

Weber Woman's Wrevenge

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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>

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Web version if you can—
photocopying is difficult and
expensive, now that we no
longer live in a city..

Our GUFF trip report will be
published as we go along, on
Eric's website:
**[http://psiphi.server101.
com/guff/](http://psiphi.server101.com/guff/)**
and in printed form later this
year.

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GUFF

The Get Up-and-over Fan Fund or Going Under Fan Fund
(depending on which way you're going)

GUFF assists fans from Europe and Australasia to form closer links, by providing funds for well-known fans from one part of the world to attend a major science fiction convention in the other.

The GUFF winners are selected by popular vote amongst fans, after a nomination process. Winners are required to attend a specified convention in the host country, and become administrators until the next winner from their area takes over. Although GUFF is often thought of as being for residents of Australian and the UK, people from other European countries and New Zealand are eligible to nominate and be candidates.

GUFF winners are expected (but not required) to travel as widely as they can in the host area, meeting as many fans as possible, but purely personal sight-seeing costs are not covered by the Fund. Winners are also expected to report on their trip in fanzines and by producing a trip report in some form.

GUFF, like the other fan funds, is supported by donations from fans. Like other administrators, we will be organising auctions and other fund raising, to provide a sound basis for the next GUFF trip.

Eric and Jean's GUFF website is at <http://psiphi.server101.com/guff/>

Irwin Hirsh's site on fan fundshas links to most of the trip reports:
<http://www.users.bigpond.net.au/hirsh/fanfunds.html>

Diary notes

by Jean Weber

In November Eric and I made our usual trip to visit my mother for two weeks around Thanksgiving. This year my sister Barb and her husband Ted showed up for a few days. It wasn't as happy a gathering as in 1998, since father had died in June, but we all enjoyed getting together and my mother particularly appreciated having the whole family there.

Before Barb and Ted arrived, Eric and I had been telling Mother about our travels plans for this year (we got the news of our GUFF win the day we arrived at her place). She, of course, asked how she was going to be able to keep in touch with us, and we chorused, "Well, if you were on e-mail...."

"Perhaps it's time I got a computer," she said.

That was all the encouragement we needed. We immediately collected all the advertising we could find, including the local computer trader free newspaper, and visited as many stores as we could get to (as a good excuse for taking our daily walks).

At Thanksgiving we checked all the sales, and there at the local Office Depot was the perfect purchase: far more machine than she needed, but fairly entry-level these days, and after mailing in a stack of rebates, it would only cost about US\$400 for computer, scanner, printer, modem, and 17" monitor. We could hardly get a secondhand machine for that price.

After Barb and Ted arrived, all five of us traipsed off to the store and bought the computer -- plus some extra memory and a few other bits and pieces. Mother stood there looking overwhelmed but determined, and paid for it. (She's enjoying her status as "wealthy widow," and the fact that she can now make her own decisions without having to okay anything with Dad. Fortunately she's just as frugal as he was, so we're not concerned that she'll waste her money, at least no more than we waste ours.)

The boys then put the computer and all its bits together while we girls

cooked dinner and got an early start on celebratory drinks. Assembly involved going back to the store the next day to get the correct printer cable. (The box clearly said it took a parallel cable, so that's what we had bought; but the printer actually needed a USB cable.)

On our trip to get the cable, we also purchased a computer desk to put all the stuff on, having determined that none of Mother's furniture was suitable. Then I set to work setting up the software to my preferences, getting rid of icons that she wouldn't need, adding or renaming icons for things she would use, installing the printer and scanner drivers, testing everything....

Meanwhile Mother came in now and then to ask "where's the instruction book?" Of course, there wasn't any, other than the installation guides for everything, which didn't include what she wanted to know. So... back to the store to buy a book. One with lots of pictures, and explanations that started with "this is what the left mouse button does; this is what 'click' means..." I also wrote a 6-page mini user guide, complete with diagrams and screen captures, starting with "here's how to turn it on" and "this is the icon to start the e-mail program" ... all cross-referenced to the relevant page of the book we'd bought.

One of Mother's friends teaches beginners' computer classes at her retirement community, and has come by her house a few times to help her get going. I've yet to receive any e-mail from her, but the time will come.

Meanwhile when we talk on the phone, she says things like, "I didn't know I could scan my own photos and print my own Christmas cards! I didn't think I'd have any use for a scanner, but this will be great." For years she and my father had taken a photo to the camera shop and got personalized cards, to which she often added personal artistic touches (she's quite a good painter); now she's excited about doing her own, every step!

Adventures in self-publishing

I published my second book, *Editing Online Help*, in October 2000, and my third book, *Taming Microsoft Word*, in February 2001. The latter is a revised and expanded version of two chapters from the 1999 book, so it didn't take nearly as long to research and write.

Health news

I'm sure I mentioned having the cataract removed from my right eye last March. That went well, and I'm very happy with the results, although that eye is now a bit more long-sighted than I'd prefer. The surgeon says that can be fixed.

I was planning to have the cataract in my left eye removed in December, but the surgeon and I decided to leave it for another year as it wasn't causing any problems that glasses weren't correcting.

Travel news

After visiting Mother, we stopped for a few days in California, nicely timed for a PenSFA meeting where we saw lots of friends, including John Berry and Eileen Gunn who had only recently moved to San Francisco, and David and Andrea Evans, who moved to the Bay Area from Australia earlier in the year.

We stayed with Karen Schaffer and Mike Ward in San Jose, and I enjoyed Web surfing using their high-speed permanent access line. Karen and Mike were out most of the time, as Karen was selling her wonderful home-made jellies at several events in the area.

On Sunday, before we left to catch our plane back to Australia, we helped set up party decorations for that evening. A highlight for me was the chance to talk with artist Freddie Baer.

Eric and I leave on our GUFF trip on 26 March, stopping in Boston for Corflu before arriving in the UK on 2 April. We leave the UK on 14 May, stop in Seattle to visit Mother, then

attend Wiscon before Eric goes home, arriving around 3 June. I'm going back to my mother's for 3 more weeks before going back to Australia.

After a quick turnaround, we plan to head off in the motorhome for about 10 weeks. The window for pleasant outback travelling (that is, not unbearably hot, nor pouring rain) is a bit short, from mid-June thru early September.

Miscellaneous news

Christmas and New Year's were uneventful. We stayed home, the electricity stayed on, and we enjoyed the chance to relax and just read a book and appreciate our view.

On January 8 the new Airlie swimming lagoon opened for public use, and we've been going swimming almost every morning around 6 am, before the sun gets too hot and the crowds arrive. At that hour there are

usually about half a dozen people our age leisurely swimming laps, plus a younger couple pelting along rather more energetically. Quite a contrast to a few hours later, when the place is full of hundreds of people of all ages.

The lagoon is a huge concrete swimming pool with an artificial beach, nice landscaping, picnic shelters, electric barbecues, and a toilet block (but no change rooms, much to everyone's annoyance).

In February we celebrated Eric's birthday by going to dinner with some new friends, Kurt and Ingrid from Switzerland, who found us through Eric's Airlie Beach web page. They had retirement-entry visas for Australia and wanted to move to Airlie Beach (they'd visited the town in the past and liked it). Eric and Kurt had had quite a long correspondence by e-mail before they arrived. They turned out to be delightful people in person, though disgustingly fit, and serious scuba divers. They're our age (mid-50's) and we share several interests including comfortable and leisurely 4WD travel, so we'll probably be seeing a lot of them over the next few years.

Later in February we celebrated my birthday by going to Mackay for dinner with Leanne and Kerry Frahm. (Leanne's birthday is a few days after mine.) We went to a seafood restaurant not far from their place, where the food was wonderful though the service left a lot to be desired.

Also in February we had a quick visit from Craig and Julia Hilton, who were driving south after finishing their year at the Doomadgee hospital. It was great to see them again, but they had to leave all too soon. They were headed for Melbourne and really looking forward to being in a city again.

Meanwhile I designed a web site for a techwriting recruitment agency—a minor consulting job that will help pay for the GUFF trip. It was fun too.



Above: the children's pool; the wading pool is under the shade sails.



Above: the children's pool from another angle; not visible beyond the little bridge is the main pool, about twice the size of this one.

Book Reviews

by Ellie Miller



Peter Beagle, *Tamsin*, 1999, ISBN 0451457633, NAL

Part coming-of-age saga and part ghost story, this wise, witty, and darkly fey novel centers around its thirteen-year-old narrator Jenny's life-changing encounter with a ghost named Tamsin after she (Jenny) has been transplanted screaming and kicking every step of the way from the sidewalks of New York to a centuries-old manor house in the Dorset countryside due to her mother's remarriage to an English agricultural biologist.

Completely miserable in her new environment and bitterly resentful of her suddenly-acquired stepfamily, she's abruptly jolted out of her funk when a reunion with her beloved Mister Cat (who has been languishing in durance vile due to British quarantine restrictions) leads to his courtship of a ghost cat which apparently only he and Jenny can see.

That cat leads them to a hidden room where they find Tamsin, a lovely and lonely ghost whose personal tragedy, the traumatic death of her lover at the hands of Hanging Judge Jeffreys during the Monmouth Rebellion, has kept her tied to Stourhead Farm for over three hundred years. Trying to free Tamsin from the horrors of the past puts Jenny directly in harm's way in the present, but the end result of her efforts ultimately liberates them both and brings the book to its powerful and truly spellbinding conclusion.

I wish that I could find the words to really explain what it is that moved

me so much about Jenny and her world. Far beyond the eeriness of Faerie... the Wild Hunt, Boggles and "things that go bump in the night" which also inhabit it... if there's any real magic in this genuinely magical tale, I think that it's Peter Beagle's ability to somehow get inside his young heroine's head... take on her voice and feelings... and make her live! The writing here is so incredibly fine that it simply beggars description. Pick up a copy... meet Jenny... and, once you have, I suspect that she'll steal your heart as completely as she did mine.

Jan Siegel, *Prospero's Children*, ISBN 0345439015, 1999, NAL

One of the things that I found especially interesting about *Prospero's Children* is how successfully it employs many of the standard devices of Heroic Adventure fantasy in such a fresh and effective way. In her first novel, British author Jan Siegel utilizes a coming-into-one's-magical-powers approach as a premise for much of her action... which works out extremely well since it enables her to move her heroine "there and back again" through time and space without sacrificing one ounce of credibility in the process.

A powerful talisman (not a ring, but a mystical key of Atlantean origin) has resurfaced in an old mansion in modern Yorkshire after being lost for centuries, just in time to become an object of contention between an evil witchdame in alliance with a demon and our naive but gutsy heroine, Fern Capel, and her delightfully-unbrattish younger brother, Will. The youngsters acquire some powerful supernatural allies in their attempts to find and rescue the key... a sympathetic loup garou and a charismatic wizard... but the odds are against them, and the initial battle for its possession goes to the Powers of Darkness.

Undaunted, Fern uses her own newfound powers... her "Gift"... to follow the villains into the distant past hoping to recover the key and prevent its misuse. This places her in Atlantis on the eve of its destruction with the fate of the rest of the known world hanging in the balance. While this may all sound a bit overblown, by me,

such conflict is part and parcel of the whole fantastic mystique, and, quite frankly, Ms. Siegel does it so well that I found myself perfectly willing to suspend my disbelief, sit back and simply enjoy just being along for the ride!

Dave Luckett, *The Tenabran Trilogy: A Dark Winter*, ISBN 1862913684, 1998; *A Dark Journey*, ISBN 1862913811, 1999; *A Dark Victory*, ISBN 1862914060, 1999, Omnibus Books (Scholastic Publishing Group, Australia)

One of the most common themes in fantasy is the overcoming of some sort of major Evil force/threat to a land's stability and well-being by a few good characters, operating at an initial disadvantage under circumstances of enormous pressure and deadly peril, thereby achieving their own personal goals while restoring order and stability to the land itself. When it's well-done, the <g>trufan is as happy as a child hearing the beloved "once upon a time" for the umpteenth time, knowing that wonderful things still remain to be told, and Mr. Luckett's completely solid reworking of this theme more than met that criteria for me.

I know that there are two schools of thought about first person narration. I happen to like it very much, especially in the hands of a fine writer who uses it artfully to give me access not just to the actions, but to the inner world and mindset of hir central characters.

Our hero, a young squire named Will de Parkin, tells of his adventures in the service of disinherited knight, Silvus de Castro, who has taken up the cause of a band of sword maidens who are sworn to defend Tenabra against her enemies: the enemy in this case being wicked Prince Nathan who has usurped the throne of one of its smaller kingdoms through his terrible use of Dark Arts and is now bent on conquering the rest of Tenabra.

As battles are fought and won and various perils met and overcome, suspense mounts while other equally fascinating characters... the girl-mage, Asta, is such a delight... are added to meet the increasing scope and demands of the story.

Ultimately, the action expands from Tenebra above to include its underground regions where goblins rule (a beautifully-delineated concept), and the final confrontation between Light and Dark left me absolutely satisfied but more than a little regretful at having reached the "...Well, I'm back..." point and the end of my Tenabran involvement.

Although the series has won major awards in Oz, (IMHO) marketing this splendid "Heroic Adventure" saga as YA may well be one of the main reasons why it is not yet available in either the UK or USA, where it could certainly more than hold its own against heavy-weights such as Brooks, Jordan, Goodkind and Martin and where, quite probably, Dave's lucid style and superb plotting could win him a secure place in the hearts of readers like myself who find many of the above writers overly repetitious and excessively convoluted.

Juliet E. McKenna, Tale of Einarrinn Series: The Thief's Gamble, ISBN 0061020362, 1999, Harper; The Swordsman's Oath ISBN 0061020370, 2000, Harper EOS; The Gambler's Fortune, ISBN 185723989X, 2000, Orbit UK

To date, British SF writer Juliet E. McKenna has managed to make it across the pond with two volumes in her on-going series of Sword and Sorcery adventures. I enjoyed them so much that I decided not to wait for a US printing of her third novel and ordered it from Amazon.co.UK.

Although I do make the distinction rather clearly in my own mind, I'm not at all sure how to verbalize what I see as the difference between Sword and Sorcery and Heroic Adventure. (I suspect it's most probably a matter of degree, having primarily to do with style and characterization.) You might say, quite justifiably, that characters in HA must stay alive for a purpose while those in S&S simply purpose to stay alive.

That isn't such an easy proposition for this particular band of adventurers. Livak, Ms. McKenna's feisty heroine, is eking out a somewhat precarious existence as a gambler and thief in the shadowy underworld of the realm until a routine housebreaking goes danger-

ously awry and she encounters Ryshad, swordsman and warrior, whose life quickly becomes entangled with hers through the machinations of Shiv, a crafty wizard, who needs both of their talents to uncover the Magickal secrets of the ancient Empire in order to save their own badly-factionalized land from a band of Dark sorcerers who are determined to invade, conquer and destroy it. And that's about the best that I can do by way of a precis. Ms. McKenna's canvas is simply too broad, her story too far-reaching and complex to lend itself readily to summarization.

However, I must also add in that context that the craftsmanship here is absolutely first rate! Many times, I found myself almost catching my breath at the sheer audacity and scope of this author's vision. Told primarily in the first person, the point of view shifts from volume to volume, which adds enormously to their immediacy and impact; but what really excited and hooked me was her graphic world-building and hell-for-leather action involving an entire social spectrum of utterly memorable characters.

Long and short? These fascinating novels either separately or combined make for one incredibly good read... more than good enough to make me willing to forego my distaste for getting involved in an on-going series and happily snatch them up just as fast as Ms. McKenna is able and willing to produce them.

John M. Ford, The Last Hot Time, ISBN 0312855451, 2000, Tor

I firmly believe that some of the finest and most imaginative writing in the SF field these days is coming out of the Minneapolis "School" of writers. The latest novel by Phillip K. Dick Award winner John M. Ford is Contemporary Fantasy, which (hopefully) isn't completely accurate because, frankly, I'd hate to have to live in the dystopic, near-future world that Mr. Ford has envisioned, although it is a truly fascinating one from a reader's point of view and his hero, orphaned, loner Danny Holman, ultimately manages to make a place for himself there.

Mr. Ford bypasses the details of exactly what has happened and

presents us fait accompli with the results of (presumably) nuclear catastrophe in MidAmerica... one of the more interesting of which being that the border between Faerie and our human reality has been dissolved, and the two species are now sharing an uneasy and troubled coexistence in a land where Elves can wander as they choose, but humans are limited by the Threshold that lies between.

Trained and licensed as a paramedic and trauma specialist, Danny has left Iowa for unspecified reasons and is headed for Chicago when he inadvertently witnesses a deadly gun-battle between two limousines. He stops beside the loser, provides emergency, life-saving assistance to its badly-wounded passenger and has his first encounter with its owner, mysterious boss-figure, Mr. Patrise; his human bodyguard, Lincoln McCain; and his Elfin associate, Cloudbunter.

Events move swiftly from that point. Once the young lady has been taken to hospital in Chicago proper, Patrise offers Danny his protection and a new identity as "Doc Halloween" as well as lifetime employment as doctor-in-residence at his luxurious headquarters deep in the heart of Chicago's Levee... the shadowy, lawless region between the two worlds, where Elf and human gangsters skirmish with sorcery and machine guns and where anything can be sold, smuggled or stolen.

Given the violence in Patrise's world, that lifetime may be short, but there's plenty of work for Danny to do, and he finds both the home that he has lost and new friends and a lover there. However, as he gets more and more entangled in Patrise's empire and his plans for humankind, he is also forced by the nature of his profession and his own innate goodness to take sides in his employer's fight against both Elfin excesses and a dark and terrible, ancient Evil that threatens to destroy both worlds. When battle is ultimately joined, the denouement is simply breath-taking.

I really loved this book! Minneapolis writers quite frequently tend to deal with themes about Faerie and contemporary human interaction (Will Shetterly's superb *Borderlands* books

and Emma Bull's *War for the Oaks* come immediately to mind), and Ford does them all proud with his completely fascinating, uniquely-personalized take on the subject. Maybe you could subtitle it "The Godfather Meets the Ungodly", but whatever label you choose to apply, this wonderful read sure worked like a house-a-fire for me!

Caroline Stevermer, *When the King Comes Home*, ISBN 0312872143, 2000, Tor

Written by another Minneapolitan, this is an incredible but completely indefinable little jewel of a book that essentially leave whoever's trying to review or summarize them shaking his head and mumbling a lot. Neither the novel itself nor its components lend themselves to any sort of easy capsulization, but taken as a whole it's a quiet mindblower!

I honestly don't think that it will be everyone's cup of tea, but if you read and relish Bull, Dean, McKillip, De Lint et al, chances are that it will wind up on your "keeper" shelf too. Part coming-of-age tale, part quasi-Renaissance, save-the-kingdom saga, over-laden with some really intriguing Arthurian echoes, its plot is rooted in what happens in the lives of "little" people, especially its heroine and narrator, Hail Rosmer, a wool merchant's daughter who wants solely and desperately to become a great artist, when an old prophecy is fulfilled and two-hundred-years-dead Good King Julian of Aravis is brought back to temporal existence by sorcery only to find his kingdom in turmoil and disarray, torn between a weak king and a conniving Prince Bishop.

Hail's observations of and involvement with the subsequent struggle on the part of a small group of the King's followers to set-things-right make up the bulk of the action, but only part of its interest and charm. Not peripheral but integral to the plot is Hail's account of her apprenticeship experience as she strives to gain mastery of her talents. Meanwhile, things happen... armies march... Hail is there. She tells us simply and directly about what she witnesses and how she feels about, and her sense of caring and involvement becomes

entirely our own through the magic of Ms. Stevermer's writing.

In my own mind, I keep coming back to that. I can't tell you just what it was that moved me so much about this beautiful book. Maybe like music that must be heard... experienced whole in performance... to be appreciated, there are some books where the delight comes simply in accepting whatever an author has felt well and truly in his heart into your own. For me, *When the King Comes Home* is one of them.

Helen Merrick and Tess Williams, Editors, *Women of Other Worlds*, ISBN 1876268328, 1999, University of Western Australia Press

In all probability, *Women of Other Worlds* would never have found a home in a commercial press. Today's bottom-line-oriented publishers want to pigeon-hole, categorize, label, and this book defies definition. Subtitled *Excursions Through Science Fiction and Feminism*, it is truly one of the most fascinating anthologies that I've ever read: a brilliantly edited, intensely-eclectic collection of essays, short fiction, criticism, poetry and conversation which has its roots in the events of WisCon XX (1996) and represents a kind of crystallization of the ideas and inspirations that were generated at the time by the veritable who's-who of feminist science fiction authors and scholars who were in attendance.

This book is a celebration of their willingness to dance on the cutting-edge of what if! and I see it as a wholly-unique literary touchstone against which an incredible variety of more traditional concepts about gender, ethnicity and culture can be and are tested... expanded and/or redefined... as a result of that juxtaposition. I also think that it's important to mention that much of the attraction here (at least, from my point of view) can be found in the fact that this collection imposes no strictures whatsoever upon our perceptions beyond those which we are personally willing to accept... preaches no dogma except that diversity is... and insists only upon our willingness to open ourselves to possibility and then deal with whatever we've found within its

pages...especially that which moves or impresses us deeply... as best we can once we've paused long enough to consider all of its ramifications.

What moved and impressed me most? First and foremost, being able to savor all of the nuances of Ursula LeGuin's gutsy and heart-breakingly beautiful WisCon XX GOH speech, An Envoy from Senectutus, was worth the entire cost of the collection. Since I am particularly interested in the minutiae of fannish history, Jeanne Gomoll's evocative Introduction which traces herstory from MidAmeriCon in 1976 through the genesis and flowering of the WisCon phenomenon and the establishment of the Tiptree Award gave me such a vivid sense of what it must have been like to have been a part of those exciting times that I found it especially intriguing. As an extension of and addenda to what Jeanne had to say, I was also caught by Susanna Sturgis' *Notes of a Border Crosser* and Helen Merrick's *From Female Man to Feminist Fan*.

More? "Founding Mother" Pat Murphy's wry and witty discussion of the metamorphosis of the Tiptree in *Illusion and Expectation: the Baking of a Science Fiction Award* and Justine Larbalestier's *Tiptree Stories*, anecdotes about the woman herself, made for truly delightful reading. Finally, icing on the cake for me was the editors' decision to close this incredible book with a section taken from Judith Merril's unfinished memoir, *Better to Have Loved: Excerpts from a Life*.

Farming Daze - notes from rural New Zealand

by Lyn McConchie

In October it blew—howling screaming gales, though temperatures were reasonable.

Fluff produced four kittens. I kept worrying about them, because she'd tucked them right on top of the hay at the back corner. But the hay barn is high-roofed and really ancient. It'll go one day during the gales and I'd rather it didn't when there were kittens there—or when it's full of hay.

Junior Goose sat on six eggs, but not one hatched. In the end two eggs exploded under her, and the others produced dead goslings. It took another week to convince Junior she was wasting her time.

The new piglet finally arrived, took one look at the place, burrowed into her hay and vanished for two days. She must have come out to eat since the food I put in the trough was going, but I never saw her. However she comes from a farm where they treat their animals well, so after two days she reappeared and allowed me to pat her. I named her Lois. She is thriving and seems to be happy in her new home. I have a feeling I'll be sorry to see her go—at least until I smell baked chops.

Then two kittens vanished. One day I found Fluff crying at me and two babies missing. I sat up at the top of the hay bales comforting Fluff until she fell quiet. In the silence I heard a tiny faltering wail, and knew where they'd gone. I hastily dragged bales from the top of the stack, one layer, two layers, the third and—bingo—two blinking kittens. Silly little so-and-sos had squirmed along the top of the bales and managed to fall down the tiny gap between bales and outer wall. Fluff had no way of getting down to haul them up. The kits were far too young to climb back, and anyway they were three bales down—about 6 feet.

If I left everyone there it would happen again, so I transferred the family to floor level in a box made from three bales on the floor and against the wall. Since Fluff is a sensible cat, she accepted that and left them there. It also made it easier for



me to socialise feral kits, as lots of friends delighted in meeting and cuddling the tiny furry bundles.

In a few weeks, the kittens had identified me as the source of affection, warmth and **food!** So any time I stepped outside, I was doing so in slow motion. Shift a foot, peer around, shift the next and so on. That's because the kits were just as likely to tumble under my feet as to run under them on purpose. They were at the utterly adorable stage, small round balls of fluff with upright matchstick tails and huge innocent blue eyes.

Even Curly seemed to have been charmed. One day the babies were out enjoying some brief sunshine when Curly wandered across to look them over. To my astonished amusement, the smallest kitten reared up, put paws on the gander's chest and looked up into that dangerous saw-edged beak. I feared the result; but no, Curly dropped his beak and nudged the baby very gently back to all fours before strolling away. I guess he'd had enough goslings to know a young and harmless baby when he met one. But it was a wonderful sight and I only wish I'd had a video camera on hand to catch the action.

But it's fortunate I'm still around at all. I have a habit of reading almost anything, and it may have been just as well. I'd done a month on Accupril, the heart medication given me recently because of a diagnosed slightly enlarged left ventricle. I'd got the first month's supply and while in town collected the final two months on the prescription. I stashed that, finished the original month's supply

and broke out the new lot. I went to open the box and noticed it said 20mg. That was odd. Hadn't I been on 5mg?

I checked the original box. Yes, 5mg. What was more, the chemist's label on the new boxes also said 5mg. But the tablets were four times that, stated clearly on the boxes themselves and on the foil covering the tablets. Problem! If I missed taking one, would it be bad for me? On the other hand, I had a definite feeling I didn't want to take four times the indicated medication and go flat. The tablets would be almost impossible to cut into quarters.

So I rang my doctor. No reply. I then rang our local cottage hospital and talked to the staff nurse. She reassured me that missing one tablet was okay. If I phoned the chemist next morning, he could get me a correct supply back the same day via the rural delivery. So I waited until 9AM and rang the chemist, who was very off-hand about it—along the lines of "everyone makes mistakes sometimes, ha ha."

Later I talked to my GP and I didn't find events quite so amusing. With my damaged leg I have falls, maybe a couple a year. Usually since I rode and did stunting in my youth I fall safely. A few bruises, no damage. But, said the doctor, if I'd taken that dosage for several days I'd probably have been light-headed or fainted, or both. Fainting, falling, and without even that split-second to fall the right way, I could have done some real damage. Further injury to that leg yet again and I may lose it. I know accidents and errors happen, but I'd prefer they didn't happen to me. The chemist may not know it, but I'm going to see that message is conveyed to him via a wide circle of local friends and acquaintances who'll hear about it.

November finished with two events, one unanticipated. I woke the morning of the annual Norsewood Country Fair day, went out early to feed everything, and found Curly had vanished. Now where the heck would a big white bad-tempered gander disappear to? I did the chores, keeping

an eye out for him. Nothing to be seen. With everything done and ready for the fair, I started Curly-hunting. Barn, front lawn, back paddock, wood shed. No gander.

Thinking this was **really** strange, I suddenly noticed an odd black patch by the bathroom window at the back corner of the lawn. Wondering what **that** could be, I approached—to find a large deep hole, about 6 or 7 feet. I gaped at that. The hole gaped back. And from the bottom a hoarse voice demanded I **do** something. Ah, that was one mystery solved. I hooked flatfeet up with my shepherd's crook and grinned as he stamped off muttering peevishly. I gathered it was **my** fault that he'd fallen into a hole in the dark.

We aren't on limestone here, which I know can open up in this way. So I couldn't work out where the hole had come from until I reached the fair and was telling several locals. One of the oldest was able to enlighten me, as they know the history of my place, which used to be not only a farm but also the Norsewood sale yards. Turns out that about 70 years ago the farm had its own well. Twenty feet deep, brick-edged, and with a windlass. The windlass and brick surround have gone, and the well has been filled in but probably not—um—well.

The filler material has decomposed, compacted, or whatever over the many years and about a third of the depth has unexpectedly reappeared. The thing which gives me fits is that it's just near where the cow's hay rack was all winter. I spent several times a day marching over that spot carrying hay to fill the rack. It's a wonder I wasn't swallowed up like Curly.

I got on with my stall at the fair, but I have to admit to being rather uninterested. All I could think of as I chatted and sold and signed books, was that damned well and what to do about it. I'd need a truck-load of something to refill it, but I can hardly leave it open like that either. Someone other than Curly might fall down it. Bet (the cow) for instance, or one of the sheep, even a wandering visitor.

After the fair I got one—a visitor that is, a local reporter. While at the fair he'd picked up the story about my amazing re-appearing well. Could he

come and see it, take photos, write a story? I shrugged. If he wanted to drive to Norsewood, stand looking into a large hole and take photos he was welcome. Slightly nuts in my estimation, but welcome. He arrived, took photos, asked a number of questions and departed. The story appeared a few days later, to the interest of a good proportion of the area judging by the phone calls and comments I got after that.

The second week of December switched to deeply irritating. The Palmerston North ACC (my pension people) decided that despite our agreement the previous year that I didn't have to go over to the city yet again to see their specialist, they'd changed their minds. I went mulish on them. They arbitrated. They'd convey me in a taxi; yes, a local one. (Well that would cost some \$4–500 and delight the local owner, and anything which helped Dannevirke keep its taxi was okay by me.)

I agreed and was wafted in comfort to said city, where I met their rehabilitative orthopedic specialist and spent about an hour and a half talking to someone I recognised after the first few sentences as an idiot. I sighed. I'd **told** the ACC people that I believed this was a waste of time and after three minutes with this guy I **knew** it was.

He listened selectively. In the end I was conveyed home again in style and a few days later they sent me a copy of his report. A report in which he suggested three "solutions" to making me more healthy and fitter to work. The ACC rang me to be sure I had read the report and this twit's suggestions for implementation. What did I think about his ideas?

This prize prune had said that: One, I should see a trained dietitian for weight loss. Wonderful idea, **if** the main problem was ignored. The one which made a dietitian useless. I have pernicious anaemia and as one of the side-effects of that, I am unable to digest most vegetable fibre; hence I can't and don't eat most vegetables apart from peas and potatoes. And how is any well-trained dietitian going to create a suitable diet for me on that basis? I pointed out that I had **said** this. Then too, my over-weight is

pretty stable and caused in part by the pernicious anaemia, which is with me for the rest of my life.

Two, he'd said I should have water therapy, i.e. swimming. Also a wonderful idea, **if** one ignored that a) while I'm not frightened of water, I can't swim; b) the nearest pool is 20 km away and if they really wanted me to do this I would have to go there several times a week by taxi at tremendous expense. And in fact in 1980 when I was living elsewhere they had done just this by trucking me twice a week down to a hospital's tepid pool (\$600 a week for ten months) and it had exactly the effect I'd foretold then—none at all. I shot down that suggestion with the final comment that I'd told him all of the above during our session, when it appears he still wasn't listening.

Suggestion three was "homebased physiotherapy" to improve the muscle wastage of my damaged leg. I pointed out that I've been doing back exercises since 1983 and leg exercises since 1978. If I increase the amount of leg exercises past my usual quantity, my leg becomes more painful and difficult to use. Physiotherapy which renders me less mobile and with a higher pain-killer consumption is hardly to be described as an improvement in my condition. And yes, I'd told him that too! Not only that, I'd got down on the carpet and demonstrated the exercises I used. And come down to it, my leg isn't as "wasted" as he thinks. What he looked at was the difference between calf muscles, without recognising that the good leg has heavily over-developed muscles now. The dud leg probably isn't less muscled than the legs of most ordinary office workers.

Final consensus is that I don't get any of the so-called effective treatments he suggested, and someone is going to report this guy doesn't listen. So I should hope. They paid him to fly from the other end of the country to see patients here and make daft suggestions which were never viable for reasons he was told clearly at the interview. Then they wonder why clients get irritated.

The geese sat mid-November, again to no avail. Possibly because Curly was insisting on helping brood the eggs, which got a lot of jostling

and perhaps a bit over-heated, or maybe chilled at intervals as the struggle shifted ground.

On December 9th, Dianne came in to say she'd just found Curly lying dead. I wondered if that had been caused by the fall. He must have fallen or slithered 6–7 feet down the well and been trapped there some time before I discovered him. I looked him over once he was released, and the only injury had appeared to be to his dignity. He'd showed no signs of damage, but birds are like that. They can appear fine while dying slowly, then just keel over without warning.

A local friend had purchased two goose goslings from Farside 6–8 years ago. Hers in turn had hatched a spare gander this year and since her new gander wasn't related to any of mine at all, that genetic divergence should be enough for her spare to join my geese as "man of the house." Which he did a few days later. He settled in on the spot and both he and his new wives appear quite happy at the new set-up.

Junior Goose also moved. She's gone to a small farm as companion to an elderly gander who lost his mate four years ago. Both are now apparently devoted, so the owner tells me. I also retained a new young goose of similar breeding to the new gander. So, I still have two geese and a gander but only one is from the earlier trio. That too may improve the hatch rate for eggs.

Christmas was approaching fast and events swirled through the farm at high speed. The first kitten went as a 21st birthday present; the second to a farm where there are three dogs. They wanted, they said, a feisty kitten who wouldn't be intimidated. I assured them one of the ginger boys wouldn't and at last report I was right. He has three dogs under a small paw and is enjoying being ruler of the roost. The little dark girl was going to a farm too, joining the ginger boy the local health nurse took a year back. And the other ginger boy went the day before Christmas to the daughter of Kath on our rural delivery. Four kittens, four good homes. Can't beat that.

In between kittens, reporters from an even larger newspaper showed up. My well was becoming a celebrity in its own right. This time the photographer actually climbed down inside to look closely at the hole and to take photos from below of me peering over the rim. The hole is now about 8 feet and still deepening slowly. When Christmas and New Year were gone, I'd have to take steps to get the darn thing filled in somehow. But with the hay in, I moved slowly into writing mode again.

One day when I wandered out to give Lois the piglet more water for a hot day, as I passed the water tank I glanced at the level. **Not** good. It had dropped two sections overnight which, since it had rained enough to bring it **up** half a section, indicated we had a leak again somewhere.

I hurried back inside, switched to gumboots and trousers, collected the binoculars and marched off down the back. Using the binoculars I can often just travel along the top of the back and use them to check out waterlines and troughs. Often a break or hole in the lower pipes will send up a spray so it can be easily seen. Ah ha! And there was one. Right at the bottom of the hill by the trough. I started to plod down what is quite a steep slope. All of the cows were in that paddock and a small electric-fenced portion of the next, grazing the long grass down.

I was about two thirds of the way down the steep slope when I heard the thunder of hooves and looked around. Easter was hurtling down the hill towards me, wild with excitement, eyes popping, horns pointing at me. I spun, swung my stick, roared with rage and stood my ground. Easter was traveling like an express train, but seeing that I wasn't about to submit to any steamroller tactics she tried to prop sideways, stop, dodge me and in the confusion of it all, crossed her front hooves. There was an earth-shaking thump. After a minute or so Easter rose slowly and carefully from the ground shaking her head. That hadn't been a particularly good idea. She limped away, watching me from the corner of one eye, just in case I did it again. I'm sure she thought I'd tripped her somehow. I don't think the idea will wear off for a while, which

is fine since she'll be a freezer full of beef quite soon now.

Last year I decided Minstrel, my ram, would have to go. He'd been with my flock so long he was not only breeding back to daughters—which is okay if the inheritance is clean—but in another year he'd be breeding back to grand-daughters too. That's isn't so good. In town there's a chap who runs a small pottery. He also has a flock of coloured sheep. I asked if he'd like Minstrel and was overwhelmed by enthusiasm. His own ram was really old and on his last legs. A new ram would be ideal, particularly one in bold black and white patches. So they drove out and collected Minstrel, who took one look at his new ladies and dived in. No problems there.

I was left to see if I could find a suitable ram, which wasn't easy. I wanted one which, bred over my black and white patched ewes, would give me black and white or brown and white patched lambs. That meant the ram had to be patched or from solidly patched stock. I had several friends looking about for me but after months, nothing had shown up. Then towards the end of January, John from the pottery rang. While browsing through a trading magazine, he'd seen someone advertising a patched ram lamb.

I made the phone call, and the owner decided that Farside was the ideal flock for his prized ram lamb. They brought him out in a crate on their trailer and I paid on the spot. He was gorgeous. Very big for his age—six months—and a lovely rich brown mostly but with white pants and stockings, white blaze and a couple of white rump splashes. Most of his immediate relatives, I was told, were black and white or brown and white. He should throw the sort of lamb I wanted. He was walked out to the paddock and I called Ellie, my lead sheep, who came running. Once she saw what we were holding, she accelerated. Six months and no husband had been a real downer for a girl. We left him the centre of a dozen adoring ewes with Ellie in the forefront. His name is Maximillian. I now hope that by August, once I'm back from overseas, there's going to

be lots of miniature Maxs and Maxines running about Farside.

After that, Tiger decided I should be kept occupied. The first I knew of this was shrieks from the cat park. I went rushing out and found him with a bird. That isn't unusual, but in this case he was almost at the top of the trellis, with the bird on the other side. Tiger was hanging on to it with his arms through the trellis holes, unable to get the bird inside and refusing to let go either. The bird, an extremely annoyed white-backed magpie, was alternately attempting to get away or peck Tiger's paws off.

Dancer was cooing with admiration below them and encouraging Tiger to hang on. I couldn't work out how he'd caught it in the first place but this was no time to stand about asking questions. I shot back through the door into the house, out of the porch doors and around the outside of the trellis.

There I realised I couldn't grab the bird in my bare hands. It was mad enough at Tiger; I'd lose my fingers to one or the other of them if I became embroiled as well. I snatched off my t-shirt, quite forgetting that it was all I happened to be wearing on my upper half on a very hot Summer's day. But the bird was more important. I smothered its protests in the t-shirt, managed to detach Tiger's paws, working carefully through the fabric and freed the magpie. It had lost a feather here and there but seemed to be otherwise okay. I shook the t-shirt out and the magpie rose like a helicopter into the air. It paused a moment, maybe wondering if it should lecture us on its status as a protected species. Tiger made another hopeful grab through the trellis and the bird left abruptly while Sir screamed after it in frustration.

I could only hope the new lot of neighbours down the back by the cemetery hadn't seen me hopping about by my trellis nude to the waist and apparently involved with an unwilling magpie and indignant feline. They think I'm odd enough already.

One day I came in to find Tiger attacking a thawing turken in the sink. He saw the look on my face and instead of running, he jumped down

to the floor then stright back upwards for me to catch and cuddle. This time he may have figured it would defuse my wrath. It did. But with him rebounding like a rubber ball so fast, I wasn't prepared. He caught me on the wrong foot and in trying to catch him and sort out my feet across the slight lip on the porch doorsill, I went staggering sideways. My damaged leg did what it does at such times and promptly gave way. I had no time to drop Tiger clear. I could only cradle him into my chest, and arch over so whatever bits of me hit the floor, he didn't and he wasn't flattened by my weight either.

I landed with a massive thud and lay there feeling stunned. Not Tiger. He squirmed from my grasp, sat affectionately on my chest, stuck his nose in my ear and demanded I do that again. It had been fun, hadn't it? Maybe we could get a job as acrobats? I, feeling every one of my fifty-four years and a number of new bruises, wasn't in agreement!

Then the video went wrong again. When the serviceman brought it back, Tiger was smoozing with him as he hooked up all the wires. I received a phone call from a woman who phones me at irregular intervals to talk about writing. I had to keep stopping our conversation to answer questions from the repairman, so by the time both had gone I was feeling a bit confused. The day had turned chilly and damp. My leg, fueled by recent bruises was starting to squawk, and Lois the piglet would like cooked barley. So I shot outside before the rain arrived, rushed in several armloads of wood and lit the fire, putting crushed barley to cook in the old preserving pan atop the enclosed fire.

Tiger had wandered out to howl that his friend had left. I had my hands full with a piece of firewood I was about to add to the fire and the kettle to fill and replace by the barley pan. I'm not sure how it happened. But when I came back out to stoke the fire again an hour later I found the firewood reposing on top of the fire by the pan, the kettle in the fridge and the bread stick I'd planned to thaw, sitting in the firewood stack.

While a friend was staying some time ago she asked why I ejected Tiger from the bathroom. It was unfair, she said. He stood miserably on the bathroom step like an orphan of the storm and almost visibly wept at our separation.

I snorted. There's a number of reasons why Tiger is excluded when I'm in the bath and last night was a good example. My bath is one of the old-fashioned deep ones with enamel over cast-iron and with lion feet. I fill it about two thirds and climb in, demonstrating Archimedes principle by raising the water at this point to about 1 inch from the rim of the bath. Last night Tiger managed to sneak in and hide before I closed the door. I climbed into all that lovely hot water, laid back, head on the rim and the rest of me floating. I then prepared to read while soaking a while. Tiger popped up and beamed, I glared, he hopped up to check the situation. Gosh, I was an island. If he stepped down he could sit on me and stay dry. He leaned over and planted his front feet. He was wrong about that because with the extra weight I sank lower. The water crept up to his feet. He removed them. I rose. He stepped back. I sank and he hastily took his paws back. Fascinated by this phenomenon he spent the next five minutes stepping on and off me while I went up and down like a submarine practising crash dives. It was **not** a peaceful bath. At last I gave up on trying to read, washed hastily and exited the water, Tiger at my heels in case I did something else interesting.

Letters

Lloyd Penney
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December 11, 2000

I am always amazed at how some places (like Barcaldine) can be a small town or village, and still sustain six or more bars. Can that many people put that much beer away? I guess they can. They must be British fans...

{Towns like that serve a huge area of countryside, so there can be a lot more customers than live in the town. Most of the pubs were empty, or nearly so, when we visited. I suspect they survive by renting rooms to tourists and itinerant workers, more than by selling beer, but I'm only guessing—Jean}

It also made me wonder about Brampton, where I used to live. When we moved there in 1993, it had a population of 185,000, and somehow kept ten strip joints in business. Both those numbers have now doubled.

I've seen a TV programme on great train rides around the world, and one of them was on a train in Queensland, a long trip that ended at a sheep station (can't remember the name), not far from the Gulf of Carpentaria. I've been across Canada on the train several times, and will happily go to conventions by train when I can.

{That was either the Gulflander—the one we rode—or the Savannahlander, which goes slightly more inland but in the same general area.—Jean}

Now I know exactly where Craig Hilton got to...I'm sure I can speak for many when I say that I miss Craig's anthropomorphic cartoons and Rats of the Underworld drawings.

{Now that Craig's year in Doomadgee is finished, and he's back in civilization for awhile, perhaps he'll have more time for cartooning. We hope so, too!—Jean}

When you mentioned your stay in Georgetown, you used an unfamiliar word, fossick. I decided to have a quick look in my Canadian Webster's,

doubting that I'd find anything, but there it was. Did you find any gold around the tailings area? I'd think that any hopeful fossickers would be completely disappointed by now, with gold findings being nearly non-existent. (Fossick might be a good zine title...)

{We didn't bother fossicking on this trip. Many places that rent fossicking equipment to tourists also "salt" the area with small amounts of gold or gemstones so everybody has a good chance of finding something. They don't hide the fact that they're doing this. Serious fossickers go to non-tourist areas and know enough to find odd bits on their own. Considering the size of some of these areas, and the relatively small number of fossickers, there often is quite a bit of scrap gold and gems around, not enough to be economically mined, but enough for a hobbyist jeweller, for example.—Jean}

I remember you had laser eye surgery...on the news yesterday, a government agency in the US issued a warning against laser eye surgery. Apparently, the advertising for the laser treatment fails to warn again its hazards, such as possible blindness, loss of ability to focus and loss of night vision. I think you avoided all that.

{The place where I had my laser surgery spent a lot of time telling me about the possible hazards, and the fact that my chances of perfect vision—given my exceptionally poor eyesight—were approximately zero. The advertising for most places doesn't mention the problems, but I think most do tell you before you sign the release form. Of course, many people don't listen, or hear only what they want to.—Jean}

Richard J. Faulder
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24 November 2000

I enjoyed the trip diary. Many of the locality names I was familiar with as being associated with Mouse Spider specimens in the Queensland Museum, but it was nice to be able to put flesh on the bones of the name.

Who'da thought that Craig and Julia Hilton would end up in a place like Doomadgee, so far from Perth. Your preference for a more-or-less civilised shower and toilet I can definitely sympathise with.

Lyn McConchie... The flue for my old wood-fired oven is too wide for anything to nest in. Unfortunately there is a hive of bees in the chimney for the (unused) oil heater.

Pamela Boal
4 Westfield Way
Charlton Heights, Wantage
Oxon OX12 7EW, U.K.
8 February 2001

I do hope you are planning a motorhome trip in another part of Australia. Your report is fascinating. I particularly like the photographs and the fact that when you mentioned a road train in the text you gave us a photograph of the object that might have been a puzzle to us foreigners.

Thank you for the reviews. I tend to be leery of books given the amount of hype that the Harry Potter books received here but when the grandchildren practically ostracise one for not having read Harry Potter, needs must. I was pleasantly surprised. I feel that J.K. Rowling really understands the emotions of children. She supplies characters children can identify with and situations that every child feels familiar with, where they are in the wrong but know that circumstances are to blame rather than themselves. I also feel her books are very well paced the setting is clear without holding the action up with long descriptive passages.

Wouldn't the answer to Lyn's flue top be a cowling? The type that have a rounded slatted body that revolves either from the heat rising from the fire or the wind blowing. The movement stops the slats getting gunged up as a static piece of netting does. Mind if she had fitted a cowling we would not have had yet another of her highly entertaining accounts.

Adrienne Losin
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December 2000

This year, 2000, has been a mixed bag of good and bad. Good for my artwork, but bad for my health.

My artistic coup was to be selected to do a picture destined for an overseas exhibition, celebrating Australia's Olympic involvement. This 20-artist exhibition was initially destined for the Australian Embassy in London, but ended up at three different galleries and is still on display, four months later. Most art shows run for ten days.

The supreme compliment has been paid by London's Commonwealth Institute art gallery. The C.I. has purchased the collection in its entirety for its permanent collection. Unfortunately, the costs of sending my art overseas, exhibiting costs, etc mean that although my picture has been sold, I'm still very much out of pocket. Worth it, however, for the experience.

Healthwise, I've discovered several more severe allergies, but by avoiding wheat, corn and potatoes, and getting regular physiotherapy, going to the Mornington heated pool and spa, I'm able to keep well enough to do some artwork, volunteer art teaching, and helping look after an elderly relative.

During 2000 I'd been a volunteer art teacher to the mentally handicapped and physically disabled. I enjoyed it, and they enjoyed me, but the facility is poorly managed and some distance from home. It began to cost me more and more to do that volunteer work and was difficult to get everything else done, so in 2001 I'm unlikely to be volunteering again.

I also heard from... lots of other people, mainly trading zines.

Books

Notes by Jean Weber

Brian Stableford, *Inherit the Earth, Tor, 1999, ISBN 0812584295*

Quotes from the book: "A much shorter and substantially different version of this novel ... appeared in the July 1995 issue of *Analog*."

"In the 22nd century, biomedical nanotechnology has given everyone in the world long life and robust health. It is the New Utopia, and all live in the expectation that true immortality will soon be realized.

"Damon Hart, son of the scientist responsible for much of the wonders of the new world, would rather forget his famous father and get on with his own life. But a shadowy terrorist group forces Damon to confront his heritage, launching a cat-and-mouse game that pits Damon against the terrorists, Interpol, and the powerful corporations that control the biotechnology of the future."

It's very much a mystery novel as well as SF, and includes lots of virtual reality stuff where even the characters aren't always sure what "real" and what's "virtual." They can't always trust their senses, even Damon, who is a VE (virtual environments) designer, including porn and fight action videos. Some interesting ideas on ageing, motivation, and other questions that people thinking seriously about the implications of very long lives always end up asking. Do people take more risks, knowing their nanotech will fix them up, or do they take fewer risks when death (if injured too badly for the nanos to fix) robs one of a very long life? How do relationships change? And so on.

Recommended.

Esther Friesner (ed), *The Chick is in the Mail, Baen, 2000, ISBN 0671319507*

Another in the "Chicks in Chainmail" series of humorous stories, often sendups of some cliché of sf/f. These make me laugh out loud on airplanes.

Lois McMaster Bujold, *A Civil Campaign, 1999, Baen, 2000, ISBN 0671578855; British edition Earthlight, 1999, ISBN 0743408292*

Continues the saga of Miles Vorkosigan, now besotted with the widow Ekaterin Vorsoisson. Desperate to woo and win her, without scaring her off, he bumbles through a series of hilarious encounters. Meanwhile Ekaterin is refusing to recognise her attraction to Miles, and the politics of the capital waft around them both. Bujold has a fine turn of phrase and a tongue-in-cheek style that I enjoy thoroughly, a way of creating characters that most of us can probably recognise as reflecting the awkward adolescent that lurks within each of us, and a deft hand at plotting and pacing.

C.S. Friedman, *This Alien Shore, Daw, 1998, ISBN 0886777992*

"The first age, humanity's initial attempt to people the stars, ended in disaster when it was discovered that Earth's original superluminal drive did permanent genetic damage to all who used it -- mutating Earth's far-flung colonies in mind and body.

"Now, one of Earth's first colonies—a world called Guera—has given humanity back the stars, but at a high price. For the new Outships can only be piloted by members of Guera's Outspace Guild, whose mysterious abilities allow them to monopolize galactic transportation, giving them control over all human commerce.

"Powerful companies from dozens of planets vie to be the first to topple Guera's stranglehold on the stars, for to unseat the Guild would be worth any risk.

"And on Shido Habitat, a corporate satellite in Earth's outer orbit, lives a girl named Jamisia. Protected by her biological brainware systems, and accompanied by the many voices in her head, she has grown into a resourceful, if unusual, young woman. When Shido is viciously attacked by corporate raiders, Jamisia flees to a ship bound for the Up-and-Out. But this narrow escape does not mean safety for Jamisia. Speeding across the galaxy pursued by ruthless

but unknown adversaries, Jamisia must unravel the mystery of her identity and her importance. This odyssey of self-discovery will lead her to uncover a secret which is buried deep within her psyche—a revelation the universe may not be ready to face..."

Despite all that breathless hype on the cover, it was a good book.

Julian May, *Perseus Spur (The Rampart Worlds: Book 1)*, Del Rey, 1999, ISBN 0345395107

On one level, this is a serious tale of corporate plotting to control lucrative resources at the far reaches of human-controlled space, where aliens have recently been hijacking cargo ships and there's some evidence of collaboration between alien species which have never previously worked together.

As the story opens, Helmut Icicle returns from a fishing trip to find his beach shack has been eaten by a sea creature, realizes that he was intended to be in the shack when this happened, and quickly gets involved in a mystery that deepens with every page. Assisted by a powerful friend, a smuggler with the latest spacecraft and lots of useful contacts, Helmut tries to stop the assassins and find out who they are and what is going on. Why the interest in a particular remote planet? Where have some key people disappeared to, and why?

Mostly a space opera-mystery story, this novel is enhanced by May's witty turns of phrase and deft timing. I had become bored with the Pliocene books, so I had put off reading this one; but now I'll be seeking out the next two volumes in this series. If they continue to be as cleverly written as *Perseus Spur*, they'll be winners.

Anne McCaffrey, *Pegasus in Space*, 2001, Ballantine Books; ISBN 0345434676

The third (and final) volume in the Pegasus series, begun with a short story in 1959 and related to *The Tower* and *The Hive Sequence* which takes place some years after this book. McCaffrey's been filling in historical gaps in several of her series in recent years; this is one such novel.

It stands well on its own but will be of most interest to enthusiasts of the other Talent books. "Talent" is the term for people with psi powers (telepathy, telekinesis, precognition, and numerous others). Such people, particularly in the early days of their "coming out" on Earth in the late 20th century, were feared by many non-Talents, especially those engaged in seriously illegal activities like organ farming. This book is also concerned with overcoming the objections of those who oppose the push into space, a project that the Talents support enthusiastically. An interesting but far from outstanding story. To coincide with the publication of this book, Bantam has reissued the first two volumes in the series, *To Ride Pegasus* and *Pegasus in Flight*.

R.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Scholastic, 1999, ISBN 0439064872

The second book in the series about the young wizard, raised by unpleasant and uncaring muggles (non-wizards), who goes to wizard boarding school where more powerful enemies are out to get him. Harry and his friends must find out who's behind the mysterious goings-on and save the school (and Harry) from disaster. A delightful read, even for adults. Being able to guess what's going to happen next is probably an attraction for younger readers, though adults may think some of the sequences are a bit obvious.

Nancy Kress, *Stinger*, Tor, 1998, ISBN 0812540387

A biological thriller, not marketed as SF, but with definite SFnal elements. "A local nurse notices a sudden increase in the incidence of fatal strokes among otherwise healthy black adults. The trail leads to a new strain of malaria that causes rapid blood clotting in people with sickle-cell trait."

Is this a bioengineered weapon against black people? Is the release deliberate or an accident? FBI Agent Cavanaugh finds that his search for answers quickly brings refusal from his superiors of permission to pursue

the case. Now sensing a serious conspiracy in high places, he sets up his own investigation.

Kress knows her biology, and also manages to mix the mysterious and dangerous elements of the story with relevant and credible personal-relationship issues.

Kim Stanley Robinson, *Antarctica*, Bantam, 1998, ISBN 0553574027

Not SF, but the harsh environment of the Antarctica continent is as alien to humans as Mars would be, in many respects (except for the oxygen levels) and the principle of "keep it uncontaminated by human biological and industrial wastes" is much the same.

Robinson includes a lot of historical notes; commentary on the various bureaucratic, political, and environmental issues surrounding Antarctic research, tourism and development; sympathetic portrayal of the personalities and interactions of the people who choose to live and work in Antarctica; a rather less sympathetic portrayal of some of the tourists (the sort with more money than sense); and an overall "sense of wonder" about the place.

Some of the permanent residents, especially the self-styled "ferals," read like characters out of Robinson's Mars trilogy; hardly surprising given the similarities of the two places and Robinson's social views. As a fan of the "Reds" of Mars, I enjoyed meeting their Antarctic counterparts.

Vonda N. McIntyre, *The Moon and the Sun*, Pocket Books, 1997, ISBN 0671567667

A fantasy novel set in 17th-century France, but with a major difference from the usual pseudo-medieval fantasy. Father Yves de la Croix has brought back to the court of King Louis XIV two mermaid-like "sea monsters" (a living female and a dead male) from the western Atlantic Ocean. Yves' interest is in dissecting the male and studying the female. Yves' sister Marie-Josephe's interest is in taming the female and saving her from the indifference and cruelty of the King, who is only interested in the novelty of the creatures. McIntyre

shows the intrigue and infighting of the courtiers and the church, and the dark side of court life.

The monster sings to Marie-Josephe, who responds to the songs and interprets their meaning for the King, who usually doesn't like the message. When the King decides to kill the monster, Marie-Josephe resolves to save her. But can she do so? And at what cost to her own life? Can she overcome her religious upbringing, to follow her heart rather than the dictates of society? How can she know what is right and wrong, if the Church says otherwise?

A thoughtful and insightful story as well as a fantastic one. Unless readers are more familiar than I am with the history of France in that period, they'll have difficulty sorting out the historical facts from McIntyre's fiction—another mark of an excellent writer, in my opinion.

S.M. Stirling, *On the Oceans of Eternity*, Roc, 2000, ISBN 0451457803

Third in a series, following *Island in the Sea of Time* and *Against the Tide of Years*. Ten years after the island of Nantucket found itself suddenly in the Bronze Age, the good guys of Nantucket mount a serious effort to depose the tyrant William Walker, one of their number who has been building an empire in the eastern Mediterranean.

This book had rather too much of an emphasis on military tactics than I prefer (not finding that subject very interesting), but for readers with an interest—and especially a knowledge of the "real" military history of the time of Ulysses and the fall of Troy—I'm sure this book would be fascinating reading.

I enjoyed it anyway, for the depictions of everyday life in the various parts of the world that the Nantucketers visited, including California. I like the series because of the depictions of everyday life in the Bronze Age, but the military stuff exceeds my boredom level, and sometimes the blood-and-guts is too much too.

Pat Murphy, *There and Back Again*, Tor, 1999, ISBN 0812541723

This "wild, fantastic journey through space and time, from the asteroid belt of the Solar System to the heart of the Milky Way" contains many delightful and amusing scenes as Bailey's adventure story unfolds. Just as Connie Willis' *To Say Nothing of the Dog* moved me to read "Three Men in a Boat," this book has me searching for a copy of *The Hobbit* to re-read.

Amy Thomson, *Through Alien Eyes*, Ace, 1999, ISBN 0441007392

In this sequel to *The Color of Distance*, the human Eerin (Dr Juna Saari) returns to human space, accompanied by the Tendu Moki (her adopted son) and Ukatonen (an elder). The story is told mostly from the Tendus' point of view, or from Juna's—a mixture of human and Tendu attitudes, as she had spent some time living as a Tendu on their planet. Of course, human reactions to the Tendu are mixed; some are afraid of or threatened by them; others are fascinated, as by a strange animal; a few treat them with consideration and respect.

Bureaucrats dither and obstruct; a sympathetic journalist exposes the obstruction; business interests seek to profit; the Tendu are confused and distressed; and Juna's lover Bruce suffers a serious change in attitude when he learns that he is the father of Juna's illegal child. A most interesting book on many levels.

Margaret Ball, *Lost in Translation*, Baen, 1995, ISBN 0671876880

An amusing tale of a young woman who isn't properly obedient to her rich, authoritarian father. Disapproving of her California college, he packs her off to a good old-fashioned school in southern France. But she doesn't arrive at the intended school; somehow in Orly airport, she makes a wrong turn and ends up in another universe, where she is accepted as a new student at a wizard's college. All the oddities she writes off to being in Europe, which she knew was going to be different

but didn't think would be quite so primitive. This book is a precursor to the sort of stories Ball writes for the Chicks in Chainmail series, though with a different character. I enjoyed it thoroughly.

Judith Tarr and Harry Turtledove, *Household Gods*, Tor, 1999, ISBN 0812564669

Nicole Gunther-Perrin is a young lawyer, divorced, struggling to raise two children in Los Angeles, with an ex-husband who's always behind in his child support payments.

When she's passed over for a partnership in her law firm on the same day that her childminder announces she's no longer available, Nicole wishes to a plaque of Liber and Libera, Roman god and goddess of wine (she thinks they are gods of freedom) that she lived in their day—thinking it was less violent, sexist and artificial than turn-of-the-20th-century California.

When she wakes up in the 2nd century town of Carnuntum on the Roman frontier along the Danube River, as a widowed tavernkeeper, she quickly learns that a lot of her assumptions were wrong. Water isn't healthier than wine, medical science is almost non-existent, women have different rights, and smacking children is normal discipline, not child abuse. Then there's slavery. This book has lots of good stuff about everyday life and very little war stuff.

I thought the main character was a bit too dumb to be true at first, but then I realized that she's probably typical of many young people who haven't traveled much.

Norman Spinrad, *Greenhouse Summer*, Tor, 1999, ISBN 0812566564

A hundred years from now, the Greenhouse Effect has raised the sea levels and changed the climate, so Paris is much like New Orleans of today. The big corporations and businesses who make a profit on fixing the environment are doing well, but are their efforts actually making things worse? At a major UN conference, a scientist predicts

disaster, and appears to have the data to back up those claims.

Monique Calhoun's job in VIP services is to keep her syndic's clients (and prospective clients) happy, but she's soon drawn into serious spying, in an attempt to learn what's really going on. Numerous other characters—many of whom are amusingly, yet sympathetically portrayed—are representative of types and points of view, yet avoid being stereotypes.

I found this book hilarious, though there was some heavy stuff in there too. I couldn't read it quickly because almost every phrase was a gem to be appreciated. I really liked Spinrad's *Pictures at 11* too. He neatly skewers just about everybody's sacred cows in both of them.

Jane Routley, Aramaya, Avon, 1999, ISBN 0380794608

In this sequel to *Mage Heart* and *Fire Angels*, Dion Holyhands, the demonslayer, spends entirely too much time obsessing over her supposed inability to have children, convinced that her husband Shad left her because of this failure.

Dion travels to Aramaya, looking for her cousin Dally, who she suspects of dabbling in necromancy. Although Dion is totally opposed to the practice, she doesn't want her kin to be discovered and punished.

Nicoli, a powerful mage, loves her, but she's suspicious of him. So was I, considering that in the first book she was seduced by another charming man who was actually a demon. Dion's lack of good sense was acceptable when she was young and inexperienced, but by now she should have learned something. Many people, of course, never seem to learn; but I get irritated reading about them.

C.J. Cherryh, Precursor, Daw, 1999, ISBN 0886779103

Fourth in a series, following *Foreigner*, *Invader*, and *Inheritor*.

The Atevi are now in space, and plan to be the main suppliers of services to the humans' space station, now under the control of the humans' starship captains and crew. The captains are deeply suspicious of the Atevi (and of the humans on the planet), and have deficient negotiating skills even with humans; with no understanding of the protocols of dealing with Atevi society, they constantly offend.

Bren Cameron, a human, is now working on behalf of the Atevi. His job is to move the negotiations forward while making the situation clear to the ship humans: you are dependent on the Atevi for the skills and materials needed to repair your ship, and you cannot coerce them into obedience. You can probably destroy them (and most of the planet), but that will only make your situation worse.

This volume is fairly slow and thoughtful, examining many nuances of interspecies interaction, with fast-paced events happening occasionally—rather like real-life negotiations. I very much enjoy this writing style, and I hope Cherryh continues this series.

Joe Haldeman, Forever Peace, Ace, 1997, ISBN 0441005667

Not a sequel to *The Forever War*, this book examines similar issues of people who have little choice but to fight in a highly technological war that civilians can follow in real time on the cube. He looks mainly at the psychological reactions of the soldiers and their civilian friends. Throw in some politics and conspiracy and it's a interesting mix.

This book has a bit more blood-and-guts than I like but was otherwise extremely well done and very thought-provoking, as always for Haldeman.

Joe Haldeman, Forever Free, Ace, 2000, ISBN 0441007872

This book is a sequel to *The Forever War*, following the lives of some veterans of that war, who have settled on a planet far from Earth, and declined to join in the group consciousness known as Man.

Man attempts to seduce their children, as well as over-protecting the veterans (who are a genetic reservoir for humanity), so the vets hijack a spaceship and set off for the stars, out of Man's reach. But something goes wrong and they have to return, centuries later. What will they find? And why has their escape failed? Another thought-provoking book from Haldeman.

Neal Stephenson, Zodiac, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988, ISBN 0871131811

An early novel from Stephenson, not SF but an "eco-thriller." Learn more than you ever wanted to know about toxic waste, while following the adventures of a group of environmental extremists as they attempt to track pollution in Boston Harbor back to its source and work out why the pollution isn't doing what they expect.

This book exhibits the same madcap style of *Snow Crash* and *The Diamond Age*, while also looking at series issues as he also does in those other books. I haven't found time yet to read my copy of *Cryptonomicon*, but I'm looking forward to it.

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