

Weber Woman's Wrevenge

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Magnetic Island, near Townsville

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Web version: <http://fanac.org/fanzines/Wrevenge/index.html>

If you're interested in what Eric and I are doing, I encourage you to visit our Australia travel website,
<http://www.avalook.com.au>

The printed version of this fanzine is available for contributions, uncanceled postage stamps, editorial whim, or A\$4 or equivalent per issue (air mail extra). Please read the Web version if you can—photocopying is difficult and expensive, now that we no longer live in a city.

Diary notes

by Jean Weber

When last seen our hero was learning to drive a truck, heading off to the USA to visit her parents and attend Corflatch, waiting to see an eye surgeon about the cataract in her right eye, planning a trip around Australia in a large motorhome, writing a book, and standing for GUFF (a fan fund between Australia-New Zealand and Europe). In her spare time she was reading sf, publishing two e-mailed newsletters every two weeks, and failing to keep two websites up to date, though she did manage to publish a fanzine.

How did I ever find time for life when I had a job?

Motorhome news

I got my truck driver's license on the first try (in early February). I only got a few non-critical demerits on my test—mainly not looking in the mirrors often enough—and a friendly chat about practicing my down-shifting a bit more; my shifting is a bit jerky. (I didn't tell the inspector that my gear shifting in a car isn't much smoother.)

Eric failed his test. He hasn't had a chance to try again, because the lead time to get an appointment for a test is about a month, and we were going overseas soon thereafter. Since we've been back, events have conspired to delay things further, as you'll discover if you read on.

The first problem was a flat starter battery, which we took an outrageously long time to get around to doing anything about. Eventually, after Eric had tried several do-it-yourself remedies, we stumbled upon a local expert in batteries and solar power technology for boats and motor vehicles. He came up with a plan to fix the system so the truck batteries can be charged from the solar cells or the generator, and the truck can also be started from the solar-cell batteries. Eric wanted to do this, but he didn't

know enough about the details to feel confident of getting it right.

We finally made a weekend trip to a nearby camping area at the end of May. To my surprise, I had no trouble driving and in fact rather enjoyed charging along the country roads at top speed (which in most cases was nowhere near the speed limit). Now I'm looking forward to taking off on a longer, more ambitious trip.

Lousy weather and flu

Both of us have had a lingering flu. We think we picked it up at Corflu, because a lot of people seemed to have some illness, but fortunately the symptoms didn't really appear until after we'd returned home. (I could tell, on the plane, that I was getting sick.)

We were home over two months now before we'd completely shaken off the thing. Just as well that other events had slowed us down.

The weather, for example. December through April is the wet season, and parts of the country had a lot of rain, even places that don't usually get much. At least one normally-dry lake (Lake Eyre) in South Australia is full of water. Several places we were planning to visit in Queensland and NSW were flooded. I don't yet feel confident enough in driving the truck, to set off into boggy road conditions, even if it does have 4WD.

Cataract removal

I had the cataract operation on my right eye on March 23, with an intra-ocular lens implanted. My vision was soon sharp and clear, but a bit odd until the 3 stitches were removed 5 weeks later. Since then the vision's been sorting itself out.

The new lens is great for distance and not bad up to about 4 feet, then rapidly goes blurry. The left eye is my close-up eye. It has fairly clear vision out to about 2-1/2 feet, then drops off rapidly to a slight blur at all distances.

So I still need a left spectacle lens for driving. (At the moment I have eyeglass frames with a left lens only.)

Computer work is mostly in that in-between distance which neither eye sees well, so I got new reading glasses for that.

US trip

In late February – early March, we attended Potlatch and Corflu in Seattle, then spent a few days in Las Vegas, seeing some of the fans there, and finally 1 day in the SF Bay Area.

The main purpose of the trip for me was to visit my parents and check on my father, who is not doing very well. He has pulmonary fibrosis, which is slowly getting worse, and breathing is difficult (he's now got portable oxygen equipment).

Gadgets

This year's first gadget is a digital camera, Kodak DC240. I haven't used it much yet, but the few photos I've taken have turned out well, and I think it's going to be great for taking photos for the Avalook website. The resolution isn't quite "photo quality," but I don't intend to print the results, and I usually compress my web photos quite a bit to get the file size down to something reasonable, so I don't need high resolution.

GUFF

Eric and I are standing for GUFF, the Get-Up-and-over Fan Fund which operates between Australia-New Zealand and Europe. If we win, we will be attending the British Eastercon in Blackpool, UK, and plan to make an around-the-world trip, stopping at various places in North America as well as UK/Europe.

Books

Notes by Jean Weber



I've been working my way through a shelf of long-unread books, so some of these notes may relate to books that are no longer in print.

Kevin J. Anderson (Ed.), *War of the Worlds: Global Dispatches*, Bantam, 1996, ISBN 0553575988

A delightful collection of short stories by a range of well-known sf writers, each writing in the style of another well-known person (mainly, but not exclusively, writers) of 1900, taking H.G. Wells' famous radio show as the background. The book includes some quite creative interpretations of events of the time.

For example, Mike Resnick writes as Teddy Roosevelt, Robert Silverberg as Henry James, Barbara Hambly as Rudyard Kipling, George Alec Effinger as Edgar Rice Burroughs (my personal favourite in the collection), Gregory Benford and David Brin as Jules Verne, and others.

Greg Bear, *Foundation and Chaos*, HarperPrism, 1998, ISBN 0061056405

The second book in the Second Foundation Trilogy, following on from Asimov's original series. (The first was *Foundation's Fear* by Gregory Benford; the third will be *Foundation's Triumph* by David Brin.)

Hari Seldon is on trial for treason, and some of the robots (unknown to

humans, as they were supposed to have been destroyed millennia ago) are questioning R. Daneel Olivaw's grand plans for helping humanity.

Bear seems to have captured Asimov's writing style; whether this is a good or bad point is obviously a matter of opinion. I enjoyed the book, as I did the Benford volume, and I'm looking forward to the Brin. It's been years since I read the original Asimov books, and I don't think you need to have read them to follow this series, though if you have read them recently, you would probably notice many references that I missed in this book.

Barbara Hambly, *A Free Man of Color*, 1997, ISBN 0553575260 and *Fever Season*, 1998, ISBN 0553575279, both Bantam

Marketed as suspense rather than sf/f, these books should appeal to any of Hambly's fans as well as other readers.

They are set in New Orleans in 1833, a time when Louisiana had a society and culture (derived from the French immigrants) which was very different from that of most people in the United States. In Louisiana, people of color might be slaves or free, and everyone had a place in society based partly on their skin tone (the closer to white, the higher their status) as well as their wealth and connections. Females, of course, had different rights from men, but they could own property and have status and power of their own.

Hambly has done a lot of research on the social conventions of the times and weaves it into a murder mystery. Part of the tension comes from the attitude of the newly-arrived Americans, with their uncultured ways and their attitudes towards dark-skinned people. Hambly does a wonderful job of depicting the arrogance and stupidity of some of the whites, who would rather die than admit that a black person might know as much or more about medicine than they do.

The main character, Benjamin January, trained in medicine in Paris, and has some idea of the importance

of cleanliness in the prevention and cure of disease (at a time when no one really knew *why* this was important). During fever season, he works nights in a hospital, where some of the white physicians practice bloodletting and other treatments that are likely to prove fatal. Hambly's descriptions of some other medical practices are quite hair-raising as well as historically accurate.

There's also the voodoo practitioners and other people to liven the mix. I found these books most impressive and am looking forward to reading the next one, *Graveyard Dust*.

Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson, *House Atreides: Prelude to Dune 1*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1999, HC ISBN 0340751746, TPB ISBN 0340751754

This book was written from notes and manuscripts discovered after Frank Herbert's death, and is one of three books planned to set the scene for the events in the classic *Dune*. The other books are *House Harkonnen* (due out later this year) and *The Spice War* (due in 2001).

This book features young Duke Leto Atreides, various Harkonnens (the bad guys; you know that because of their sadistic habits), old Emperor Edrood and his heir Shaddam, Pardot Kynes (a planetologist studying *Dune* and the Fremens), young Duncan Idaho, various women of the Bene Gesserit and baby Jessica.

If you've read *Dune*, many of those names will sound familiar, even if you can't remember the details. If you haven't read *Dune*, this is still a good story. *House Atreides* is also a lot easier to read than Frank Herbert's *Dune*; because it's much more straightforward in style; Brian and Kevin have not attempted to impose the multiple layers of meaning and events that Frank used.

You won't be surprised to learn (if you don't already know) that Frank Herbert's *Dune* books are being reissued, so now is your chance to read (or re-read) at least the original volume. (I didn't like the others very

much, but I really liked the original book and found it intriguing.)

Alexander Jablov, *River of Dust*, Avon, 1996, ISBN 0380778637

On Mars, after 300 years, the economy is collapsing, many people are unemployed, gangs rule the corridors, and some people are trying to exploit the situation for their own purposes.

Some of the problems sound familiar (squatters in abandoned homes, homeless people living on the streets—or in this case, in the corridors of underground cities), but the differences are intriguing. In many areas, a "street culture" (art, music, theatre as well as the details of everyday life like eating and sleeping) flourishes, and many people stake out living space by hanging from the walls and ceilings, rather like mountain climbers setting up camp on a sheer vertical cliff or under a protective ledge.

The book follows several people caught up in the political rivalries; some of them believe they are able to control or at least influence events (and some of them are corrupt or arguably insane), while others think they are at the mercy of events (they do in fact influence events, but not because they tried to).

It's a very interesting look at a society a bit different from our own. Jablov's sense of humour intrudes at odd moments (I appreciated that), and I really enjoy stories where some of the action comes from people deciding to take matters into their own hands, making a bit of a shambles of it, and then making the best of that situation (and having to deal with a few saboteurs trying to subvert the situation for their own purposes). Some of it rather reminded me of the civil rights movement in the USA—not in the details, but in the sweep of events that get away from you.

Elizabeth A. Lynn, *Dragon's Winter*, Ace, 1998, ISBN 0441006116

It's been far too long since I've seen a new book by Elizabeth Lynn,

so I was delighted to get this one. It's as good as her earlier books, I was happy to discover.

The "Dragon" of the title is a shapeshifter, in a land where this ability is not uncommon, although most people don't have it. The other shifters, including birds, bears and wolves, acknowledge the dragon as king, but dragons have mostly gone from the earth.

The previous dragon king died young, leaving twin boys, only one of whom has the shapeshifting gift. The boy without the gift, jealous of his brother, becomes a wizard, steals his brother's talisman (without which no shifter can change shape), and goes off to the icy wilderness to plot his brother's death.

An intriguing story, set in a society just a bit different from ours (for example, in attitudes towards men and women), a habit of Lynn's that I thoroughly appreciate and enjoy.

Elizabeth Moon, *Rules of Engagement*, Baen, 1998, ISBN 0671578413

In this sequel to *Once a Hero*, Esmay Suiza is at Fleet's command school, learning how to lead and command. She's had field experience, having led a mutiny against a traitorous commander, then saving a lot of people from the enemy, but she has much to learn.

At command school, Esmay's friendship with Barin Serrano develops further, though for a long time she won't admit how she really feels about him. Meanwhile, Brun Meager, a bright, unruly, rich young woman, attempts to make friends with Esmay, but Esmay constantly misinterprets what's going on with both of them.

When Brun is captured by some bad guys (a repressive religious militia group), Esmay is suspected of involvement and her offers to assist in a rescue are rebuffed. Not surprisingly, she won't take "no" for an answer; but in the meantime, Brun isn't sitting around passively waiting for rescue.

Esmay reminds me a bit of Miles Vorkosigan (Lois McMaster Bujold's

character), in her talent for getting into messy situations and then saving the day using native wit and some rather unorthodox methods. Given that I really enjoy Miles' adventures, it's not surprising that I like Esmay's.

I'm also a big fan of strong, competent female characters, and both Esmay and Brun are in that category. Like Miles, they do heroic things, but they also have a very realistic side, unsure of their standing with people they really care about. I'm looking forward to the next book in this series, *Change of Command*.

Rebecca Ore, *Gaia's Toys*, Tor, 1995, TPB, ISBN 0812539087

A look at a potential future of the welfare state and the "work for the dole" notion. If you don't have a real job and must rely on government money, you have to spend a certain number of days a year plugged into a system where your brain is used as processing power and you have no memory of any of it.

But what if some of the welfare drones actually did remember some of what went through their brains while they were plugged in? And what if some of those people compared notes, discovered a nasty plot, and attempted to do something about it? Where would they go for help? Enter the eco-terrorists, many of whom are wealthy drop-outs from the rat race. They are outside the system but have their own resources. Are they the good guys or the bad guys?

I had put off reading this book for some time because my first impression wasn't favourable (just another tedious cautionary "if-this-goes-on" tale), but I should have known better. Ore writes very readable books, with interesting and sympathetic (if odd) characters, and this is one of them.

Spider Robinson, *Callahan's Legacy*, Tor, 1996, ISBN 0812550358

Even if you're not a follower of Robinson's Callahan series, you will enjoy this book—assuming you like

the sort of wacky, pun-filled writing that Robinson does so well.

This book is a novel, not a collection of short stories, but it features the usual assortment of weirdos, aliens and time travellers that inhabit all the Callahan books. And no, I won't tell you whether Mike Callahan himself turns up again or not. I will tell you that Robinson is one of the few punsters whose puns I thoroughly enjoy.

Spider Robinson, Lifehouse, Baen, 1997, ISBN 0671877771

This book is *not* in the Callahan series. It does feature some sf fans, who first get ripped off in a scam that was tailor-made for them (who else would believe a time-traveller story so easily?) and then use their knowledge and talents to combat the *real* time travellers. I can think of dozens of people who could have been the prototypes for the fans in this story, and I laughed all the way through it.

Robert Sawyer, FrameShift, Tor, 1997, ISBN 0812571088

Pierre Tardival has a fatal genetic disease, which will age and kill him in his mid-thirties. He works long hours on human genome sequencing, partly in the hope of discovering some way to cure himself. He is being stalked by someone who wants to kill him somewhat sooner. He won't allow his wife Molly (a partial telepath) to have his child, but eventually agrees to having her become pregnant by IVF. Since the cost of the process is beyond their means, they enlist the aid of Pierre's boss, an older researcher, who provides the sperm and does the fertilization.

Things get rather more interesting after the child is born, as the sperm donor insists on taking a major interest in the child's development. The girl, Amanda, seems bright and intelligent but cannot speak. Fortunately she and her mother are able to communicate by telepathy, but others outside the family treat Amanda as if she were retarded.

One of the potential problems of human genetic research is the likelihood that insurance companies and others will use the information to discriminate against people with a greater genetic risk of developing disease—if legislation does not prevent this discrimination. Pierre's situation is a classic one, as until he is tested, he only knows the odds of his having inherited the disease; after he is tested and finds out he definitely has it, he has no chance of getting a health or life insurance policy, for example. (Had he tested negative, he would not have a problem.) This book explores this dilemma.

Meanwhile a whole lot of other stuff is going on, some of which seems a bit irrelevant to the story at first, but it all comes together at the end. Sawyer manages to make a lot of important points about our society and beliefs, while still telling a gripping science fiction story.

Charles Sheffield, Aftermath, PB, Bantam, 1998, ISBN 0553577387 and Starfire, TPB, Bantam, 1999, ISBN 0553378945

In 2026, Alpha Centauri becomes a supernova, causing various disasters on Earth, including excessive heat (direct damage is mainly in the southern hemisphere) and rain, and the destruction of all microchips on Earth and in nearby space. More serious problems are expected in 2053.

These novels had far more emphasis on people than I expect from most "hard sf" writers, but Sheffield is always good at characterisation. There's plenty of physics, too, and Sheffield is also good at finding ways to make his "expository lumps" fit into the story when he needs them.

His main protagonists include the survivors of the first Mars expedition, who arrive back at Earth not long after the disaster and discover that none of the contingency plans for problems on their return and landing had considered the complete loss of all microchips. Fortunately, the crew members are resourceful and manage to find a way to land on Earth, where the

survivors are promptly captured by the followers of a religious cult.

Other main protagonists include Dr Oliver Guest, who is in "judicial sleep" on a 600-year sentence for murdering 18 teenage girls; the President of the United States and various other politicians and their staff, who are either trying to hold the country together and get vital services functioning again, or seeking ways to gain power by exploiting the situation; and three people (Art, Dana and Seth) whose lives depend on an experimental medical treatment that is no longer available to them.

One really nice touch in *Aftermath* was the number of people who bring "obsolete technology" (including cars and aircraft) out of their basements and garages and get them working again. If you want an excuse for all that junk you've been accumulating because you might need it someday, you should really enjoy that aspect of the book. And of course, who's driving those obsolete cars? The 70- and 80-somethings, who remember how to use them.

Obviously, Earth survives the crisis of 2026, because *Starfire* covers the crisis of 2053, when another, much worse, onslaught is due from Alpha Centauri. This time the problem is charged particles, rather than radiation, and the solution is to build a huge shield in space, to deflect the particles. In addition to the engineering difficulties, the project faces sabotage from people with a different agenda, who would be happy to see the poor and non-white people die, so the wealthy, white people can clean up the mess and have the Earth to themselves afterwards.

Bruce Sterling, Distraction, 1998, Bantam, ISBN 0553576399

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, which takes place in 2044. Sterling's extrapolated some bizarre situations, lifestyles and events from trends in today's USA. As the quotes on the cover say, it's a provocative, hilarious, thoughtful, inspired political thriller, mixing science (particularly biotech-

nology), politics, economics, and sociology into an almost surreal but oddly believable and serious tale.

I laughed out loud a lot, sometimes at the unexpected turns of events, and sometimes at the cutting observations made by one or another of the characters. For example, there's the scene in which the military (at a base whose funding has been cut off) have put up a roadblock on a nearby highway and are running a bake sale. Although a "donation" in exchange for food is theoretically voluntary, it's obvious to all that if you want to get past the roadblock anytime soon, you need to dig into your wallet.

The plot's rather convoluted, so a summary is difficult. I won't try. But I will urge you to read this book. You'll enjoy it, even as it makes you think.

Cherry Wilder, *Signs of Life*, Tor, 1996, ISBN 0812553969

Several groups of humans are stranded on a planet when their transport ship breaks up. Rivalries among these people lead to problems on the ground, power struggles, deaths, and accusations.

Meanwhile another (considerably larger) group of humans has been on the planet for generations and has a well-developed culture adapted to local conditions. Some of the locals, on a fishing boat, find some of the newcomers. Opinions differ on both sides about the ways these two groups will or should deal with each other.

It's an interesting sociological study, which I greatly enjoyed, as I enjoy all of Wilder's work. I just wish she produced more of it!

Kate Wilhelm, *Defense for the Devil*, Mira, 1999, ISBN 1551666286

Wilhelm has written several mystery/suspense books featuring Barbara Holloway, a lawyer who is far more interested in justice for the powerless than in prestige or money. She tends to get emotionally involved with her cases, which leads her into extra investigation and, occasionally, personal

danger when she gets too close to exposing serious corruption.

In this book, Barbara agrees to help Maggie Folsom collect back child-support payments from Maggie's abusive ex-husband Mitch Arno. When Mitch is found murdered and his brother Ray is accused of the crime, Barbara is drawn into the family drama and agrees to represent Ray. Soon the bad guys who were really behind Mitch's murder are after Barbara.

This is a fast-moving story with believable characters and events which, like many of Wilhelm's books, often leaves this reader gnashing her teeth with sympathetic frustration at the characters' difficulties in dealing with "the system."

Kate Wilhelm, *The Good Children*, Fawcett Crest, 1998, ISBN 0449004554

Another suspense novel from Wilhelm, who does this sort of thing very well indeed. The four McNair children's mother has a mysterious past, a fear and loathing of people, and a vagueness that gets worse when her husband dies in an accident at work. The children cover for her, doing the shopping, paying the bills, forging her signature on checks and notes to the school.

When their mother falls from a ladder and dies, the children bury her in the yard (they live well out in the country on a large property) and continue living as they have been. No one in the town is surprised not to see the mother, because she rarely went out in public anyway. A few things were more of a challenge: when the oldest boy needs a driver's license, he needs a parent to go with him. So the oldest girl dresses in her mother's clothes and acts in the reclusive, suspicious way her mother did; they get away with it.

The youngest boy, Brian, claims his mother is still around and talks to him. When the others get old enough to go away to college, or jobs, he refuses to leave the property, because he had made a promise to his mother.

A brilliant musician, he is otherwise a very troubled child.

As the other children try to cope with their changing lives and Brian's obsession, and make sure their secret isn't discovered, they begin to seriously question how their mother died and whether one of them might have killed her. Suspicions grow, driving them apart.

Then Brian has a seizure and ends up in a mental institution, where he is kept drugged into passivity. The other children (now young adults) must rally around to protect Brian and get him out of the institution if at all possible.

A compelling story, each step of which makes perfect sense at the time and comes back later to haunt the characters.



Our kitchen gecko, around 150 mm (6") long, including tail.

Farming Daze - notes from rural New Zealand

by Lyn McConchie

March finished with a terrifying incident. It was pouring all day and I was catching up steadily on outstanding mail. About 2pm I heard a small pop or bang sound from where I sat at the word processor. Looked around the house, nothing obvious. Must be hearing things.

At half-past two I heard the mail car pull up and leave again, so I hurried out in the rain to collect the mail. Scooting back across the lawn with a handful of mail I idly noticed that there was a fire with flames leaping up the wall in the shearing shed. That's odd, why would there be a fire in...DEAR GOD THE SHED'S ON FIRE!!!

I shot inside, rang Ginger, screamed THE SHEARING SHED'S ON FIRE CALL THE BRIGADE. I'M GETTING THE HOSE and hurtled back outside. Just in time to meet Diane scrambling through the door to tell me... yes, I know it is. Get the hose!

So there was much running about. Di was waving the hose, I'd turned on the pump and water under high pressure was hosing everywhere, Ginger had come rushing over NOT having phoned the brigade because Tony was home and she said that if the four of us couldn't put the fire out on a day when it was pouring the brigade probably wouldn't be much better. So we did.

When all the excitement had died down, we checked on the cause. Sigh. It was a good example of what brigades tell you not to do. Back in 1989 when I bought the place and sold some off to Ginger and Tony we'd taken an old extension cord and used it to connect power in the outside main shed over to the shearing floor. It had worked well enough and we'd never got around to changing it.

After ten years the cord had perished, and as there was still power to it, it had caught fire. The fuse had finally blown in the house (the pop I



heard) but by then melted material from the cord had dripped onto a small heap of dry C grade wool directly below. That caught fire, and from there it spread to the wall.

Fortunately, apart from scorched walls and floor, ruined extension cord, sooted up clearlite roof panels and everyone having the jitters, not much damage is done. Ginger says the silly thing is that she looked out of the kitchen window just before I rang and noticed the smoke. "Odd," she said to Tony. "I wonder why Lyn's got a fire going in the rain." I suspect next time they see smoke they'll be over here like rockets just in case.

Just to add to all of that I later found I should have rung the Brigade as a precaution. But by the time I found Ginger hadn't, the fire was out and it didn't seem worth it. But the Head of the bunch talking to Ginger a few days later said we couldn't get an insurance payment now. Apparently the Insurance insist on a report from a Brigade before they pay out. Oh, well, no real damage so I don't need it.

April started out as rather better (thank God) with more story sales, to

my delight. If I can't sell many books right now, I can certainly sell short stories.

Half the hens decided to moult, looking like nothing on Earth! So I'm raking feathers off the lawn. Meanwhile, a cameraman and an interviewer from National TV arrived to interview me, the head of the Norsewood Promotions Committee and another chap, all about how the 'Troll theme' was being used to promote our village. I feared that the item would come out as a 'look at all the weirdos' slant but was really pleased to see they hadn't done that. They certainly do whenever they film at the National SF Conventions. But right now the Troll books are getting a lot of media coverage.

After that I was chatting to my mate while she let Bet [the cow] out after her turn at the milking. Bet shot around the corner of the big water tank and was next seen drooling with a strangely smug look. Ginger went into the paddock and I called to her while she was there, to see what Bet was eating. Ginger looked. Then she started to giggle.

"She's eating tomatoes."

"But the ones out there aren't ripe yet."

"I know. She's eating the green ones. She loves them."

And she was and did. I had to grab electric fencing wire and standards and tear out to fence of the tomato corner. Actually I never planted them there. That's the corner where we dump a lot of the sweepings from the cow bail, hen sheds, and cleaning out cow poo from the hay paddock. It's composted down quite well without other input from us and from somewhere a couple of large energetically fruiting tomato plants had grown up in the middle.

I felt that there was no reason why we shouldn't have the benefit of this serendipity. Bet must have felt the same way although I'm a mite surprised to find that she likes her

tomatoes still solidly green. But I want the tomatoes so instead I dug out frozen apples being saved for the piglet when that arrives, thawed the apples and gave her a couple of those. Bet felt that was okay. She likes apples too. But I'm keeping the fence up until the tomatoes ripen. Bet isn't above eating her apples and having her tomatoes too.

A week later I had that impressed upon me. Despite the tape and standard, Bet had realized that there was no power through the fence and had simply marched in. I was checking the fenced-off plum tree (with a solid wooden fence so it's surviving), when my gaze fell on the tomato corner. Not only were all the tomatoes gone, all of the plants were eaten right to the ground as well. Sigh. There went my extra summer tomatoes.

And heaven alone knows what Bet's milk will taste like for a day or two. Whatever strong tasting stuff cows eat, the taste comes out in the milk. It's lucky that right now I'm dividing her production between Fluff's latest kittens and the pig milk-barrels. The kittens and coming piglet won't care. We would.

April was also mouse month. Owing to a very mild winter last year and then a long warm summer, the rodent population exploded. Then in late April we had several freezing, very wet days combined with howling gales. The mice outside felt that it was getting past a joke and inside with me in the warm would be much preferred.

Personally I don't care about their goings-on outside. What I do mind is being parked on the bed reading, glancing up out of the bedroom door, and seeing a mouse amble nonchalantly past the door. Tiger was asleep on my feet so I scooped him up, tossed him gently over the end of the bed towards the doorway and watched.

Tiger landed, looking surprised, almost on top of the mouse. The mouse, looking absolutely horrified, dived under a small stack of books. Tiger, who'd originally been

wondering what he'd done to be so evicted, cottoned on fast and dived after it. Books went in all directions. Tiger was squawking with excitement as he pursued the mouse, which brought Dancer running. The mouse, finding it was heading for another cat, reversed, then found Tiger was there.

It shot sideways, Tiger and Dancer dived, and the mouse with some superb timing, feinted one way, dodged the other, and both cats missed. But not for long. Working as a team, they had the mouse in another few minutes. After which it - um - perished.

That may have been the first to brave a warmer house from a now rather chilly outside. It wasn't the last. The cats have had five this past two days. Tomato season may now be done but Tiger is still keeping very fit for his August cat show.

Tiger, usually the gentlest most willing to share cat, has a weakness. I don't know if it's always been there and I never noticed before, or if he's just developed it. But a weekend ago it was the last few days before the beef

grilled for those, suggests lots of leftover bacon rind. And that's where Tiger disgraced himself. I often have ham. Every year I rear a pig from small to large then have it made into Christmas ham and many many pork chops which I also adore. As I work my way through lots of sliced ham I always offer Tiger the ham rinds which he likes but not excessively. This time though it wasn't ham and it was 4-5 rinds at a time all nicely grilled. Saturday night I dropped the stack in Tiger's dish and left him to it. I did notice a bit of growling much later and thought nothing of it. I should have.

Sunday night I left the rinds on the bench and Tiger didn't realize they were there. Later I came out to clear up and offered him the rinds which he accepted with enthusiasm. Dancer happened by, saw bacon rinds were on the menu and went to share. Tiger rose in wrath and clouted her. They were HIS bacon rinds. I was startled. He's always been willing to share anything at all with her before, even a few mouthfuls of salmon on the occasions



arrived from the deceased Mr Flatley. I dug into the very bottom of the freezer and discovered a pack of bacon. Oh good, thought I, bacon sandwiches for the next couple of dinners. Of course lots of bacon well

when the larger tin has been cheaper and I've bought a couple of those. Not this time though. Rather than interfere at once I sat back and watched. Dancer sneaked in while his mouth was full, grabbed a rind and attempted

to escape. Tiger pounced, seized the other end and when she hung on, clouted her over the ear, all the while growling at her like a - well, a tiger. She let go hastily and retired under my writing table. So I intervened. I picked up a long rind, took it across to the other side of the kitchen, called her and dropped it. Dancer went to eat, Tiger shot across the floor, grabbed it, still growling furiously, and hauled it back to his plate with the rest of the rinds. Dancer sat where the rind had been and sulked. In the end I sneaked a rind outside into the cat park for her where she could eat it without Tiger seeing and committing arbitrary

into the chassis, tripped, fallen into it then tried to crawl out underneath. And there she was, completely entwined and totally stuck. I was annoyed on two counts. Firstly that Dean was supposed to get that out of there the previous weekend and hadn't. And secondly that the idiot heifer had done such a damfool thing anyway. I called the owner and the four of us using a car jack managed to lift it up and off her. Then it was clear she was badly injured. So the vet had to be called.

Unhappily the injuries were too severe and the hay paddock now houses four heifers. My bike shed

the bottom of my chest freezer. Oh, yes. There was that pumpkin, it started to go off and I'd frozen it just in time. And the carrot tops, outer cabbage leaves. The over-ripe tomatoes, half a loaf of sliced bread with a touch of penicillin, two stale buns, and, oh yes, nine apples that had gone floury. Dump it all into the big preserving pan I use for such things, add water, and begin to simmer for twenty-four hours on the enclosed fire. Leave in the big ladle I use for stirring pigfood. It had been going all day, all night and it was about lunchtime the next day. The results had become a sort of pumpkin orange colour and were emitting a pleasant aroma. Kim arrived, I left her a few minutes while I went to get something and when I returned she nodded at the fire.

"That's pretty good soup. Maybe I should stay for lunch."

With trepidation I asked the obvious. "What makes you think it's so good?"

"It tastes great of course."

I managed to shuffle her out without further soup discussion. I didn't want to be the one to tell her what it really was OR what was in it. Odd friends? Not really. But I can say I've one who really likes pigfood. Does that count?



requisition. But at least I know now. Bacon rinds are his weak spot. We all have one, I guess. His is bacon rinds. Now if I could only find Dancer's, it would be a lot easier giving her her annual vaccinations!

After that we all discovered someone else's weak spot. The old landrover chassis. Ginger was at her kitchen window and noticed something odd around it. She rang me, I hurried out to check, and found one of the weaner heifers stuck underneath. Sigh. I'm grazing five for a local chap who ran out of grass. The hay paddock was kneehigh so I said he could use that in swap for the free calf Easter which he brought over. Young animals having a high quotient of viscosity, she'd apparently climbed

houses a quantity of veal waiting to be cut up. The owner only wanted the hindquarters so we fell heir to the forequarters. Heifer cloud had a veal lining.

Soon after that a local pal rang me. She'd just finished re-reading my first book FARMING DAZE (under the nom-de-plume of 'Elizabeth Underwood'). Why, she wanted to know was it that only my animals were all peculiar, didn't I know any strange people? Truth is my animals are odd, and most of my friends - well mostly - aren't. But there are times. Like the week before when I'd made up piglet food for the newest porcine arrival. Just weaned piglets do better on cooked food. So I was sorting out carefully hoarded frozen scraps from

You can read some of Lyn's farming stories at <http://www.wrevenge.com.au/lynmc/index.htm>

Report to the antipodeans from a peripatetic perl programmer

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Hello to all and sundry.

This is the long letter I promised about what's been happening. After this there won't be much since it's calming down a lot now, thank ghod.

The quick summary is I'm having fun and working hard. I've got a car, license, a place to live and my green card. Is that short enough?

Oh, you wanted details ...

The first thing I organised, as most of you will know, was accommodation. Given the size of the place, I'm tempted to use the pun on commode but it isn't that bad. Its about 5.5 to 6 sq: one bedroom, a living area, a small but servicable bathroom and a totally inadequate kitchen. It came with a refrigerator and electric stove and oven (no griller) and a washer/dryer.

The electric stove is wide. It's shocking. I think it's for the Thanksgiving turkey for 20 people but the apartment would be full with four people. The fridge is late 70s/early 80s and has an unfortunate habit of collecting water internally. So twice a week I have to empty the bottom of the fridge out before it cascades onto the floor. I have learnt it is better to clean it out while awake than open the door at 2 in the morning and have your feet frozen off by the sudden stream of mountain cold water while still half asleep. (Brings a new meaning to the word chill-blains.)

The washing machine is a "two storey" job I've never seen before. The dryer is above the washer. This interesting contraption (apart from its small capacity) has a few quirks. The lid can't open all the way, only to 45 deg. so you have to feed things in and out carefully. Not a big problem except the latch that holds the lid up is a bid old. The lid may only be light sheet metal but when it comes down over the fingers and you're not ready for it, well, the neighbours found I had a grasp of the vernacular that I'm sure they don't want their young'ns to find out about.

However that's the bad part over. The place itself is a cross between Edward Scissorhands suburbia and Victorian terrace houses. I'm on the 12th floor at work and looking out the window you can see the groupings of houses. A group can be easily distinguished as having the same basic shapes and the one colour. The colour grouping does more to make the association than the architectures. Each group has three or four designs repeated in the community. It's not ugly but it is a bit repetitive. The Scissorhands comment is the colours are pastels or earthy tones with the place I'm living in being an earth brown. The terrace house comes to mind through the repetition of designs.

One thing that shook me was shingles. No, I haven't let my health slip and picked up some highly contagious disease. I had always thought of shingles as roofing material (or a sign of bad health). Some of the places around here use them for walls too. It made me think of a European village in the middle-ages (but never having been to Europe you can make your own opinions of my views since I'm not 400 years old) It was just unexpected.

On the other hand the view from the 12th floor is lovely. My office faces north-west so I get the afternoon sun and I have a view for about twenty miles. In the afternoon and evenings I

can see the clouds come down and settle into the hills. It's very picturesque and makes a nice view when working late. After five years of not seeing any natural light, this is quite a nice change.

Oracle has some nice office benefits. I think it could be more of a Silicon Valley type thing but it's quite nice. They supply free Pepsi, tea and coffee. So what, I hear the Aussies say. Well it's fresh coffee and every second floor seems to have an espresso machine! I'm on one of those floors and I love my coffee black and hot. Now if I could just get the taste right Yes, I know I'm gloating but it's so much fun.

Oracle also, like a few other large companies here, has its own gym. There is a 25m heated outdoor pool, a full size baseball court, three squash courts and ~200 machines to run, bike, climb, row and otherwise abuse an aging body on. And three or four stands of free weight for the people who want that Schwarznegger look.

Being spring here and the tallest building, we also have some wildlife making this building home. No, not that sort of wild life, get your minds out of the gutter. There is a pair of hawks, I think they are, using this building as a nest. They spend quite a bit of time calling to each other in the morning and evening. The screeches aren't at all musical (still better than my voice) and it's frustrating knowing they are two floors above me and I can't get a good look at them. However I do get a few wonderful moments most days when I can see them flying over the parklands looking for food.

Some of the smallest things are the items that still get me. A small list of examples are:

- The power points are all live! No switches. Remind me to jump on a table if the place floods. *[Editor's note: "power point" = "electrical outlet" in American. Australian electrical outlets, being 240V*

instead of 120V, have individual on-off switches.]

- The light switches (and power switches where they exist) all work in the opposite direction from Australia: up is on and down is off.
- In the Bay Area (here) they complain about a lack of water but sprinklers are going all the time.
- Toilets, well the cisterns to be correct, are all full flush and use a passive method. Makes me appreciate the half flush cycle and the active flush in Australia.
- You can use a stop light like a stop sign if you're making a right hand turn. Just come to a full stop, check for traffic and turn. It would be great if I could've done a left turn at stop lights in Australia. *[Editor's note: in some places in Australia, including many intersections in Sydney, you can do what David describes.]*
- You can spend your money on all sorts of stuff. There are Monopoly sets for just about everything: a Star Wars edition, a Star Trek edition, a 3D puzzle edition, a NASCAR edition (car racing), an heirloom edition (wooden board etc), an NFL (American football) edition and who knows how many other editions are in the stores.
- A lot of people don't understand the term "fortnight".
- You have to sort your money regularly. Since they are all the same size and colour/color you need to keep it sorted to make sure you don't hand over a \$20 instead of \$1. Most people are honest but they may miss the difference too.

I've met a number of the local science fictions fans and everyone has been very nice. This has been thanks to the efforts of Janice Gelb, Jean Weber and Eric Lindsay; without them some of these weekends would have been very long and slow.

A good example was a party for the Brits who went to this year's Potlatch and Corflu (two sf conventions here in the USA). I'd met Paul and Maureen at Aussiecon Three, around 11pm after finishing registration for

the evening with Jamie Reuel, when I was in need of beer. So I grabbed a can and sat down with a small group who were talking and I had a great time. Two of the people were Paul and Maureen.

When I met Paul at the party here, his face went into all sorts of contortions. He recognised me but couldn't place me. It provided a small amount of fun for myself and Maureen (who placed me right away, drats). Sorry Paul, but thanks also, you uplifted my spirits a good deal.

There have been other highlights that some of you know about so I'd better cough up the details before I get ostracized for teasing.

The first and most dramatic was the saga of The Cancelled Credit Card. Andrea (enters stage right) takes the credit, as it were, for this.

I'd had a good night's sleep and been in the apartment about a week. I was starting to think of buying some chairs, as sitting on the floor was getting a bit hard on the gluteus maximus (such are the signs of my incipient decrepitude sneaking up on me). The office chair was nice and I had a hot cuppa in my hands when the phone rang.

I thought it was a bit early for a call: 8:00 am on the nose. I didn't know many people had the number. Was it a head hunter trying to recruit me? I heard the area was full of that sort of activity and I was hoping it would be that sort of call. But my aspirations of being offered lots of filthy lucre dropped and my heart started racing when I heard Andrea's frantic voice on the other end of the 'phone. I immediately did the sums: 3:00am in Melbourne. My God! Must be a disaster....

Andrea was a bit frazzled; I'm sure she would admit it herself. So I started by asking the questions: was she all right, her parents, my relatives — all were OK. Hmm, not a personal disaster: what about the house and car — fine.

So what was bothering Andrea that she was still awake? She had lost her credit cards ... well, *our* credit cards.

So for safety's sake she had cancelled the lot. I asked all the stupid questions: did she check the house and where she'd been before cancelling them. The obvious answers came back — she had. She'd lost her handbag and looked all over for it.

So there I was, in the heart of the world's most capitalistic society, an area which runs on credit. The credit card I had been using to keep myself in food (and some other not so critical refreshments [hic]) had been cruelly cancelled. I could see the immediate future and it looked poor — in the most literal sense. This was grounds for divorce — no, assassination!

However the cruellest blow was yet to fall. Andrea had cancelled the cards during the evening, well before midnight for her. And in the intervening time she'd found her handbag. Beside the couch. With everything in it. Needless to say I was my normal charming self when told this last fact. So not only was I without a credit card, waiting for my first pay check, it was all for no reason! With only my bare wits and native cunning to get me through the next few weeks, I knew I was in trouble.

Those who know me also know I had several backups so it was only a minor annoyance. I think Andrea knew this too and *really* cancelled my credit card to stop me shopping. I'd been talking about buying chairs and a table and her trust in my taste obviously inspired terror and the resulting credit squeeze. Next time I'll keep my mouth shut and just buy the furniture I need.

During the short time I've been here the second highlight was the flying visit from Andrea. About a fortnight before she arrived I'd bought a roll of butcher's paper for lining the drawers and cupboards with. This was a roll about 20cm in diameter, not small. Due to the events with my lack of a credit card, I was using the remains of the roll (reduced to 19.5 cm) as my chair. I had mentioned this fact to my loving wife before her trip.

Well, I picked Andrea up from the airport and drove a rather weary per-

son back to the apartment. I opened the door, Andrea went inside and burst into a fit of laughter. She'd seen how much I hadn't bought and saw my "chair" and realised I hadn't been joking. I got a lot sympathy at that point. In the gear Andrea bought with her was a soft bag full of jumpers. And being the gentleman I am, when I got back from work I did the most appropriate thing: I kicked her off the bag and graciously gave her the paper roll to sit on. Cancel my credit card will you? It would have had an effect on most people: she just went into another fit of laughter. Hmmm.

During the visit we agreed on furniture. We agreed we couldn't agree on anything. So for another month I used that bag. I now have two folding canvas chairs. The second one is in case anyone visits. They are an ugly green canvas that would be unlikely to match anything inside most houses. But they're so solid they'll outlast me. And it's more comfortable than the floor, the paper roll or the bag.

The final item is the green card. Well I have mine and I've sent Andrea hers. So if you're interested you can see it. It's a creamy yellow plastic card with a green tinge (to my eyes). The writing on the back is in green. The front has some nice laser etched images of the Statue of Liberty and the USA. The back has presidents and the flags of the fifty states on the back.

Well that's all the interesting events for now. Hope you found it amusing.

Letters of comment

Teddy Harvia
<tharvia@airmail.net>
26 May 1999

I understand well the costs of fan publishing. Postage and copying left me empty numerous times. Postcards are much cheaper. My entire Xmas mailing only cost me \$50 US.

But I remain a very tactile and visual person. I receive several fanzines via the internet, but those that arrive in an envelope that I can tear open with my own hands still seem to have more value somehow.

My process for responding to fanzines and correspondence is based on weight and guilt. I throw everything into my briefcase. The heaviest often get answered first to lighten my load. The fanciest next to keep them from staring me in the face with accusing typefaces.

The bottom line is that I am requesting you keep me on your printed version mailing list. Your reward will be a continued flow of postcard cartoons with painful puns which words via e-mail alone cannot properly convey.

Lloyd Penney
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April 7, 1999

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Gorgeous pictures. I don't think you'll get bored with the deck and the view any time soon. Our own balcony isn't the best, but we still enjoy the view...we're on the 17th floor of our apartment building looking east, so we see the entire Toronto skyline and a lot of Lake Ontario. In fact, we can even see a smokestack from a factory on the south shore of the lake, in New York state.

Amazing that with countries like Australia, Canada and the United States having such stringent housing regulations, no one checked the plumbing of your unit before anyone moved in.

Pamela Boal
<Pamela.Boal@tesco.net>
6 March 1999

Bless you for the book reviews there is so much on the market that we could easily miss out without such helpful lists. Mind I can seldom read affordable books,

Derek reads them and lets me know if it is worth the effort of magnifying glass. If you know of any decent books in Large Print please add that info whenever you can. I'm not the only fan with almost failed eye sight.

On the point of eye sight I really can't read zines on the web (and can't afford the phone costs to stay on line long enough to print them out). I seem to be having less trouble downloading e-mail attachments and printing them off line but still get the odd hiccup causing an inordinate amount of trouble with my whole computer. I'm writing this in 14 point but still by the time I have read it through my eyes will be watering.

10 May 2000

I really appreciate the photos and the chance to put faces to names. In the case of Jan Howard Finder, I wonder if he would recognise me (if he even remembers me) I last saw him twenty years ago and to be honest did not recognise him in the photo.

Harry Cameron Andruschak
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28 May 2000

Although I have e-mail and Internet access, I cannot say I use it much. I note your new venture of Avalook. I still have hopes to visit Australia one day, but I keep getting distracted by other vacations and activities.

My main Internet activity, in fact, is in the AOL AOnline Meeting Room. I think I spend about 2-3 hours a day on the Internet, and most of it is in this chat room/meeting room. Working with alcoholics is my main service activity nowadays, since I really have little to do with fandom anymore. At 16 years sobriety, I am now considered a good example of how AA works—even for an atheist. "If that jerk Andy can stay sober, ANYBODY can stay sober!" sort of thing.

I spent 2 weeks with Windjammer Barefoot Cruises Inc. aboard their latest schooner, the 4 masted S/V *Legacy* sailing through the Virgin Islands. Also did some on-the-spot research work for Ken Brooks concerning the *real* pirates of the Caribbean. All in all, a most relaxing and enjoyable vacation.

I also heard from numerous other people whose letters I have mislaid.