city spread out around me, all different from me, all disapproving.

But one night I went to the Folk Music Festival down in the river valley, and heard the music of strangers and famous musicians blending with Randy and other people I knew. Some people I had heard and played recordings for years. Others were there for the first time in Canada, the first time they were recorded, and even their breathing in the microphones was foreign and exciting.

My husband and friend Linda and I spread our blanket on the hill where a forest of blankets marked out small spaces in front of the main stage. As darkness fell, the other stages fell silent and the main stage lit up with lights and sound. Food booths sold satay and green onion cakes, which we ate with our fingers before giving our plates to the washing-up booth.

A little boy wandered up to Linda and asked her, "Why are you fat? Are you gonna have a baby?"

She goggled for a moment before answering, "Well, yes, I am. But I'm mostly a little fat anyways." She stared after him as he wandered away. "Does it show already?" she asked me. She looked warm and round and happy to have convinced my husband and I to come to the Folk Music Festival.

We listened to music as the sky grew darker, and the skyscrapers across the river stood out against the

sky, lights glowing in their windows. The music changed and swelled, and the crowd grew up the hill till there were people from the stage to the crest a thousand yards away. I had met some friends there earlier, who wandered away into the crowd below. Other friends were lost in that mass below me on the hill, where a knot of people danced wildly, trampling the grass to mud and dust underfoot.

When the moon rose it backfilled a gentle light where the spotlights didn't penetrate, so everyone was painted silver and all our clothes looked soft as old blue jeans. I wandered down in the dark behind the stage, where the people lined up for the porta-johns didn't look like strangers, and all the faces were relaxed from the annoyed tension I had thought was habitual to all people in this city.

"We are babies in the park
We are lovers at the movies
We are candles in the dark"

I made my way back up the hill through crowds of men and women who didn't frighten me with their voices and drinking, back to my husband and Linda. Lying back on the blanket, I felt the hill under me like I had felt the earth in my garden for three summers now, the only thing here that welcomed me except for Linda. Now the warm earth under me held me up, and the moon rose between my feet, between the tall buildings where I went for U.I. cheques and where I sold my writing about other people's books.

Fifteen thousand people breathing together into the warm night sang the middle eight a cappella with Ferron:

"We are snowflakes in July
We are women grown together
We are men who easily cry...
...We are not afraid of lies."

When the music changed from a mad violinist and Ferron's smoking alto voice, to the Oyster Band's spinning string bass, the beat moved in us and people up the hill were dancing, not just in the knot in front of the stage.

My friend leapt to her feet, standing above us with her belly slightly rounded, resonating to the music and the feet beating the hill like a drum. She put down a hand to each of us and pulled my husband and I to our feet. We danced like that, hand in hand, and when I collided with another dancer, I held out my hand to her. She reached out too, and her group and another joined us so that half-way up the hill we were a circle whirling with other circles amid blankets where people held candles like stars.

We danced up and around and down for an endless time till there were no more verses and the circle spun apart, stumbling on the steep hill. We tumbled back to our blankets, laughing and hot, trembling and tired, and the band played a quieter song. It held us too, quiet where we'd been whirling, and the mad knot of dancers kept on, writhing in the lights of the stage.

When they left, we left. Los Lobos was coming on next to close the festival for the night, but we were done. My husband said that the Oyster Band must have passed Los Lobos backstage, saying "Hey—close for *this*," and that must have been true.

Notes from rural New Zealand

by Lyn McConchie

In early June I deserted Tai and the farm for the 17th National SF Convention down in Christchurch. It was one of the better cons and I had a great time in and out of bookshops in the city, then doing assorted panels, a seminar for wannabe writers, and keeping an eye on our fan fund auction while disappearing happily into half the hotel corners to talk writing. With three professional NZ writers there, all with SF/F books sold/published, it was a rare chance to converse with peers about the problems of selling that genre here..

Trip home added its modicum of interest as the airline "lost" two passengers at Christchurch. The plane was an Invercargill to Christchurch to Wellington hopper. Luggage is booked straight through but passengers going from Invercargill to Wellington must change planes.

I was told that this sort of thing happens regularly with non-English-speaking tourists. They don't understand they're getting out simply to switch planes, vanish instead in search of their luggage believing they have arrived, and the airline is stuck with frantically trying to find them. Because this is a common terrorist method of blowing up planes (check in baggage, then don't show), even here airline regulations now say that if the passengers can't be found, their luggage must also be removed before the plane can leave again. I eventually got home.

June continued to be busy. It started with installing the new fire in my open plan lounge, dining room, kitchen corner. Since the local fire brigade are trying to raise money for a water tanker, they did the installing.

The noise of one rolled steel fire being dragged out, a second dragged

in, plus a lot of leaping about on the roof, was horrendous. Tai took one look and vanished under the bed.

The installation went reasonably easily. Someone dropped the old flue off the roof, necessitating a yell of "Look out!" but fortunately those below did. Someone lost their balance on the ladder, slid down the last three rungs and ended up flat on their back. No damage though.

And when the guys were lifting the old fire off the old hearth we discovered two completely mummified mice underneath. That had me baffled for a few minutes until I realised that as the old hearth was just loose bricks, the mice (probably at different times) had squeezed through the bricks to elude Rasti or Tai, come up on top of them under the fire's hollow pedestal, and died of the heat there. Painlessly I'd think. A sort of heat stroke ending in death and then mummification.

Three days later the Safety Inspector arrived, checked out the fire and came down from the roof looking surprised to say, Yes, I could have a Certificate of Compliance, and boy, the blokes really had secured the flue, hadn't they? Darn right. At my insistence they'd wired the top on and strung three guy wires from roof to flue as well. We get some howling gales here around October and I felt I'd like the flue (which is now much taller) to stay right where it was put.

After the Inspector had departed, I lit the fire with much rejoicing. It was just as well. The cold snap arrived a day later and half the country froze.



Not that things were standing still though. The carpet came next and thank heavens you don't as yet need permits for that. The chap laying it was supposed to arrive at 1.30 on Friday. Naturally he arrived an hour late and then found that the job was going to take even longer than he'd bargained for.

The job then took another three hours, so he kept phoning his girlfriend trying to tell her how late he'd be. This didn't speed things up and neither did her replies once he'd finally reached her. After that I found I was acting as marriage guidance to a distressed carpet layer while the carpet unrolled in a tidal wave across the rooms.

He finished up at half past six, far too late to make the intended date which had been planned for five. (Of course, as I kindly refrained from saying, if he'd arrived on time, he wouldn't have been late leaving.) But it had been a miserable job. Laying secondhand carpet always is, I was told once. So I paid him and added two of my lovely big peace roses and a bag of assorted meat packs from the freezer and my last steer. (Garry rang back

next day to say that the combination had worked. Leanne is talking to him again.)

Tai had to be shut out in his park the first couple of hours while the library was done. The furniture from that had to go into my bedroom, and doors had to all be left open for gear and carpet. Sir didn't appreciate it.

Once the carpet was down in the library and the furniture back there, he could come in to hide under the bed again for stage two. But to get to the bedroom, he had to cross new and unfamiliar carpet. Garry was moving up behind him, so Tai took a deep breath and jumped, about two feet upwards and some four feet forwards. Of course he landed on the unfamiliar carpet none the less.

I spent the next few days sorting out odds and ends surrounding all this. The old carpet went off to the tip (where, so Tony said, someone promptly scavenged it).

I also reorganised the spare room. Then my cleaner arrived for the morning. Together we put up the new kitchen curtain, planted out a bunch of *Watsonia* bulbs at the front of the house, and shifted the two squares of spare replacement carpet to the back of the shearing shed where it will stay dry and available in case I need an extra piece for repair at some stage.

Sigh! When I bought this place I had a choice. Take out a mortgage I probably couldn't afford and do all the stuff like fixing the roof and renovating at once. Or forget the mortgage and just do what I could when I had a few bucks to spare. I opted for the second which made sense. It's just that there are times when I suspect I'll be into my seventies before it's all done (or have sold up and left). At least I'll be spending this winter admiring my nice new fire, hearth, and carpet.

The carpet-laying had barely been completed when Mt. Ruapehu started up. We had that last year for

a couple of months, with airports being closed, ash falling where the wind blew, and both the Government and Civil Defence in quite a tizzy. The mountain had been nicely quiet for months, then in mid-June it all began again... to the fury of the local ski-fields people who felt it could have saved all the fuss until summer.

By the end of June things had simmered down somewhat, airports were open again, ski-fields were starting to recover, and most of the hundreds of tons of ash had been swept up. Not that I'd count on anything myself. Mountains are unpredictable. Particularly ones which are active volcanoes, and positioned on the "Ring of Fire."

Theoretically Norsewood is safe from major fallout, being 140km as the crow flies from Ruapehu. But if the volcano really blew, the devastation zone could extend past us, with ash falls to several meters and dangerously strong tremors. Not that I think it's going to happen, but just in case I have emergency supplies handy and other precautions ready. Better to be ready than totally unprepared...

I am gambling that things will die down quietly though and meanwhile I'm getting on with the other minor renovations as I have time and/or assistance. The weather is being merrily peculiar and was all month. At various times we got snow flurries, stretches of wonderful clear windless days and then patches of 2-3 days when you went to bed wondering if the farm would float off during the night.

I know winter has *really* arrived when Tai gallops through his door and sits complaining very indignantly right by my typing chair. I wondered what was bothering him and opened the people door to look. It was snowing. Not a lot, just a steady scattering of big flakes which vanished almost as fast as they

landed. Quite beautiful; and Bet, bucking and bouncing across her paddock, horning up the flakes as she danced, was clearly feeling that way too. Not so his Lordship who was now in the armchair by the fire, warming frozen toes and muttering about daft humans and their aesthetics.

The paper arrived soon after and I could see that in finding the snow beautiful I *was* in a minority. The South Island had been blanketed the previous night; farmers and motorists combined to complain about it. Weathermongers warned of more to come, police warned of icy roads, and the two lots of people who had to visit Farside complained of the freezing cold when out of either a warm house or vehicle.

I sympathised fast once I had to really go outside myself. It was freezing. Bet had stopped bouncing and was now standing at the gate waiting for hay. I milked before my fingers froze solid and gave her an extra hay biscuit. (Hay is excellent in such chill. Some scientist could explain it, but all I know is that a cow with a belly full of hay stays warmer than with grass. So although Bet still has ample grass, I'm also giving her hay after milking in the evening.)

I also tied an old bedspread over the banana passionfruit and hope that it won't die on me as it did in the unusually heavy snowfall in August of 1992. Looking at the paper and later watching the TV news of South Island cars skidding merrily all over the roads down there, I can only think how lucky SF fans were that it didn't do this a couple of weeks earlier. Right now a lot of the roads are blocked which fans would have used to attend the National Convention. Many planes are grounded, airports closed, and many of the Cook Strait ferry crossing delayed or cancelled.

An hour after the milking I gathered up my friends, donned heavy warm gear, took up my stick and torch and went out to check on all the furred and feathered gang. The hens were all tucked up in the bike shed and cow bail, geese quietly around the corner of the woodshed out of the wind. In various paddocks the cows and sheep were in warm huddles behind trees where the wind was broken and the rain seldom penetrates. (Unlike some of the "large" farmers, we don't rip out our shelterbelts and hedges. We'd rather see our stock warm, dry and comfortable than have that extra few feet of land.)

Reassured that they were, we staggered back to our respective houses. My new enclosed fire was doing its job and the house was gloriously, wonderfully warm. I wonder if animals ever praise something for warmth? I will be from now until Spring.

While I was still up to the eyebrows in bronchitis, Fluffy produced her kittens for inspection. In fact as I found out quite quickly, she didn't so much want them admired, as fed. With four growing balls of fur, the milk supply was running rather low.

I looked them over. Two ginger boys, one black and white charmer, and a shy black one with a single smudge of white just below the chin. They were barely six weeks old, smaller than they should have been, and a bit worried about me. Was I dangerous?

Fluff rushing up to me and purring joyfully as I stroked her settled the question of danger although the black baby still wasn't too sure. Once I produced food and fresh milk, all the others were certain I was okay. They fell on the supplies like starving tigers while Fluff watched in approval.

I watched as well but with less delight in one way. How on earth

was I going to find homes for four feral kittens? I pumped food into everyone over the next week while asking every visitor if they'd be interested in a kitten. No one seemed to be, so it might have to be the SPCA once the babies were definitely old enough to leave and be healthy. I hated that as I'm a mug and was already fond of all of them.

The black and white one was the best. It had lost the baby blue eyes first, was the boldest, and the prettiest in my opinion. I redoubled my efforts to convince people they *needed* a kitten.

I borrowed the black and white kitten at eight weeks and took it inside to show Tai. He was first horrified, then doubtful. He peered at it around table and chair legs, finally walking over to look down dubiously at the small object. The kitten raised its face and pushed its nose hopefully at Tai, who was not actually hostile, just baffled. I began to consider the possibility of a second cat. The kittens continued to grow, time continued to pass and they were eating me out of house and home and costing the fortune I didn't have.

Then out of nowhere friends started announcing they required kittens. My cleaner's ancient cat died and suddenly there was room for a replacement. In the end she took not one but two. The shy black, and the black and white, my favourite. I let them go. Better they went to homes that wanted them and I was left with the space for another in case of emergencies (or the next litter, whichever arrived first).

One of the ginger boys went to the local dairy for light mousework. The other was bundled shrieking into a box and off in the mailcar which delivers the rural delivery mail each day.

The nice thing about all four departures is that the kittens have gone to people I see regularly. I hear

about their exploits and how they are growing. Things will be quiet on the kitten front now until September or so. Fluff allows me to pick her up but I still have no hope of getting her boxed to be spayed at the vet's 20kms away. Sigh. I foresee more kittens...

Being busy has been added to by my purchase of a young steer named Enoch. Turns out that he should have been named Mark Todd as he's a great jumper. So far he has ended up on the front lawn (trying to join Bet in the cow bail), in the lambing paddock (trying to join Bet in the hay paddock), and in the shed paddock (trying to get away from Bet who'd just handed him a thumping for annoying her).

He does seem to have settled down now but I've had to electric fence off 2/3rd of Bet's usual paddock because he kept persuading her to dodge me when milking time arrived. With a lot less ground to be evasive in I'm having no trouble with either of them at the moment but I'm keeping an eye on him.

Beef prices are through the floor this year. I paid \$250 including delivery etc for Enoch and he's 18 months old. Last year I purchased Warner for \$230 and he was only 6 months. If prices don't rise soon beef farmers' belts will be tightened to extinction. Of course people like me wind up happily eating very cheap beef. Probably around \$1.25 to \$1.50 per kilo once Enoch is freezered in July.

Bet has been having a harassed period too. Before they departed, Fluff's kittens were around 10-12 weeks old and very active. Because I fill a wide shallow pan for Fluff when I milk, the kittens tended to spend a lot of time in the cow bail awaiting milking time.

Bet doesn't really like cats much. After recent events, she likes them a lot less. I was tucked into her flank, milk was hissing into the bucket and

at the pan one cat and four kittens lapped peacefully. Then the pan was empty and the ginger tom kit looked about for some pursuit. He found Bet's tail. I put a stop to that hastily. No cow wants a kitten bungee-jumping using her tail.

The kits vanished around the corner in a mock fight. The bucket filled so I swapped it for an empty one. Needing to stretch, I stood up, strolled around the opposite corner to the kits and emptied the full bucket into the barrels kept for the piglets. Then I returned to finish off.

I'd just completed that with another four litres when a hissing spitting ball of entangled kittens rolled back into the cow bail. Before I could rise from my stool, one unraveled, made a wild leap, shot up Bet's hindleg and stood, shouting defiance at his family from her rump where he was anchored with four sets of claws.

Bet rose vertically with a strangled moo of pain and indignation. I tried to jump up, lost my balance attempting to avoid flying hooves, milk went everywhere, and petrified by the commotion the kitten hung on harder. I wallowed on my back on the concrete for a minute wiping milk from my eyes before I could catch my breath and stand.

I managed to detach the kitten, soothe a trembling cow, and release

her to her paddock. The kittens have now departed but Bet is still eyeing her bail very cautiously before she'll come in each night. And I'm still grinning at the sight all that must have made.

Piglet has been added to the usual farm menagerie. She is about eight weeks old, plump, black and white and due for the freezer around late October/early November. Meanwhile I'm cooking piglet scraps on the new fire. I'm told Piglet must have her food cooked so she will digest it better and grow well. If this is so—who the hell cooks food for wild piglets? It does seem to be working for her though. You can almost see her growing.

The bloke who sold her to me was delighted to swap free delivery for 100 litres of surplus milk contributed by Bet while I was trying to find a "for sale" weaner piglet. Piglet arrived, was tucked into her nice sty and given a whole biscuit of hay as bedding. I checked some time later to find she'd arranged it in a neat pile by the door. That way she can lie there and watch everything that goes on around the farm. Pigs aren't stupid.

Wish I could say the same for truck drivers. The chap who dropped Piglet off listened to me when I said to drive that way across the lawn—indicating with one hand. One side of the lawn has a solid

layer of road metal under the grass and is raised up. It never gets boggy and mucky. The other side hasn't and does.

Last year the prat delivering my firewood didn't listen and got his truck and five cords of blue gum stuck. This year the day after Piglet arrived, I heard a truck pull up. It had the other two cords of firewood I'd ordered. I reached the gate, nodded to the driver and said "take it down to the woodshed over there, staying on the right side of the drive. Okay?"

"Yeah, yeah."

You guessed it. He ignored what I'd said and went left straight onto the soft muddy part of the lawn which promptly enveloped his tyres with great affection and a deathlike grip. At least this time I was fast enough to stop him revving the engine and wrecking the lawn. Instead he had to climb out, sort out some flat pieces of firewood and get them under the wheels. He ended up getting off the lawn again without damaging it badly (and without being murdered, although that was closer). It's times like that which make me wish I was eight feet tall and built like Hercules so I could pick idiots up by the throat and ask why the hell they didn't listen? or if they did, why the hell they didn't do as I asked! Mumble, mumble....

Janice Murray for DUFF '97!

Letters

jan howard finder
164 Williamsburg Court
Albany, NY 12203 USA
6 January 1996

I checked my Adelaide maps and the "busway" was only noted as "under construction" on them. Boy am I out of date. Walking along there seems a nice way to enjoy the area.

Your mention of cold weather brought a smile to me. A couple of days ago we got about 30+cm of snow, pushing the season's total to well over 100cm. The temp yesterday morning was -24 and it was about -22 this morning. Some of the places to the north were told to expect temps down about -35. 'tis a little bit nippy out.

Speaking of teaching I may do some tutoring in freshman Chem (it would be fun to relearn the stuff) & auto engines. I figure I would really get a chance to learn the stuff trying to tutor in it. The instructor I had for the course thought it would be fine.

For those interested in the social sciences I would like to recommend a number of books to you and your readers. They might start an argument or two: *The Moral Animal* by Robert Wright; *The Lemur's Legacy: The Evolution of Power, Sex & Love* by Robert Jay Russell; *The Ascent of Mind* by William Calvin (great idea for a near future catastrophe story [a short story using something similar was done in the 30's, but the US, of course, saved the world] is mentioned right at the beginning, which could actually happen any day now); & the book I'm currently working thru *The Runaway Brain* by Chris Wills. They contain some interesting ideas on how & why the sexes interact the way they do.

I did find an interesting bio: *Vic Hall, Outback Policeman*. I'm try-



ing to track down the novels he wrote. It might be interesting to compare his approach to that of Upfield's.

Pass on to Rachel Mcgrath-Kerr that "step aerobics" when using only the step and not any of the risers and pacing self is a great addition to an exercise program. Regardless of what the others are doing, one can always go back to the basic right or left step pattern. I urge her to give it a try. The main thing is to pace one's self and not worry about what others are doing. Everything is a 4-count or multiples.

For an interesting take on the IQ story and related topics I recommend Steven Jay Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man*. Quite readable except for the last chapter which is all statistics, but he does summarize.

Enjoyed *Sex Dance*. It is a fascinating tale. I've let myself be talked into doing some magic to try and sell *The Place*. What the hell.

Buck Coulson
2677W-500N
Hartford City, IN 47348, USA
11 January 1996

I wonder if rape is really used by any section of the populace as a preface to sex, marriage, happily ever after, etc? Sure, a lot of people are pretty dumb, but that dumb? A

lot of males have always wanted the fun without having to pay for it with either cash or marriage, and a lot of females are dumb enough to let them get away with it (or have the for sexual fun themselves). But a mating strategy? I really doubt it, but then maybe I'm naive.

((I believe it has been, and possibly still is, a strategy in other societies, where women have no say in who they marry. — JHW))

I'm with Jonathan Scott about handling criminals. The trouble with the US system is that they don't stay locked up. We have a huge shortage of jails and prisons, so that many criminals are regularly turned loose well before the end of their sentences so that murder and political offenders can be put away. A burglar? Small potatoes unless he murdered someone during the crime. So he gets a vacation, regular meals, idleness, and is out again before he even gets very bored. Deterrent to crime? It is to laugh.

Over to what we're doing. Went to Music in Nashville Tennessee Jan. 5-7 and had to stay overnight on the 7th because of snow and ice closing the interstate highway. First time we've had to stay over at a con, and in Nashville! It's not exactly considered blizzard country. Got stuck in the drive when we got home

on the 8th, so we shoveled the drive again on the 9th. All 180 feet of it. On the 10th I shoveled out the mailbox and dug out the trash burner. By then the snow had enough crust so I could walk on top of it, so I just dug down inside the burner and then hauled out the paper trash, tossed it into the hole, and flung a match on top of it. (Yes, we recycle. You can't recycle everything.)

We have a new dog now. Elli is an Irish Setter/Golden Retriever cross. Maybe a year old. Got her at the animal shelter, after the manager admitted that she'd started to "put her down" (standard US pet substitute for kill) twice and refrained, hoping to find someone to take her. After 3 months, she's begun to nag us; sits on the patio and barks at the back door if she thinks she's not getting enough attention. A 70-pound puppy. I'm getting her to walk on leash, but she refuses to walk past children. At all. (A clue to who abused her.)

I figure she'll be a good exercise machine by the time the weather is fit for outdoor exercise. Got to get her used to the fact that we'll protect her from other people, so she can walk past them without wanting to head the other way. Meanwhile I can keep fit by shoveling snow.

9 March 1996

Sheryl is absolutely right about cats. Our two were so terrified of change that they evacuated from both ends in the carrying box. Extracting two terrified cats from a shit- and barf-splattered box a time or two convinced us to leave them at home from then on. The dogs have all hated boarding but put up with it.

I never quite understood why a name is considered so important. Oh, I can see why it is for the patriarchal types, but for the rest of us? If I was ordered to take another name, first or last—why not? The

name is not the object, but too many people act as though it is.

12 June 1996

Quite an Australian representation at Wiscon. I finally got to meet Jean... Lucy [Sussex] recognized me and said hello; Rosaleen [Love] didn't have any idea who I was, I think. And vice versa; I'd heard the name, but knew nothing about her.

Elli the dog continues to regain courage slowly. Actually barked at a couple of bicyclists on the road the other day, though I'm not sure she realized they were human — just something strange and therefore to be barked at. Almost totally comfortable with Juanita and me, though she still cringes when I go out to see what she's barking at. Somebody really did a job on her when she was a puppy.

Hope Leibowitz tiki@interlog.com 6 Mar 1996

Hi! I have finally gotten a real ISP. Tiki was what my parents called me all of my life (until they died). They got it from the Hebrew for Hope, which is Tikvah. We weren't the tiniest bit religious, so it is a bit strange.

Lynne Ann Morse morselya@xs1.simplex.nl 2 Mar 1996 and 20 Mar 1996

Our copy of *Mad Marsupial Saucer Invaders from the Down Under Planet Mars!* arrived this past week. Goodie! I want to comment more later, and this makes it loads easier. But I wanted to say — this title makes your 'zine sound just a tiny bit like a book I just got done reading, *Mutant Message Down Under*. Was this intentional?

((NO! (Or if it was, Sheryl didn't tell me.) I certainly don't want anything to do with a book that the Australian indigenous people find highly offensive. What did you think of it? — JHW))

Offensive... oh dear. Well, I found it pretty intense reading, though the book definitely catapulted me into my "take what you need — leave the rest" attitude. I didn't like her being coy about whether this was a work of fiction or not. I certainly don't think less of the indigenous people of Australia because of it. If her report of the walkabout is accurate, I admire the hardiness and the commitment to live in such conditions, which in the book even makes that life-style a positive embracing of a really harsh environment (rather than just submitting to a "primitive" life-style... though she used the "noble savage" item more than I could really stomach, personally...)

All in all, I'm not quite sure what to make of it. I guess what I already said, I took what I needed, left the rest.

Now I feel like I've gone out on a limb... I hope this doesn't get me on any "non-Australians without a clue" list, if the book is so offensive to the locals! (Then again, maybe I should stop worrying about these "lists" — if you've ever seen "Sylvia" with the comic of "The Woman who Worries About Everything," well, that's me there!)

(I think what was offensive to the indigenous Australian people was the author's co-opting their beliefs, fictionalising them, and then claiming it was all a true story. And/or learning just a bit, thinking she understood more than she did, and going off as some sort of expert. The "noble savage" bit didn't go down very well with them either, as you can imagine!

I've read that many Native Americans get the same reaction to people who get involved in their rituals, learn only the superficials that they let outsiders know about, then embrace the whole thing and rush off to teach others a warped

(“mutated”?) version of the experience.

I really must read this Mutant Message thing. Not that I'd have any better idea how accurate it is, probably. I'm only an ignorant whitefella, myself. — JHW))

Lucy Schmeidler
lucy@gramercy.ios.com
28 Feb 1996

I take exception to Sheryl Birkhead's statement in the WWW 49 letters column that cats are location oriented “rather than” people oriented. I agree that cats like to remain in familiar surroundings, but one does hear stories of cats performing remarkable treks to rejoin people who've moved and left them behind; I also know from experience that cats will frequently behave differently toward different members of a household, showing a distinct preference for one over the others. That a cat “doesn't relate to humans the way a dog does” doesn't mean that cats do not relate to humans at all, any more than not being pack animals means that there are no friendships, or other, more complicated social relationships, between cats.

((Sheryl didn't claim that cats don't relate to humans at all. And as she is trained as a vet, I suspect she knows more than you or I do about animal behavior. — JHW))

22 Mar 1996

I sent a copy of your *Lethe* review to Tricia Sullivan, and received the following:

“Thanks for passing along the copy of Jean Weber's review of *Lethe*. I had a laugh about it because, of course, I had NO CLUE about that sea passage — I'm just glad I don't seem to have goofed up in any major way.”

So Yanks (or other Northerners) setting stories in your half of the

world work as blind as many Aussies using US settings. Give us teleportation and maybe everyone will zip over to check details? Nah, most writers are too lazy!

David Thayer
eoushar@exu.ericsson.se
29 Mar 1996

The latest issue of *Wrevenge* has numerous comment hooks I will attempt to latch on to in a postcard of comment. Many would be of interest to Diana but I am afraid to give the fanzine to her for fear she would neglect other things, such as the next San Antonio PR. Perhaps later.

We have discovered e-mail is great for chitchat during the day when we are at the office or alone at home and have other things to do between messages. It is great for long-distance conversation as almost real time, but it does not replace the written word. And illustrations are next to impossible in the medium.

R-Laurraine Tutihasi
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I had my struggles with OS/2 when I worked for the City of Los Angeles. With all the problems I've had with the 640k conventional memory limit for the PC-compatibles, I'm glad to report that I will be upgrading soon to a Macintosh. Mike will buy a newer one in spring, and I will get his old one.

One note. Please don't insert a period in my name. Either a space or hyphen is okay.

Regarding Lan's worry about sales people, I now work for a company that gathers lists for use in marketing. As much information as possible is gathered about each household or individual, so that the marketing company doesn't waste advertising dollars on people who are unlikely to be interested in their products. There is even a service

that allows individuals to say which kind of catalogues, if any, he would like to receive. I was sent one of the questionnaires myself. Being a fairly big catalogue shopper, I intend to answer the questionnaire. Much information collected by our company comes from the warranty card questionnaires that people fill out. It is entirely voluntary. There are other ways of gathering information as well, but I won't write a dissertation on the topic here.

I met Lyn McConchie briefly when she dropped by the LASFS when she was in California. She was doing a book signing in San Diego the following weekend. Unfortunately, Mike and I had previous plans that took us in the opposite direction. I have bought her book. I have enjoyed the *Witch World* books, but I have not bought any before.

I must disagree with you about John Barnes's *Mother of Storms*. Although the sadist plot is somewhat peripheral throughout most of the book, it becomes crucial near the end. It was because of that plot that the other plot to assassinate various individuals was set off prematurely. I thought it was quite a good book. Mike, who has studied meteorology and works with computers, also agreed.

Sheryl Birkhead
23629 Woodfield Road
Gaithersburg, MD 20882, USA
22 June 1996

I drove about 2 weeks after my surgery. It was a big mistake. I felt fine (sorta) and didn't realise how unwell I really was until I totally overdid it and driving home was not pleasant. I, too, was told I had healed far faster than usual, so I wonder if they tell that to all the patients?

Books

Notes by Jean Weber

One thing about not publishing very often is that I end up with an impressive stack of books to bring to your attention, and not enough space to do justice to any of them.

Please take as given that all of the books mentioned below are recommended reading.

Eleanor Arnason, *Ring of Swords*, Tor, 1993

A very well-developed alien contract story. The aliens' society is divided by sex: the men are warriors and diplomats, and the women do just about everything else (including some things that don't become clear until late in the novel, revealing their real power). The women consider men to be far too violent to live with, so they don't. Homosexuality is the norm, and children are produced by artificial insemination. Not surprisingly, the aliens view human social organization with considerable suspicion, and ask some pointed questions about human society.

Wilhelmina Baird, *Psykosis*, Ace, 1995

Sequel to *Crashcourse* and *Clip-joint*, this novel continues the adventures of Cassandra, Sword, Moke and their friends. In this case they are mostly fighting the aliens, rather than other humans. It's fast-paced action adventure stuff. Don't know why I enjoy it so much. Probably because I like the characters.

Gregory Benford, *Matter's End*, Bantam, 1995

Short story collection, including Benford's first published story from 1965, "Stand-In." A lot of very good writing in here, much of it featuring a smart-ass approach to the way people react to change and danger.



If you (like me) have trouble with some of the concepts in Benford's Galactic Center novels, these stories will remind you that he is a talented writer in a range of styles.

Gregory Benford, *Furious Gulf and Sailing Bright Eternity*, Bantam, 1994 and 1995

Books 5 and 6 of the six-volume Galactic Center series. *Gulf* follows a group of humans as they voyage on the spaceship *Argo* toward the black hole at the Galactic Center. The physics of the space-time near the center gets pretty weird.

Eternity brings together characters from past novels and brings the series to its conclusion. I confess that I find it difficult to wrap my mind around such concepts as "esty" (space-time) as surroundings that change in both time and space in ways that are significantly different from our own linear world. But Benford writes well enough, and injects enough wry asides, word-play, philosophy and insight to keep me interested.

David Brin, *Otherness, Orbit*, 1994

Short story collection with interspersed essays, showing the range of Brin's thought-provoking writing.

Lois McMaster Bujold, *Cetaganda*, Baen, 1996

Continues the adventures of Miles Vorkosigan, joined here by his cousin Ivan. Bujold's books are always a good read, with some important lessons about humanity hidden in them.

C.J. Cherryh, *Invader (Daw) and Rider at the Gate (Warner)*, 1995

Invader, the sequel to *Foreigner*, is the story of a young human, Bren Cameron, the human representative to the alien *atevi*. In the first book, Bren went missing for awhile, and the humans sent a replacement, Deana Hanks, who is not acceptable to the *atevi*. Human politics complicate an already tense and dangerous situation, and the arrival of a spaceship full of humans after 200 years only complicates things.

Rider is the story of a lost colony of humans on a planet full of telepathic animals. Most of the humans hide in walled towns; a few form bonds with the intelligent Night-horses, which choose humans as their Riders (hence the book's title). When a Rider and her mare are killed, other "horses" go mad, and Danny and his comrades must find the killer before their whole world falls into chaos. Strong characters, but too much discussion of food, especially bacon!

Charles De Lint, *Into the Green* (Tor, 1993) and *Memory and Dream* (Pan, 1994)

Two excellent fantasy novels by a master. *Green* is Celtic fantasy, well done but not my favorite form. *Dream* is urban fantasy, of that weird blend with reality that I like very much. Isabelle Copley's paintings provide a vehicle for beings from elsewhere to come into our world. They are benevolent, but those brought over by Isabelle's mentor are not—nor is the mentor himself.

Greg Egan, *Distress*, Millenium, 1995

Another fine, chilling, thought-provoking novel from this Australian author. Andrew Worth is a journalist, whose internal hardware can record what he sees and hears. To escape one assignment, he chooses another which he thinks will be fairly boring but unthreatening. He is, of course, wrong, and finds himself in the middle of an international conspiracy. I liked the touch of the small artificial island nation in the Pacific, called "Stateless," which is a working anarchy. How its people handle the efforts of the big powers (mostly multinational economic consortiums) is quite fascinating.

Leanne Frahm, *Borderline*, Mirrordanse, 1996

This small-press collection contains five of Leanne Frahm's stories, including two published here for the first time, an interview by Lucy Sussex, and a complete bibliography of Leanne's works. The stories are all good, well-written, lurking on the edge of horror, and the ending typically sneak up on you—one of the signs of a good writer.

Lisa Goldstein, *Strange Devices of the Sun and Moon*, Tor, 1993

In this fantasy novel, the Faerie Queen has entered London with her court, searching for her lost son. Goldstein combines a historical novel, rich characterization, conspiracy and fantasy.

Steven Gould, *Jumper*, Tor, 1992

Okay, so I'm a few years behind in my reading. This story is about a young man who can teleport, but he must learn to use and control his ability, without being detected by authorities who would try to use and control him. Good characterization as well as plenty of action to keep one turning the pages.

Nichola Griffith, *Slow River*, HarperCollins, 1995

Lore wants to forget her past, which has some horror in it that she can't face. (The reader thinks she knows what this horror is, but learns that she's wrong at the same as Lore finally lets herself remember.) But she's certainly being sought by powerful people, who had left her naked and injured in the street three years before. Lore was taken in by street people and has found a new life; she doesn't want to be found by her family, but neither does she like what she has become. Only by accepting personal responsibility for what she has done can she take control of her future.

Denise Lopes Heald, *Mistwalker*, Del Rey, 1994

Another Del Rey "Discovery," and another good story, combining an adventure tale, a love story and an ecological drama. Sal hires Raschad to assist on a cargo run through the dangerous alien jungle, discovering too late that not only is he an offworlder, but the government wants her to forfeit the run.

James P. Hogan, *The Multiplex Man*, Bantam, 1992

Another book from the past. Hogan's novels are full of fascinating ideas, but his characterizations are a bit weak (or stereotyped) for my taste, so I tend to let his books slip down my priority list. Sometimes this means I miss reading a good story, like this one. Jarrow is a schoolteacher, a law-abiding drone. After some experimental medical treatment, he wakes up to find he is someone else and that 7 months have disappeared out of his life. He then discovers that he is in the middle of a plot to track down a defecting scientist, who is the key to a worldwide conspiracy.

Gwyneth Jones, *North Wind*, Gollancz, 1994

Sequel to *White Queen*, which I haven't had the chance to read. Humans might appear to have bowed to the superiority of the alien Aleutians, but a hundred years after the aliens' appearance, many humans are still trying to find a way to get rid of them. Sidney Carton is caught in the middle, along with his alien companion Bella, whom he insists in thinking of as "her." One reason this book interested me was its study of male-female concepts of sexuality, and the differing social organizations of the humans, some of them based directly on the "war between the sexes." There's a lot going on in this book.

Ursula K. Le Guin, *Four Ways to Forgiveness*, HarperPrism, 1995

Four interconnected novellas, three of which previously appeared in *Asimov's* in 1994 and 1995, set in the Hainish universe. Excellent.

Nancy Kress, *Beggars and Choosers*, Tor, 1994

Sequel to *Beggars in Spain*. Continues the story of gene-modified humans and the Sleepless, who must deal with a world full of jobless people. Kress makes some very important points about the direction in which our society appears to be heading, and the views that many people hold about technological efforts to improve our lives and about anyone who is different from them.

Lisa Mason, *Cyberweb*, Avonova, 1995

Sequel to *Arachne*. Carly Nolan, once a professional telinkler with a legal firm, is now an outlaw, recovering from cram addiction and wanting to clear her name of crimes she didn't commit. To do so, she must confront some very powerful AIs who are plotting against humankind.

Anne McCaffrey, *Red Star Rising: The Second Chronicles of Pern*, Bantam, 1996

More filling-in of the history of Pern, this time covering the coming of the second fall of Thread, 200 years after the first fall. A must for fans of McCaffrey Dragonriders series. I've enjoyed all these books, but the novelty wore off long ago.

Maureen F. McHugh, *Half the Day is Night*, Tor, 1994

David Dai is a bodyguard for a banker, Mayla, in the ocean-bottom city of Caribe. Mayla (who seems a bit too naive for someone in her position) accidentally crosses the crime bosses and becomes a target for terrorists. A very realistic depiction of a possible 21st century city and society.

Neal Stephenson, *The Diamond Age*, Bantam, 1995.

By now most of you will be aware of this book, which won the Hugo for best novel this year. Well deserved, too, in my opinion.

A complex, thoughtful, yet action filled story of the haves and the have-nots, of nanotechnology, and of the human condition. What I liked best was the view of a different, more effective way of learning, tailored to the individual student. This is a favorite hobby-horse of mine, having never liked the formal educational systems I had to deal with (although I got good grades), and having been vastly excited by the potential offered by hypertext and now the internet. (Potential which it will probably take the public education system far too long to exploit, but that's another story.)

Bruce Sterling, *Heavy Weather*, Bantam, 1994

The USA isn't in very good shape, only partly because of the greenhouse effect and the resulting weather. The Storm Troupe follow tornadoes, using a variety of nifty gadgetry. The Troupe's members are a collection of highly intelligent misfits (rather like many of my friends), and the story of them, their pasts and their relatives reveals much about the 21st-century society in which they choose not to live.

Sheri S. Tepper, *Shadow's End*, Bantam, 1995

More weird, thoughtful, superbly written insights from a master. It's quite amazing what humans will put each other (and themselves) through in the name of their gods, or tradition; what happens in this book isn't so far away from reality.

What is the mysterious force that wiped out human life on many planets, leaving one untouched? Why does one woman have strange memories that no one else believes could possibly be true? Why do the women of Dinath allow the horrors that happen to them?

Amy Thomson, *The Color of Distance*, Ace, 1995

Juna Saari, a biologist, is the only survivor of a plane crash on an alien planet. The natives save her life by transforming her body so she can eat their food and is no longer allergic to their world. She learns to live as they do, and in doing so she learns a lot about herself, about living in harmony with the world, and about human nature. A fascinating look at other ways of living.

Connie Willis, *Remake and Bellwether*, Bantam, 1995, 1996

Remake is a look at the Hollywood of the future, where filmmaking has been computerized and live-action films are a thing of the past. But one young woman wants to dance in the movies, and Alis is not willing to give up her dream just because it's impossible. A good read on its own, but I'm sure if I were more interested in the movies (especially of the early decades), I'd have got even more out of this book.

Bellwether is a sharp, amusing look at all that's wrong in scientific research today: incompetent management, irresponsible people, more attention to form than function, and so on. Is all the world insane? Or just chaotic? And what about herd mentality? Sandra Foster studies fads, and her insights make this book thoughtful as well as funny. Dilbert fans in particular will recognize situations and character types.