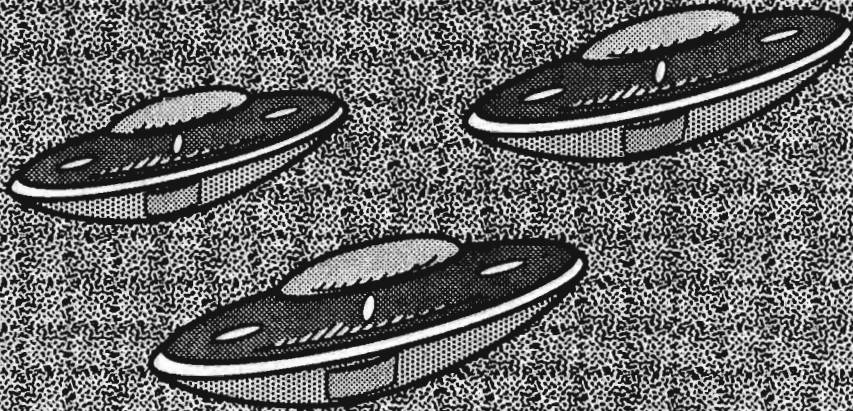
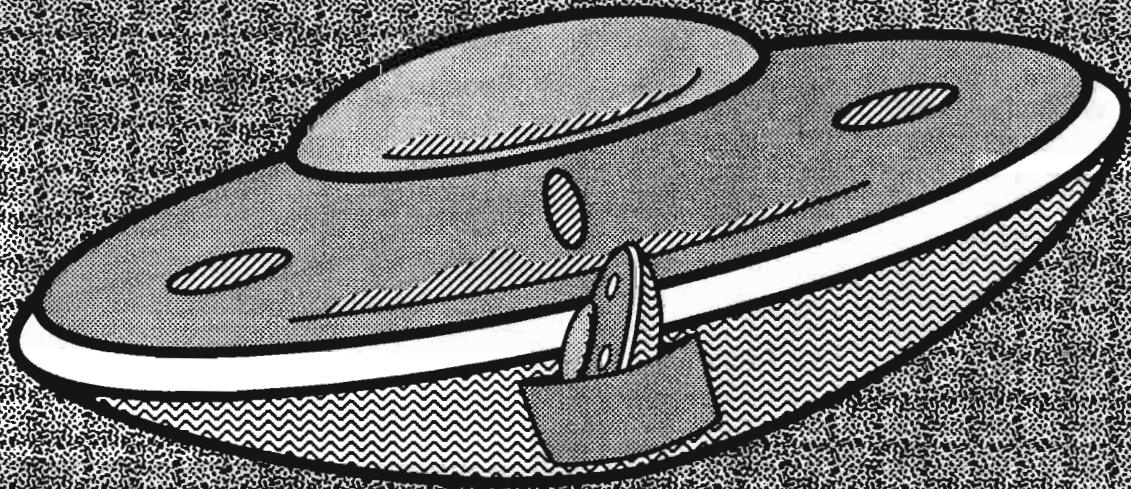


Mad Marsupial Saucer Invaders from the Down Under Planet Mars!

aka- Weber Woman's Wrevenge



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Editing, occasional proofreading, design, layout, and printing by
Jean Weber,
7 Nicoll Avenue
Ryde, NSW 2112
Australia
phone +61-2-809-4610
fax +61-2-809-0323
e-mail 100241.2123
@compuserve.com

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This fanzine is available for contributions, letters of comment, artwork, interesting clippings, uncancelled postage stamps, arranged trades, editorial whim, or A\$3 or equivalent per issue (air mail extra). I prefer some sort of personal response.

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Art Credits

Sheryl Birkhead, cover
Ian Gunn, 7, 10, 11
Bill Rotsler, 3, 9

Contributors' Addresses

Sheryl Birkhead, 23529 Woodfield Road, Gaithersburg, MD 20882, USA

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

Paula Johanson, Box 7 Site 1, RR1, Legal, AB, Canada T0G 1L0

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

Bill Rotsler, 17909 Lull Street, Reseda, CA 91335, USA

Aussiecon Memory Book

September 1995

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

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Diary notes

November 1995 trip report

I had a great time, better even than I expected. Eric and I attended Ditto in Seattle, which I really enjoyed; lots of interesting people but so small you had a chance to actually talk with all of them at length. This would, of course, be boring if the people hadn't been ones I enjoyed spending time with. Definitely a triumph of quality over quantity.

I also got a chance there to meet some people who would be running Orycon the following weekend in Portland, Oregon (and with whom I'd been corresponding by email), so I didn't have to go into a big (to me) convention at which I knew hardly anybody. As it turned out, quite a few people from Seattle turned up, so it was as if a subset of Ditto had reconvened.

But I jump ahead. The Monday after Ditto, Eric and I picked up a rental car and drove down to my parents' place in Lacey, where we visited until the Friday. The weather was lousy (cold, and lots of rain) (typical for that time of year), and my parents preferred not to drive after dark (and I can't drive their huge Suburban), so it was good to have the rental car and drive the four of us to interesting places for dinner most nights. I didn't have any trouble driving on the "wrong" side of the road this trip, I'm happy to say.

The day we drove to Portland was ghastly. Heavy rain, and fog. Fortunately no idiots on the road that I could see. We found the con hotel okay and settled in (the rain slacking off from a downpour to merely steady at the crucial time for unloading the car). We later learned that Portland had record rainfall that weekend.

Joyce Scrivner had volunteered her room for the Ain99 party Saturday night, because I'm a party-

pooper and like to go to bed early, so I always book our room in the non-party wing.

We enjoyed the con and had a pleasant, well-attended bid party. Saw a few friends in the dealers' room, bought a few things at auction, had a chance to talk with Kris Demien and Lea Day (but not long enough with either), and missed a couple of program items that I'm sure would have interested me. Spent most of my time either in the fan lounge chatting with people I know, or in the "quiet hospitality" room, meeting interesting new people.

On Monday we almost were late for our flight, because of a conspicuous absence of signs directing one from I5 onto the road to the airport. But we made it. Unfortunately we hadn't been able to get a flight directly to Las Vegas (too many people heading there for Comdex), but had to change planes in LA. Yeuch!! The connecting flight was about an hour late, and the waiting area was crowded and uncomfortable.

By the time we got to Vegas we were not in a good mood. But we cheered up immensely upon finding Peggy Kurilla waiting to collect us! She got us to our hotel in time to catch our roommates, Linda and Ron Bushyager, just before they left for the evening. We (especially I) were too tired and grumpy to go with them, so we slouched around the room, unpacked, and eventually went out for a walk and to find something to eat.

That was the last meal we paid for, for several days. Linda and Ron had arranged for us to have press passes (which got us into food events for lunch and dinner), and Linda got "comps" for all 4 of us for breakfast (as well as getting the room at no charge for the week). Not that breakfast is very expensive

HERE I AM!
IN LAS VEGAS!



anyway, but with "comps" we got to jump the queue and go right in. Some mornings there were several hundred people in the queue, so that was very worthwhile!

Eric and I had been a bit concerned about the size of Comdex and whether we'd find it too much. I don't know about him, but I was surprised and pleased to discover that it didn't bother me, except in one spot where a dozen multimedia vendors were all blaring away at full volume. Other than that, the 220,000 people seemed to spread out pretty well among the 3 major and several minor venues.

I really enjoyed myself. The first day (Tuesday) we followed Linda around and learned the tricks of collecting as much of the giveaway goodies as we wanted. Did we ever collect T-shirts! Also evaluation copies of some decent software (we were press, remember), and pens, and candy, and weird stuff.

We visited two of the press rooms. The main one was quite impressive. There were about 50 computers set up for people to get

and send email, type and send articles, and so on. IBM was running the press rooms, and all the computers had OS/2 Warp on them. As a demonstration of how good Warp is, it was very well done. I didn't try to read my mail (I wasn't sure of my CompuServe password; it's all automated on my home machine), but Eric read some of his.

Press rooms also have food and drink, but we didn't need much of the food because of all the events Linda dragged us off to (she'd RSVP'd on everything). Some events had excellent food and lots of it; other events had weird stuff or not much of it. Overall, more than we needed, and at no cost, so who's complaining? We did at least 1, sometimes 2, of these for lunch, then another 2 or 3 in the evening. Besides the food, there was usually something of interest in whatever was being demo'd. The best events had a dozen or more vendors demonstrating software or hardware, so there was always something of interest to me.

By the end of each day, we'd walked many miles and were exhausted. Ron, Eric and I would fall into our respective beds, and Linda would go down to the casino to gamble. One evening we skipped the events and went to a quiet fannish party at the Katz's.

Friday we all checked out of the room and I spent the afternoon with a non-fan friend before meeting Eric again at the airport. Flights out of Vegas were totally stuffed at that point, and ours was 2 hours late leaving. More delays getting into San Francisco and picking up our rental car, so we arrived at my sister's place around 10:30 PM instead of around 8 PM as planned. She'd sensibly gone to bed, and we did so soon after.

Spent the weekend with my sister and her husband. She had to work part of each day (she's an accountant and two of her staff had quit a month before), but we still

had more time to visit than we usually do, and it was quite pleasant.

Monday we drove to Palo Alto where I spent the afternoon with another friend, and Eric wandered around on his own, then we had a brief visit with Allen Baum and Donya White (and a chance to see their new house, which is under construction) before dashing off to the airport to catch our flight back to Australia.

Work stuff

Late last year I was complaining in print about being bored at work. No worries about that anymore... I've been laid off. Early in December the funding for the project I was working on at ISSC was in doubt, so various managers panicked and gave 30 days' notice to a bunch of contractors and the two fixed-term hires, of whom I am one. I had worked 15 months of a 24-month contract.

I had rather mixed feelings about this. On the one hand, I was considering leaving in a couple of months anyway; on the other hand, I wanted to finish the second phase of the project I was working on. On the third hand, it's really annoying for an employer to kick me out before I get around to kicking them out.

So I'm between jobs again. And happy to be so. This time I have money in the bank (due partly to my parents sending me another advance installment on my inheritance — I love this concept), so I don't need to be too frugal for awhile, nor in any rush to pick up new work.

However, if the first two weeks of this year have been an indication of how the year is going to go, I'll have as much work as I want. I was just beginning to enjoy having the time to start catching up on things (and contemplating doing this issue of *Wrevenge*), when someone rang up to ask me to do a week's worth of editing for them. Actually they had several weeks' worth of work, but a deadline at the end of the week, and

only enough money for a week's work... you get the idea. Possibly foolishly, I accepted the job.

I say foolishly, because I also had two small desktop publishing jobs to get done in the same week. I had a deadline to have everything off my desk by noon on the 15th, as you'll see in the next section.

Medical stuff

In 1994 I'd had an ultrasound scan which confirmed my suspicions that I had large uterine fibroids. My (male) GP said at the time, "if it's not causing you any problems, no need to do anything about it right now," and I was sufficiently busy to put off thinking about it.

Early in 1995 I decided that it was quite possible that some of my non-specific symptoms, including pelvic discomfort, were probably related to the fibroids, if not exactly caused by them. So I asked for a referral to a female gynaecologist.

The first available appointment was in September. Dr Pike took my history, asked a few questions, looked at the scans, and said, "but these are *huge!* They must be causing you all sorts of problems. We have to do something about this!" So we discussed hysterectomy.

I could have had it done in October, but that was much too close to my planned overseas trip. The next opportunity was early December, but that was too close to the Christmas holidays and besides it was the last few weeks of the project I was working on, and I didn't want to leave the team leaderless if I could avoid it. So in December I saw Dr Pike again and we decided on January 16 for the operation, in a private hospital not far from my home.

I came from making that appointment into work to learn, a couple of hours later, that in January I wouldn't have a job. More importantly, I wouldn't have sick leave. Here I'd put up with being an employee again and wasn't even

going to get to take advantage of one of the major benefits! I briefly considered ringing Dr Pike back and asking if we could reschedule for the following week, but decided that it really *was* too close to Christmas.

I had the hysterectomy on 16 January and everything went very well — much better than I'd expected, in fact (I was prepared for all sorts of problems and discomforts, based on past experiences).

I have a lovely 8-inch horizontal incision in a natural fold in my abdomen, so once it's healed it will probably not be very visible (not that I care, with some of the other scars on my stomach). It was sutured subcutaneously in such a way as to minimise the visible scar, and using only one long string. To remove the suture, the nurse simply pulled one end of it and it wiggled through the incision and out, all in one piece. Felt really weird: a tickling sensation.

I had booked, and got, a private room. It shared a bathroom with the room next door, but for 5 of the 6 nights I was there, no one was in the other room, so I had it all to myself, which was very nice.

The hospital wasn't very busy (many surgeons take January off if they can, or at least don't schedule elective surgery), so even the people in two-bed rooms had the room to themselves.

The nursing staff were very pleasant and, as usual, they were delighted with the fast progress I made and the fact that I didn't throw up, wet the bed, or complain a lot. They weren't run off their feet as they would be in a busy public hospital, so we had a few opportunities to chat a bit.

I didn't even complain about being kept in hospital a day longer than I thought was really necessary, because Sydney was having a minor heat wave (which meant my house would have been uncomfortably warm) and the hospital was air-conditioned. The day I went home (Sunday the 21st), the temperature

had dropped and since then it's been quite pleasant (warm but not too humid).

As expected, I will be off work for 6 weeks (until 26 February), although I can do some typing and will consider trying to get some part-time work to do at home around mid-February. Meanwhile I'm working on catching up with my reading. I'm feeling very well, though I'm still sleeping about 12 hours a day.

I had a follow-up appointment with the surgeon yesterday, and she said I'm doing extremely well ("You're at the stage after 2 weeks that most of my patients reach after 4 weeks"). I'm not sure whether that says more about my powers of recuperation or about the health of her other patients. Eric thinks it's my positive attitude, and as an enthusiast for positive thinking, I would like to agree with him.

I'm not supposed to drive for another week, but I can go out and walk as much as I like (this is encouraged). All this slothfulness fits in very well with lazy summer days.

One thing that really surprised me occurred during the pre-op chat with the anaesthetist. She asked whether I wanted to have the "pre-med" injection they normally give you about an hour before the op. I gawked at her and blurted, "I didn't think I had a choice!" She said, "You always have a choice." Because I was a bit nervous about this op, I said I would have the pre-med, and we then went on to discuss whether I wanted sleeping tablets that night. I said no, and mentioned that in the past I'd also not been given a choice about that. I didn't go into details, but I got to thinking about one time: I could either take the sleeping tablets voluntarily, or they'd make sure I took them; the doctor had prescribed them, and that was that. I was shocked, but didn't consider there was any point in arguing with the nurses, who would probably get in trouble if I didn't cooperate. (Some nurses let me

palm the tablets on the pretext of "I'd like to stay up and read for awhile; I'll take them later", but others watch to make sure I actually swallow them.) This hospital, and the anaesthetist and surgeon, made a big deal about "patients' rights and responsibilities", and it was wonderful. I'm not sure if things have changed in general in the past 10 years, or if it's a difference between public and private hospitals, or if I just picked the right people and place, or what.

My next overseas trip

Yes, I'm planning this one already. I had submitted two papers to the Society for Technical Communication's 1996 Annual Conference, and one was accepted. The conference will be held in Seattle in early May.

At the end of May there's Wiscon 20, which I am planning to attend. Now I just have to figure out some way to spend a whole month in North America. I don't expect to have a problem finding things to do!

New computing gear and other gadgets

While in the USA, I bought a slightly-obsolete CD-ROM drive for a good price. Took awhile to get OS/2 Warp to recognise its existence, but Windows 3.1 liked it fine. I only want it for loading software, clip art, fonts, etc, because the rest of the machine can't handle multimedia extravaganzas anyway.

When we were installing it, we realised that I didn't have a compatible sound card. Considering that I usually disable all the sounds on the computer as soon as I can figure out how (disconnecting the speaker wire is the quick but crude way to do it; I usually look for a software solution), this wasn't exactly a problem for me.

Maybe if I'm off work long enough I'll have a chance to look at all the free stuff I collected at Comdex. (Dream on...) I have got

started on this project, loading up a nice little program that allows Word for Windows to read files on disks formatted for the Macintosh and trying it out. Worked great! I can also use the program, called Here&Now, to format disks for the Mac and save files in Mac format. This is going to make my life much easier on some projects (and Eric's, who has been doing my file conversions at work for me).

Mobile phone: I also bought a mobile (Americans call them cellular) phone (analog). Haven't used it much so far, but now that I'll be back freelancing, it will probably come in rather handy.

Cat door: I finally got around to tracking down a pet shop that carried electronic cat doors, so I can keep out the neighbourhood feline riffraff while allowing Minou to continue going in and out as she pleases. It took me two days to get the thing installed. First I had to rip out part of the wall of my house to enlarge the opening to take the door, which was just a little bit too big in both dimensions to fit in the old opening (which is in the wall of the house, not any of the people doors). Then I had to rebuild that area. It wasn't all that difficult, but my carpentry projects are very much make-it-up-as-I-go-along, which involves a lot of doing it again until I get it right. Still, the result looks not bad, almost as if it had been planned. Also, since the work involved a lot of leaning over and deep-knee bends (we're talking about working on an area down near the floor, after all), miscellaneous little-used muscles ended up shrieking at me.

Minou, of course, refuses to have anything to do with the thing. It's been years since she's had a flap on her door, and never in this house. Despite numerous lessons in how to open the door, she ignores it. Sulks outside in the rain rather than use it. I'm sure it doesn't help that I'm home all day. She always preferred

to have me open a people door for her rather than coming in the old cat door; why should that change?

Life's little triumphs

Some of you may recall a couple of years ago I mentioned that I had quit doing the desktop publishing for *keyword*, the journal of the Australian Society for Technical Communication (NSW), after a long-running dispute about whether they were going to pay me a token amount for my time. The Society then set about trying to find a replacement volunteer to do the work. The next two issues of the journal were conspicuously late and of lower quality (poorly proofread, inconsistently presented, etc) than the ones I had done. The next several issues never appeared at all. I kept hearing tales (from friends who had remained on the editorial committee) of copy languishing on people's desks.

Just before I went overseas, I got a call from the president of the Society, admitting that they'd failed to find someone to go the job reliably, and asking if I'd like to quote on taking it over again. I allowed myself the luxury of saying "I told you so!" and a few other pertinent remarks (but very restrained, for me) and eventually, after thinking about it for awhile, sent in a quote. Some weeks after I returned from the trip, someone else from the Society (the current head of the editorial committee) called to say they were accepting my quote and he would get the copy to me ASAP so I could do the publishing. It finally turned up in early January, just in time to conflict with the rush editing job mentioned earlier.

International banking

I mentioned earlier that my parents recently sent me some money. Here's my father's account of what he went through to do this:

"Tuesday morning I went to the bank early, as planned. The two

tellers finally found the right form, and the one in charge began to fill it out. She eventually said, 'We don't do this very often' — it was obvious she had never worked on an international wire transaction before. Nancy, one who had handled the matter before, is on vacation most of this month. Then I realized that 6 years ago our bank was a branch of a small banking group that was later taken over by a subsidiary of Bank of America. The entire system has changed — different forms, procedures, codes, etc.

"What threw everybody was that your account is a credit union account. There's no provision in the forms, and nothing can be done without having a suitable blank on the form. We finally figured out a way to designate both the credit union number and your account number.

"Next step was to phone the person in the head office in Seattle who handles international wire transactions. We were put on hold almost 15 minutes. My teller had to find and transmit her equivalent of a PIN number, and two other code numbers. Then apparently the man in Seattle used a somewhat different format to send off such wires. Finally he grasped the problem, and between the two clerks they got all the names and figures down correctly, and checked everything twice. I listened in, and didn't hear anything wrong... The wire was to be sent the next day.

"I asked when your bank could expect to receive the wire and funds. She said it might take 5 to 8 working days for an amount of that size. I know that is true in the case of personal checks, but transfers directly between two major banks should still go almost immediately."

My credit union phoned me the next day to say the funds had arrived and would be credited to my account the day after that, and they were.

Notes from rural New Zealand

by Lyn McConchie

Burn, baby, burn

Last month a thing like a mechanical brontosaurus arrived to trim my shelter belts. It did so very efficiently but departed leaving behind huge piles of the trimmings. This subsequently involved us all running happily about like over-stimulated arsonists.

Being green, the trimmings take a bit of getting going. We burned the pile twice, reducing it to around a quarter, then I left word with my mate Ginger's son that he was to do the burn as soon as we had a fine windless day.

Dean's a nice kid. At the moment he's out of work, so he's sitting just on the other side of all our sheds. Him, his housetruck, his girlfriend, and his two dogs. He's hooked into my power and is paying for that with occasional work — like cleaning up shelter belt trimmings.

Dean wandered out a few days later, considered the branches, the recent dampness, and the difficulty of lighting damp wood. Ginger says she could see across the paddocks what he did but was too late to prevent him. With all that wet wood, Dean decided to encourage it.

With a fine absent-mindedness he sloshed on a gallon of petrol and tossed a match. There was a mighty boom, flames hurtled skywards some thirty feet, and Dean lost his eyebrows.

Inside I was under the startled impression that World War Three has just broken out in my hay paddock. Dean received a piece of our minds from Ginger and me (and from our community constable who arrived ten minutes later to see who was using explosives).

Foiling thieves, yet again

We must have a couple of deeply frustrated thieves around someplace. We had a couple of bad nights, one of light snow, the next of sleet. Then a lovely fine crisp night of clear skies. But my leg had finally caught up with the weather report. I crawled off filled with pain killer to sleep like the proverbial log.

I heard later that our farm ban thieves had been chased from another property further down in Norsewood. They arrived at my gate, opened it to head for possible pickings around the shed — and woke up the geese. The men fled.

Perhaps the next gate would be better. It wasn't. There they met Dean's watchdog. Slayer is a nice dog, very gentle and affectionate with anyone he knows. Not nearly so nice with strangers sneaking about at 2 am though. And he's a pitbull cross. He approached roaring, the wannabe looters backed up hastily and the geese added their two cents' worth.

The thieves, ever optimistic, moved on to the third gate, where they met Jill, Ginger's very large German Shepherd. She's the complete sappy clown. But they weren't to know that, and by now, lights were coming on all over, and the complete range of fauna was hysterical.

Two hapless thieves departed while Dean and Tony checked out all the barns with dogs and torches. Somehow I think the thieves won't be back. It must have been very frustrating for them. But that's life; they'll have to get used to it.

More lurkers in the night?

One day I was running late and had far too many things to get done before going out at 6 pm. One of them was to bring the cow in from the roadside and milk her as fast as I could. In the flurry of doing this, I forgot and left the section of electric wire in place which blocks off Ginger's drive — to prevent a cow shooting up there and demolishing cherished plants.

I vanished off to my meeting, returning just before dark and reeled off to bed. Meanwhile Ginger's sister and brother-in-law decided to pay her a late visit. By then it was 9 pm and pitch dark, out in the country with no street lights. They arrived, swung into the drive and at the last minute, saw the electric tape. Whoops!

So Lesley got out to remove it, then realised it might be hooked into the power. (Electric fences on our two farmlets are usually hooked into the mains. They wouldn't actually damage you, but they can deliver a belt that'll just about toss you out of your gumboots.) For several minutes she made ineffective dabs at it, trying to see if it was live, and afraid to touch it properly.

While this was happening at one end of the wire, Ginger looked out the window. There to her horror she saw a dark figure scurrying around the place apparently stealing the electric fencing. (I might add that although it hasn't been stolen to date, we have twice had vandals damage it after dark.)

Thinking that three times was definitely too many, she stole silently down the drive until she was close to the figure, then she shone the torch and bawled a query as to intent. Poor Les, who hadn't heard her arrive, shot upright and



AUSTRALIA IN '99. YOUR LAST CHANCE FOR A SOUTHERN HEMISPHERICAL WORLD ON THIS MILLENNIUM!

screamed. The scream scared Ginger, who screamed in turn.

At which point the usual follow-up occurred, with her German Shepherd barking hysterically, my geese announcing *something was going on out here*, and everyone hurrying outside to see what.

And after all that, the wire had never been on in the first place.

The end of Bandit

Poor old Bandit has gone. A couple of years back she broke her foot badly. I could do nothing to help but see she was fed. She is so wild that even with a badly broken foot I was not allowed to handle her. It healed but she developed a limp which became more and more painful until it was clear she was miserable with the pain and unable to hunt. I'd have continued to feed her but we could do nothing about the pain she was very clearly suffering. Then she started to lose weight, and I was convinced it was best to have her put down. To treat her further we'd have had to cage her. I think she would have died fighting to be free. So Tony came over with the farm gun and shot her.

Squeak the cat

Two of Bandit's kittens are still around. One is Squeak, now a big cat with thick short red tabby fur and the belief that he is actually a dog. He playfights with Jill (the German Shepherd) regularly, to her delight, and goes for walks all over the farm with Ginger.

One day he came all the way to the far end of the paddocks when we went to shift my ewes. He was belly deep in wet grass the whole way and didn't seem to mind at all. When the ewes didn't want to move he even made a couple of runs at them in the way a dog would. That did work, but not quite the way he'd intended. Instead of running away, the sheep were so interested in this strange object that they ran at him to look more closely. Squeak ran for

the gate and the ewes all followed, still trying to get a better look at him. It got them out of the paddock but not quite in the way meant. And if anything is guaranteed to make the neighbours look oddly at us, mustering sheep with a large ginger cat should top the bill!

Earthquakes and volcanoes

The local landscape leaped into action on 20th September. My cleaner was on top of my library ladder while I handed books up to her to shelve on the top two lines of shelves. Just as Dale poised a handful of volumes and I reached up a second, the latest quake struck. It was 6.4 on the Richter scale and it felt like it. Seemed to last forever as the house danced. Dale came off the ladder and shot into a doorway like a rocket — I was already in the other doorway.

Some seven hours later, just as I was peacefully sprawled on my bed grinding my way through a slab of steak, the landscape gave a preliminary throat clearance and moved into a brisk two-step for the second time that day. I wasn't sure if I was being told I should stay home [*this was a few days before Lyn left on a 5-week overseas trip—Ed.*] or if I was getting a hint to get out while the getting was good.

In the following week we had another two quakes and then Mount Raupehu went into minor eruption. The scientists claim the mountain lava, ash, and lahar overflows are nothing to do with the sudden rash of quakes in the region. Yeah... right!

Country firefighters

Country volunteer firefighters take a ferocious pride in the job, their local knowledge, and the speed of their response. The later can sometimes bewilder townies. Living on a main country road, I know that the howl of the siren is followed in around 90 seconds by two cars and a motorbike going East at great speed.

I also know not to wander out into the road after the siren to see if I can see anything. I was once out gathering in my mail accompanied by a friend when the siren sounded. Behind my back she ambled out into the road to stare. I was just in time to retrieve her before she became abruptly two-dimensional.

In the 70s I lived on a largish island (population during winter around 3,500; in summer around 20,000). There the local butcher was a very keen member of the volunteer brigade. The sound of the siren was immediately followed by the butcher calling for customers to depart his shop — immediately if not sooner. He then slammed the door which locked it, leapt aboard his racing bicycle and hurtled down the slope to the station.

We were all used to it, but it tended to confuse the tourists a bit. Occasionally they refused to leave the shop without explanation. A snarl of "it's a fire!" tended to convince them all right, but usually they thought it was the shop on fire. Seeing the butcher vanishing down the road on his racing bike 10 seconds later confused them all over again.

We also knew to clear the road at such times. Volunteer fire fighters have right of way. Again it was the tourists who would be peacefully plodding across the road between shops, or driving up it, when a madman on a racing bike (often wearing a blue-and-white striped apron) charged at them. The butcher left a train of terrified tourists in summer, and small knots of residents explaining things to them while making soothing noises.

It was all part and parcel of island life. Like Sunny, the big white Samoyed dog belonging to the local taxi chap. Sunny always slept in the centre of the main road. Even the butcher went around him. When a tourist once asked why it was allowed, he was told, "He lives here; you don't."

Letters

Darroll Pardoe
36 Hamilton Street
Hoole
Chester CH2 3JQ
England

12 March 1995

Thanks for *WWW* 47. I was fascinated by Paula Johanson's piece "Ghost Story" because this tale which Alex Shomburg told "simply and from the heart" is one of the most famous folk tales in the world. How Shomburg must have chuckled to himself as he told the story! His listeners obviously lapped up every word and took the story entirely seriously.

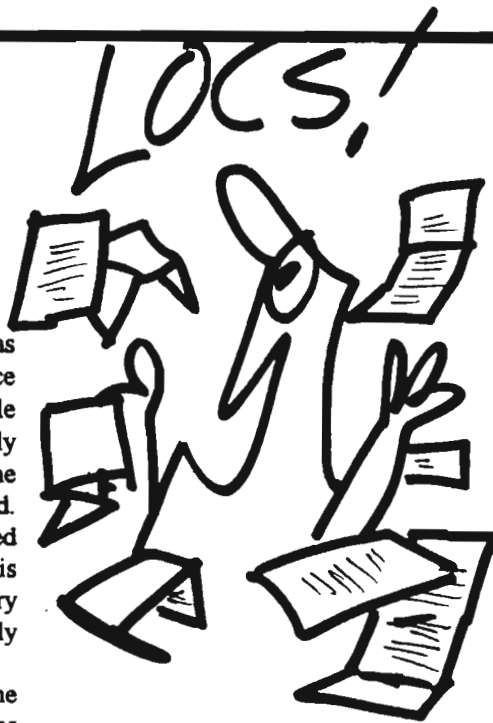
It generally goes under the name of "The Graveyard Wager", comes in numerous variants and has a history which goes back to the Middle Ages. Hammering a nail into a wooden cross in the graveyard is one of the commoner versions. There is also, for example, a girl driving a wooden stake into a grave and accidentally driving it through the hem of her dress; and a mortuary version where a knife has to be plunged into a corpse on the mortuary slab (and gets plunged through the cuff of the knifer's coat).

The story also formed the inspiration of an episode of "The Twilight Zone" back in 1961, starring Lee Marvin. I'm surprised that a whole table-full of people could be so taken in by it. I can only suppose that Schomburg must be a very good orator indeed.

Sheryl Birkhead
23629 Woodfield Road
Gaithersburg, MD 20882
USA

25 April 1995

A few years ago when I had my bouts with a hospital, one of the concerns after the first anesthesia was that I had developed a slow heartbeat that was unresponsive to whatever it was they chose to do.



Finally, after the fact, someone asked me if I worked out and I said that I did have a routine. The next question was did I do aerobics. Um, er... wasn't sure how to answer that one—turns out yes. I do a routine that is 1-1/2 hours a day at home and try to get to the YMCA to work out there twice a week... Yes, it turns out that I'm fat, but fit and the exercising is mainly got the back and knee—it doesn't make me feel good, but if I don't exercise, it hurts worse... something like a negative incentive!

Owners don't want to hear me tell them that cats (as opposed to dogs) are location (and often schedule/routine) oriented rather than people oriented. This enters in when anyone asks about what to do when they go on vacation. Dogs, while getting upset at a kennel, are more upset at the loss of the owner; while a cat is much more upset at the loss of familiar surroundings.

So, while the best idea is to have someone come in who knows the animals, boarding is usually easier on a dog than a cat. Unfortunately, the signs of problems are harder to spot in cats and owners may think that, when they return, things are fine when a cat has been boarded, only to have problems show up later. Dogs on the other hand usually show they're upset (and that means the problems are known and potentially worked on or dealt with). People want to feel that their cats love them and I am not certain that is the right word. A cat is simply not a pack animal and doesn't relate to humans the way a dog does.

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

7 November, 1995

... looking at the LOC of mine you printed, I can say that having a computer has made more and more of a GAFIAt. I now waste way too much time playing computer games like SimCity 2000 and SimTower and neglecting the few fanzines that arrive.

Unlike you, my work situation is fairly stable. I see no reason to leave the Post Office and try to find work when so many employers refuse to hire those over the age of 50. Of course, the Republicans in Congress may indeed get their wish and privatize the Post Office, which will result in mass layoffs of those over age 50 and other undesirables with medical problems. But for the moment, I am OK.

I was also on vacation for 4 weeks in September, making a circuit of the National Parks in the western USA. I had decided to see the parks before the Republicans gutted them the way they have been destroying the national forests. They were indeed very pretty.

Oddly enough, during my 3 days in Yellowstone National Park, I did not see a single bear. Lots of bison but no bears.

Nowadays most of my reading is from the local library, as I do not have the money or room to buy books of my own. But the two libraries tend to buy the popular stuff from Eddings, Anthony, Lackey, and Kerr and very few of the books you review. Well, that is OK, at least they are free, and it gives me something to read at breaks and lunchtime at work while my co-workers drool over the TV set in the break/lunch room. (And thank God that OJ trial is off the air.)

Debbie Kean-Hodgson
P O Box 56438
Dominion Road
Auckland, New Zealand
15 November 1995

I have changed my name again. My middle son, Gerard Kean, who is attempting to use the name on his birth certificate, after 16 years of being Jed, reproached me that he isn't included in *our* family — Leon and I, being the Hodgsons, and him being the excluded Jed Kean. That, the fact that I was bullied by Leon's father into reverting to Hodgson, the fact that it is constantly mispronounced and misspelled, and finally that it is a psychological burden to me, mean that I now wish to be known as Deborah Loraine Kean-Hodgson, with a hyphen.

It is hard to explain what I mean by a psychological burden, but I was Miss Deborah Hodgson until I married in 1975, and then again from 1986 to 1995 (after being "worked over" (to use Linda Ronstadt's term) by Leon's father, left like a Victorian maiden, pregnant and superfluous to requirements. So I associate the name with being young, inadequate, vulnerable and the kind of person who would lead my mother to say in that very patient tone, "Oh, *Deborah*", a sigh she applied to everything from bad

marks at school to my marriage ending.

Ideally, if I had the money, I'd have done a deed poll and changed our names, mine and Leon's, to Tolkien or something. But dependant on the bureaucracy as we are, it had to be something they would accept. So, Kean-Hodgson it is, and most people accept it, though there is a hard core of 4-5 people who won't — abrogating to themselves the right to say what they will allow me to call myself. As they do to Gerard: that's the name on his birth certificate, but many people tell him, "Oh, you'll always be Jed to me", and refuse to let him grow up. He's 19 now, it should be his choice.

Garth Spencer
hrothgar@freenet.vancouver.bc.ca
24 November 1995

If I knew more about technical writing, or work writing for that matter, I could make more of your work stories. As is I mostly grasp how people are behaving, rather than what they're working on. I am still trying to figure out how people behave.

John Newman describes the prevailing situation, I realize that, but have you ever contemplated what number of *men* are regularly abused by *women*? You will recall I tried to address this subject once and merely became incoherent. The astonishing thing about our world is that there can be two situations like that going on in the same country at once. Sometimes I think what we laughingly call Western civilization is founded on general abuse.

When Graham Stone goes on about a male-breadwinner family structure being "all right" once, under certain conditions, I find myself thinking "my God, I tell myself drivell like that half the time and don't notice it." Drivel, I say, because there never was a time when all parties fairly agreed to a design for living, with no compulsion and all the facts in the open. There never was a time when

all or most women, for instance, had access to accepted, even honored social positions, granting that they were restricted to estate management and primary education. There have always been people — and not just women — forced out of all legitimate positions, then condemned for the subsistence they *can* get. You can see why I think abuse is a general social tradition.

Lloyd Penney
412-4 Lisa Street
Brampton, ON
Canada L6T 4B6
27 December 1995

Many thanks for issue 48 of *WWW*. There's Gunny and Karen on the cover, sneaking that dangerous Australian contraband into Murrica. I've already seen the blackmail pictures of Karen blowing up the inflatable platypus.

[Actually the cover is supposed to depict Eric and me, but Gunny & Karen are great people so we don't mind being mistaken for them.—JHW]

The job hunt is still on... I was hired by Maclean Hunter as a circulation supervisor for six industrial magazines. I admitted I'd never done this kind of work before, but I had applied for it because it would expand my experience in the publishing industry. I was informed that it would take a year to learn the job properly, but I set out to learn it ASAP. I did learn a lot, and I got along famously with all the publishers and staff, so I was confident going into my three-month review meeting. In that meeting, I was given nebulous reasons for being let go.

[Good grief! I wonder if someone perceived you as a threat to their position, once you thoroughly learned the job?—JHW]



Paula Johanson
Box 9 Site 1
RR 1 Legal, AB
Canada T0G 1L0

paula@freenet.edmonton.ab.ca
14 January 1996

News! NEWS! I sold a novel. Yep, I'm not a one-book wonder, and that from a small press. *No Parent is an Island* is selling modestly, which is great for a small press, by the way.

My novel has sold to an *ahem* bigger small press — twelve to fourteen books a year for ten years, and great literary merit.

The novel is *Copper Lady* and before you ask, yes it is SF but in a Canadian kind of way. Have you read Robert Kroetsch's *What The Crow Said?* Like that — ten or fifteen percent speculative and very palatable to mainstream readers.

The press is Ekstasis Editions in Victoria. They've had some award-winning titles, and do mostly poetry and short story collections. This is their second novel and most SF book to date.

So you can imagine I'm pretty happy and looking forward to the fall when the book is launched.

I'm still trying to sell the *Modern Ritual* collection, and have two more rejections since we last corresponded. Both say wow, but it's not our style, send it out again and keep trying. *sigh*

22 January 1996

I'm working on another piece, on roadside shrines. Talk about suspending disbelief: some people I talk to not only don't know what roadside shrines used to be, they don't believe there really are any of them any more. This as we drive past a common road sign, shaped like a coffin, labelled FATALITY. These days pictures of the deceased are added by the sign shop. Flowers are added later by the bereaved.

Bernie Klassen
(address as for Paula Johanson)
22 January 1996

Do you remember running a piece of mine about working in a garbage dump? Well, I'm working for the same fellow again, only now he has his masters and is running the local office of an environmental consulting firm.

He's got me doing another of these jobs that has me learning about stuff I might rather have been ignorant of. At the moment we are doing recovery of a spill at a petrol bulk fueling site. They spilled about 1800 litres (a "small" spill), and I've been pumping spilled fuel off the top of the water table; 600 litres so far. And there's all this other stuff, like weathering rates, plume dispersals, bioremediation. Fascinating, but fascinating like a cobra poised to strike.

And in a bit of coincidence, we watched a short film the other night on video (from the local library) called "Black Rain Falls" featuring Midnight Oil in front of the Exxon tower in New York commenting on another "small" spill; the Exxon Valdez. And Paula picked up a schedule for Canadian public radio and there's a radio play authored by Peter Garret upcoming.

Karen Herkes
P O Box 767
Goulburn, NSW 2580

The debate about multi-cultural issues and intelligence has been pretty lively in psychology. The Wechler Adult Intelligence Scale — Revised is still most popular. But I agree it has many cultural biases. The "comprehension" scale asks word meanings — far easier for English "born" speakers.

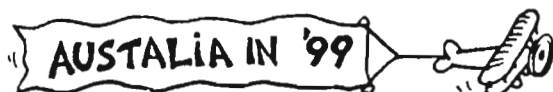
Even the pictorial tests are culturally biased. One of the "what is missing from the picture" tests is a snow scene. Few of my Australian

clients spot snow is missing from the top of the wood pile. Is this an indication of some lack in reasoning? I don't think so; as one client said, the missing piece had to be a barbecue or a chimney on the house. Why? Because what's the point of having a wood pile without one of those things?

My Koori clients have trouble sometimes. I've found they do well in Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices, which consist of visual puzzles. This test is simple to administer and probably free of many cultural biases. Yet it is not frequently used, and there are no norms for adults to compare results with.

I love this town. Last year they instituted the inaugural annual "Woolfest", a weekend of activities celebrating Goulburn's primary industry. This event was to be preceded by a parade down the main street with 300 "real" sheep. Well, my family and I joined the throng lining the main street waiting for this spectacular parade. And it was packed. People started to cheer... and suddenly 300 sheep whooshed past, running down the main street "tunnel" for their dear lives! About 5 minutes later (after most of the crowd had dissipated), a truck with loudspeakers and a shearing demonstration ambled by. And that was it! On Monday some of my colleagues complained their town's premiere event only rated 30 seconds air time on the local news broadcast. They could have screened the entire parade four times over in that space!

I also heard from: Pamela Boal, Jan Howard Finder, Diane Fox, Leanne Frahm, Joy Hibbert.



Double helix

Paula Johanson

Editor's note: This essay is excerpted, with the author's permission, from the manuscript Modern Ritual.

When our six-year-old daughter's stubbornness turned round on her father and I one afternoon, we put her outside on the porch for time out. A few minutes sitting in the spring chill would cool her off and she'd be ready to come inside and be peaceable.

Instead, after a minute or two, we heard her calling us outside. Gone was the fussy whining to get her own way; she sounded gloriously happy.

"Come out!" she cried. "You've got to see this! The geese! The geese are here!"

Over the farmhouse, arrowing in a vee against the blue sky was a flock of Canada Geese. A long line of geese ran alongside them, then another flock, and another. Our daughter was jumping up and down, too excited to speak at first. "Hear them? I hear them," she squealed. "Just like my Oma showed me in the fall—but they were going the other way then."

We called our son upstairs and out to see them, too, as flock after flock joined the first until the stream of birds was over a mile long and almost half a mile wide. The end of the flight was just coming in sight, over the trees to the south of the old Alberta farmhouse, when the leading edge of the flock began to turn.

They were riding the wind with maybe one or two wingbeats in a mile, and we could hear them counting cadence as they passed overhead. Was it the wind in their feathers, or only the wind we heard as we watched them? Then the flock was turning.

The leading edge had come round in a great sweep half a mile

across, rising above the rest of the flock that was still approaching. They rose in a great spiral, rising clockwise two full turns before the last of the flock found the column of rising air and turned into it.

"A thermal," my husband said. He pointed out the freshly-plowed field on the quarter-section across the gravel road. It showed up black and stark among the dry brown brush not yet leafing out for spring. "The black earth must be warming in the sun, warmer than the unplowed fields and bush, and a thermal is rising from it."

This wasn't watching a magpie hover over the chicken shed, or a hawk spiralling over the hayfield; seeing all those birds moving together at once was like seeing an elemental of bird-ness on the move, shifting a feather to turn, travelling miles without a wingbeat, only their bleating calls up and down their vees and slanting columns.

The great arc of birds turned once, twice in the air, sunlight flashing on the wings as the birds shifted up effortlessly from one hundred to five hundred feet in the air. Then Bernie and I gasped and looked at each other.

"Ted Sturgeon's story—" he said.

"The Golden Helix," I said at the same time. "Where the people brought to a new planet see a flight of beings like angels, like a swarm of bees, turn in the air in a giant spiral." That golden flight of beings honouring the life before them in a spiral dance, turning around and up and around and down, was an image that stayed with us since we read all Theodore Sturgeon's books together.

In our first years together, a friend had asked us if we could put up a visiting author and his wife for the weekend. That was how we met Ted and Jayne Sturgeon, who

travelled in a Volkswagen, bought day-old bread and found it no hardship to stay up till one in the morning talking with us and our friends about stories and science, invention and scrimping.

Jayne's plain clean scent was a healing beauty; and Ted's white hair, curling back from a thinning crown showed us strength and beauty unexpected in a man past sixty.

It was at that time that our twins were conceived, Bernie and I learned later; there could not have been a more auspicious influence upon the moments of our children's beginning. Ted and Jayne kept in touch after that weekend, always delighting to hear news of the twins. It didn't end with Ted's death two years later, or with Jayne's new marriage a few years after that. As she sent congratulations for the twins' birth, and put her arms around me in a crowd after a memorial reading, we sent her best wishes for her new marriage.

It had been years since we had seen them, and a year since Ted's books were boxed away in storage. But the flight of geese over our house had brought back that powerful image from his story, one Ted hadn't known the genesis of himself.

His introduction to the story in the anthology mentioned that "The Golden Helix" had been written some ten years before the discovery of the DNA molecule's spiralling nature; the double helix was a powerful, moving image that had come to him as he wrote, and he didn't know where he had got the idea for a great cloud of beings turning in the air.

Now we had some idea, an understanding of how the sight of several thousand birds moving in concert could stay with someone

who had seen it once. A memory like that could stay sleeping in the mind of someone who had never imagined crowds of people like the sea, or how the heat of the sun on a chill day could lift birds from yards overhead to a mountain's height without them stirring a wing.

Now we knew something more of the mind behind the stories that were the best of our book learning; the man who brought out the best in us during three nights' conversation

and who maintained a connection with us as if two low-income students living in an industrial park were worth the friendship of a celebrated author. He ate our day-old bread before driving home with his wife in their VW Beetle to eat day-old bread, for there wasn't much more coming in to their home than ours.

We stood outside the farmhouse a long while, in the chill spring air. The sun warmed one side of us as

the birds rose, caught a crosswind and continued north, at twice the speed they had arrived. We went in at last when the birds were gone.

Ted was four years dead by then; but when he was failing, some writer friends sent him to Hawaii for a month. Though he died a few weeks after returning to the West Coast, I like to think of him on the beach at the end of his life. The waves must have curled around his feet, and the birds flew overhead.

Books

Notes by Jean Weber

Poul Anderson, *The Stars Are Also Fire*, Tor, 1994

Sequel to *Harvest of Stars*. The story cuts between the past (at the time of *Harvest*, but telling of events not covered in detail in that book) and the present, some centuries later. The Earth and its people are subdued, protected, and safe, but there are insufficient outlets for those people who have the pioneering spirit or who simply want adventure. The descendents of the Lunarians, as well as original humans, are feeling stifled. But how to deal with these needs without destabilising society as a whole? A thought-provoking book as well as a good adventurous read.

Suzy McKee Charnas, *The Furies*, Tor, 1994

Sequel to *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) and *Motherlines* (1978), this book disappointed me, probably because so much time has passed and the issues involved don't seem as directly relevant to my life anymore — or at least a deadly serious discussion of them doesn't grab me.

Which is a shame, because Charnas covers some very important issues, and many of the events in this book could be seen as parables for things happening in the various

feminist movements today. Not everyone agrees with what needs to be done, much less how to achieve it (not that feminists, any more than any other group of people, ever did completely agree); leaders fall out of favor; and dreams of one generation aren't necessarily shared by those of the next.

Esther Friesner (ed), *Chicks in Chainmail*, Baen, 1995

This delightful collection of short stories contains the funniest sendups of stereotypical fantasy that I've ever read. I giggled and shrieked through most of Christmas Day. When Eric read it, his comment was "it's well done, but it's not *that* funny." Oh yes it is!

Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Fisherman of the Inland Sea*, Harper, 1994

A collection of previously published short stories, all excellent as always from this talented writer.

Linda Nagata, *Tech-Heaven*, Bantam, 1995

What happens to the minds, bodies, and souls of the cryonically frozen? When they are revived, how do they react? Are they sane? I've read many stories in which people awaken centuries later, but they are usually written more from the point

of view of taking a look at a future society, and rarely look at what happens during the person's suspension: how spouses, friends, and society in general develop and change over the years. In this story, unsuccessful revivals have occurred, and governments are moving to ban all life-extension and preservation treatments. The main protagonist is determined to revive her husband, no matter what, but she is concerned about what she will find when she does so.

Alice Nunn, *Illicit Passage*, Women's Redress Press, 1992

A feminist dystopia set in 2102 on a space colony which has been involved in a war for many years, so systems are breaking down and not being repaired, food is scarce, the temperature is dropping, the air is going bad, and so on.

Lots of delightful feminist fantasy clichés are woven into the story. For example, the young clerical assistants, whom the (male) bureaucrats consider silly, dumb "girls", are not only spying but subverting the computer systems, stealing valuable equipment, and generally fomenting revolution from within. They fiddle the records and get away with all sorts of things.

The "girls" come from the underclass, called the nowts, who

are descended from the convicts originally sent to the station to act as servants to the bureaucrats and technicians. Many of the upper classes express views typical of colonialists towards both the lower classes and (in particular) the non-white races: the nowts are "getting uppity", "need to be kept in their place", "shouldn't be educated beyond what they need to do their (menial) jobs", etc.

The book is written in chatty language, as a series of interviews and commentaries by several people on both sides of the class divide. It was on the short list for the James Tiptree Jr Award in 1994.

Lewis Shiner, Glimpses, Avonova, 1993

The story of a man coming to terms with himself and his relationship with his father, set in the context of the music of the 60s: Morrison, Hendrix and the Beatles. Although I was a young adult during that time, I was never much interested in rock-n-roll, so the details of the stars' lives and environments passed me by. Those with an interest in these details would probably get even more out of this book than I did, but I certainly wasn't disappointed, and I was definitely impressed.

Normal Spinrad, Pictures at 11, Bantam, 1994

A well-done sendup of the media and miscellaneous Hollywood- and TV-fostered stereotypes of a lot of people. Very cutting humour.

Trica Sullivan, Lethe, Bantam, 1995

Two stories are interwoven in this book: an altered human woman (Jenae) who has gills and can communicate with dolphins, and a research-explorer (Daire) who accidentally goes through and interstellar "gate" and discovers a group of descendents of refugees from the Gene Wars. Their stories are linked

through the once-human brains who now rule humanity and want to ensure that certain information is kept secret. When Jenae stumbles on clues to this information, her life is in danger. Daire is also in danger because the brains intend to ensure that he never gets back to Earth again, having found the darkest secret of all, and preferably that the entire colony is destroyed.

Part of this book is set at Monkey Mia in Western Australia and in some unspecified coastal area of New Zealand. The only bit that seemed highly unlikely to me was a statement about clandestine sea traffic between the east coast of NZ, Ninety Mile Beach in South Australia, and Monkey Mia. Traveling between these three places would involve going through several stretches of water that are well-known for bad weather and heavy seas, yet there are no indications that the trip could be difficult and dangerous.

Connie Willis, Uncharted Territory, Bantam, 1994

A rather short book for the price, but a good read. An interesting mix of goofy and serious. I love a book that rubs my nose in my own (incorrect) assumptions, and does it so very well. Nor until page 68 (out of 149 total) did I discover that the narrator wasn't a man, as I had assumed. The revelation was anything but subtle, and I was startled to discover that not only had I got it wrong, I simply hadn't even asked the question!

There's also the alien who makes the most of the rules against offworlders damaging the environment or influencing native culture, all handled in such a way that you can see how easily a good idea can be taken too far or is simply unworkable in the first place.

The humorous, tongue-in-cheek style of the writing makes this book a delight to read, as well as giving one something to think about.

Patricia Wrightson, Shadows of Time, Puffin Books, 1994

Children's fantasy. A part Aboriginal boy and a white girl run away from their people and meet in the bush near Sydney in 1798. The boy has an affinity for fire, and the girl for water. The travel about much of southeastern Australia over the next 170 years or more, losing track of time, never aging, fulfilling the boy's quest and observing the changes in their country as the whites become more numerous and technology changes everything. An excellent book, as are all of Wrightson's works.

1995 James Tiptree Jr Awards

Last issue I mentioned the winners of the 1995 award (Nancy Springer, *Larque on the Wing*, and Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Matter of Seggri*), but I couldn't find the short list. Here it is:

- Eleanor Arnason, 'The Lovers', *Asimov's*, 7/1994
- Suzy McKee Charnas, *The Furies*, Tor, 1994
- L. Warren Douglas, *Cannon's Orb*, Del Rey, 1994
- Greg Egan, 'Cocoon', *Asimov's*, 5/1994
- Ellen Frye, *Amazon Story Bones*, Spinster's Ink, 1994
- Gwyneth Jones, *North Wind*, Gollancz, 1994
- Graham Jones & Peter F. Hamilton, 'Eat Reecebread', *Interzone*, 8/1994
- Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Forgiveness Day', *Asimov's*, 11/94
- Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Fisherman of the Inland Sea*, Harper, 1994
- Rachel Pollack, *Temporary Agency*, St Martin's, 1994
- Geoff Ryman, *Unconquered Countries*, St Martin's, 1994
- Melissa Scott, *Trouble and her Friends*, Tor, 1994
- Delia Sherman, 'Young Woman in a Garden', in *Xanadu 2*, Tor, 1994
- George Turner, *Genetic Soldier*, Morrow, 1994