Gegenschein 84

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A science fiction fanzine from Eric Lindsay. Jean's phone number is (07) 4948 0450. I don't have a home phone. Jean stole it, because I wasn't there. Then she stole the phone line (07) 4948 0435 for her fax, because I wasn't using the line. Then she stole my modem, because I wasn't using it. Then she borrowed time on my desktop computer when her one broke. Then she borrowed my laptop computer, since she wanted to run Windows 98 and Office 2000 (beta) for an editing job. I think my Psion is still safe. It reminds me of the time Dorothy Parker was asked by her editor why she wasn't in the newspaper office, and she replied "Someone was using the pencil". Commenced late August 1998, unlikely to be finished until February. You think you get more time when you don't have a job? Hah, have I got news for you!

The paper version is formatted using Graham Freeman's Quikscript Postscript routine that runs on my Hewlett Packard LaserJet 5MP printer, not on a computer. This means I write the entire issue on any brand or model of computer, without a word processor and without desktop publishing products. Typeface is mostly 11 point Times Roman on 1.05 line leading.

Andy Porter's **Science Fiction Chronicle** is a bimonthly Hugo nominated newsmagazine, essential reading for those interested in the SF field. I am Australian agent. A$47 for 6, A$77 for 12, A$107 for 18 issues.

Due North

A minor trip, and a short distance this time, being an account of a week driving Jean's vastly overloaded little Ford Festiva from Sydney, where I have lived almost all my life, to Airlie Beach in tropical North Queensland.

I spent my last week at work in July 1998 trying to find time to identify things to take home. Mostly books I'd overlooked, but there were gadgets I'd taken in over the years. Didn't work all that well. There was the end of semester lunch, and some partying after work. There was a lunch with Christina and Raymond from Action Computers. There was a farewell lunch for me on Friday 17th July, and some partying afterwards. The presents were most appropriate, and apparently suggested by my former partner Martin, who had left more than a year before; beach towels, and a large beach umbrella, which I fitted in the car with some difficulty when I finally did get home.

The quantity of "generic stuff" at home was more than considerable, despite various sales, two combined parties and sales, and lots of throwing out. I stuffed it all downstairs, somewhere, with an unfortunate quantity in the formerly empty garage from which all our stuff had been taken to Airlie Beach. I filled the entire back room with stuff to pack in the car; that wasn't a good sign. Emptying the water bed took so long that I couldn't pull it apart until the last morning. Then I discovered one of the downstairs room doors wouldn't lock, so I stacked lots of junk against the inside of it, and used the other door instead. There will need to be a final sale sometime of what remains.

Finally left Faulconbridge around midday on Monday 20th July 1998. Even the passenger seat was full, although I stopped and mailed the 21 kilograms of stuff filling it on the way out of Faulconbridge. Since the car didn't give any problems, I figured it couldn't be too much overweight, but I tended to keep to a cautious pace as I headed towards Sydney. Had to travel nearly 40 kilometres that direction before picking up the freeway north. Stopped at 2:45 at Wyong, 142 kilometres from home, and had a late lunch on cookies left over from my parties. The weather was poor, a wet, cold, dreary day, with fog everywhere. I really felt Sydney was giving me the proper type of farewell to keep me away for a long time.

The Pacific Highway lead me to Newcastle, but a strange pattern of streets soon had me lost and having to backtrack, not made easier by one way streets each time I wanted to head in a convenient direction. I stopped before 6 p.m. at Karuah, some 284 kilometres from home, staying at a slightly overpriced $45 cabin at the Karuah Jetty Village caravan park. Back through the rain at the highway, the restaurant at the Karuah RSL provided a very reasonable $8 roast lamb and vegetables, which was as close as I could come to health food in the place. Another rainy night, and I slept poorly with the noise of rain on the roof.

The shower I had that morning consisted almost exclusively of mist. It wet my hair fine, but evaporated before reaching my toes. Strangest shower I've ever seen.

Fourteen kilometres from Karuah, I came upon one of the stranger restaurants I've seen, done in the shape of Ayre's Rock. Must be something about that area. I snacked through the day on stuff from home, including Trolli Sour Gummi Beans, a very strange candy given me by Christine Nicholls for the trip (not bad, but where did she find them?) Some people were more organised. I saw a bunch of people camped outside Karuah, setting up what appeared a fine breakfast.

I turned off to the right and headed for Myall Lakes and Tea Garden, figuring I might as well look at beaches on the way up. Ocean Beach, just past Hawkes Nest, looked ok, despite the overcast conditions. A very helpful Tourist Information person at Bulahdelah, in the

Great Lakes Visitors Centre, suggested driving along The Lakes Way. At their suggestion, I diverted to visit Sugar Creek Toymakers, an interesting toy shop, art gallery and cafe, where the owner hand makes wooden toys on his lathe. That was about 35 k from Bulahdelah. Lots of good views of the lakes to the right as you drive.

I turned off down a very muddy private side road to visit Sandbar. I eventually reached a caravan park with unfriendly looking signs, so I took my non-business away, and soon spotted the road I should have taken to the left, through a gate, and past a private golf course. There was a really nice littoral rain forest, with a newly constructed wooden boardwalk through to the Sandbar beach. I won't say the mud road was wet, but upon my return, two ducks were swimming in it.

By the time I reached Bluey's Beach there was a bit of sun, and I was feeling much more optimistic about the trip. At Kew, the 540 kilometre point, I turned off for the scenic drive via Laurieton and Port Macquarie. I stayed the Tuesday evening at the Star Motel south of Coffs Harbour, about 730 kilometres from Faulconbridge. The motel was newly taken over, and had been fairly run down, but was comfortable enough. What I lacked was dinner. I walked kilometres seeking someplace either open, or selling something I regarded as real food. McDonalds and KFC didn't count, as far as I was concerned. As on Monday night, I spent the evening reading the last box of Science News, and pulling out the interesting articles.

Wednesday 22nd July, and knowing there was scant food around for breakfast, I improvised up baked beans on toast from my rapidly diminishing left overs. I was delighted to find the old toaster in the motel still worked. I always like the old fashion kind (which Jean hates, and finally managed to dump when we moved), because you can repair them with a piece of nichrome wire. The fault with this one was no handle for the doors, so extracting the hot toast was a bit of an adventure. You can't win, of course. Cabins at caravan parks have no bed linen, but usually fine cooking facilities. Motel rooms generally have rudimentary cooking facilities (although they always have a fridge, and generally an electric jug and a toaster).

I drove to the local mall, got a bread roll to supplement breakfast, and then checked out Park Beach, north of Coffs Harbour. Of course I had to stop at that great tourist attraction, the Big Banana plantation, three kilometres past Coffs Harbour on the left. It had Disneyland tackiness, but is clean, has the nice little tourist trains, and souvenirs, a skyway, a cable flyer, a craft shop. Sure expanded since I last went through, probably more than a decade ago.

Turned right at Moonee Beach, and walked along the headland to get some photos of the deeply cut bay and sandbars. I went into Woolgoolga township, to see if I could spot anything I recalled from when I had stayed there as a child. Couple of places that might have been there, but most of it didn't raise any memories at all. Several things were new. The wonderful Sikh temple on a hill by the highway, looking beautiful in the sunlight. There were several Indian restaurants nearby, further along the highway, the Raj Mahal was by far the most decorative.

About 50 kilometres past Balina I stopped at Little Italy. A fine clean Italian industry pavilion, with an extensive history of Italy. The museum covered Italian settlement in the area since the 1880s. There was also a new Aboriginal Arts and Crafts centre, with a stereo playing rock and roll. Finally got back to the coast, past Balina and Lennox Point, where you could see the broad sweep of Byron Bay.

I stayed the night at the Calico Court motel outside Tweed Heads. Missed a bet there, as the hotel next door offered a spa as well. Took a 90 minute walk, but still couldn't really find suitable food.

By Thursday morning I was nearly 1100 kilometres from Faulconbridge. No rush now, as I had to meet Jean at Brisbane airport that afternoon. Wandered slowly along the coast, towards Surfers Paradise, via Palm Beach, Miami, Burleigh Heads and Southport. I arrived early at the airport, as it was only about 1200 kilometers from Faulconbridge. Parked on the outskirts until slightly before Jean's plane was due, and then went to their expensive car park.

I was able to start getting my mobile phone charged at the airport, but didn't need it as Jean spotted me as soon as she emerged from Qantas flight 881.

We got lost on the Sunshine Coast. We got lost in Noosa, but finally located the Noosa International Hotel, where Graeme and Susan Cohen were expecting us. Graeme is the deputy head of the School, and had suggested we drop in since they were in the area for a week. Had a good visit with them, ate at an Italian restaurant, and were shown over pretty much the entire town that evening and the next morning.

On Friday 24th July, having covered 1435 kilometres from Faulconbridge, we set out around midday, and promptly got lost in Noosa again. Eventually we got back to the highway, and made good time until we stopped at the Matilda truck stop, between Coogum and Gympie. We had some nice salad and settled down in the park, only to be mugged by a flock of renegade geese, who obviously didn't believe my threats that they could be turned into dinner if they didn't stop trying to steal lunch. "Don't let them see fear", I said to Jean, as she stood on top of the picnic table to escape them.

We reached Bundaberg rather too late for a tour of the rum factory, so after some searching, we settled into the Park Lane Motel. We had noticed that Sizzler Restaurants hadn't completely disappeared in Queensland since their unfortunate financial problem, so we partook of their salad bar. At last, the right sort of food! And I'd only had to travel 1672 kilometres to find it.

Saturday morning after breakfast, we made good and sure to get to the Bundaberg Rum place nice and early, so we could take the tour, buy the discount bottles, and get photos of each other standing by the giant bottle. We even got a book on the history of the place, which included the definitive wording of the song. US fans,

ask Joe and Gay Haldeman to sing it for you at some con - they learnt it maybe 20 years ago (and I have the cassette to prove it).

God made the sugar cane grow where it's hot
And teetotal abstainers to grow where it's not.
Let the sin bosun warn of perdition to come.
We'll drink it and chance it, so bring on the rum.

Chorus
Bundaberg rum, and it's overproof rum
Will tan your inside and grow hair on your bum.
Let the blue ribbon beat on his empty old drum
Or his waterlogged belly but we'll stick to our rum.

We're men who drink it, oh yes men indeed
Of the bushranging hairynecked olden time breed,
We shave with our axes, we dress in old rags,
We feed on old boots and we sleep on old bags.
Chorus

Dull care flies away when our voices resound
And the grass shrivels up when we spit on the ground,
When we finally die and are buried in clay
Our bodies are pickled and never decay.
Chorus

On the Morning of Judgment, when the skies are rolled back,
We'll stroll from our graves up the long golden track,
And our voices will echo throughout Kingdom Come
As we toast the archangels in Bundaberg Rum
Chorus (and repeat chorus)

In response to all this excess, we had a salad lunch at Sizzler, and then back to the road. Unfortunately about five kilometers before the Gin Gin turnoff onto the Bruce highway, we hit a pothole and blew both left hand side tyres. Given how loaded it was, we were lucky that the car didn't do anything dramatic as Jean moved it to a stop beside the road. Luckily we were in cellular phone range so a while later it was on a trailer and the Royal Automobile Club of Queensland tow truck driver had found us an open garage with tyre. When we set off again, we discovered the new tyres didn't actually fit. Well, they scraped one side of the wheel well at the rear, so it was back to town to have all the tyres moved, so the new ones (a different profile) were on the front. The car didn't behave all that badly with its mismatched tyres, but we eventually replaced them with the correct profile (which took a week or so to obtain at Airlie Beach).

Didn't get real far that day, and ended up staying at the Ambassador Motor Inn at Rockhampton that evening. Set off to look for food on foot, and had a long walk before returning to the Sizzler we had bypassed earlier due to the large queue.

Sunday 26th July we awoke early due to what sounded like renovation noises in the motel. We toured the Central Queensland University campus before leaving the area. Lunch at a busy service station at Camellia, where we had some great salad sandwiches, so large I could barely finish my second one. Reached Mackay around 2:30, discovered the Frahm's Solar World store wasn't open, and decided to push on to reach home before dark.

Finally got to Airlie Beach, after about 2500 kilometres, around 5:30. Then it was many trips up the stairs to unpack the car, and add its loot to my totally overcrowded shambles of a room here. We shot off to the Sailing Club for dinner, rather than even trying to make something.

It wasn't until several weeks after I arrived that I managed to finally unpack most of the boxes of books, build the eleven bookcases that are all I can find space for, and get the confounded 157 boxes (mostly) off the floor and into some sort of order. I still had a half dozen boxes here not unpacked a month of so after arriving. But the table is built, and painted to match the surroundings, drawer units are in place, plastic filing cabinet assembled, and I'm gradually starting to find places to put everything.

Flap and Zap

It seems I neglected to mention in recent issues that I had the same "flap and zap" laser eye surgery as Jean. She had it in 1997, and I had it in late February 1998, just prior to returning to work. Like hers, mine was done by Dr Michael Lawless, at the Sydney Refractive Surgery Centre Pty Limited at Chatswood, who are one of the oldest such outfits doing LASIK excimer laser eye surgery in Australia. One of the three doctors there, Dr Gerard Sutton, turned out to be the son of my old boss (now Vice Chancellor at Wollongong) at the University. Recently I found that Dr Lawless had become the first non-US President of the International Society of Refractive Surgeons.

I've been very happy with my results. Very little discomfort after the 15 minute operation. I no longer need glasses for distant vision, although some minor correction would improve it even more. I need glasses for close up, however if there is sufficient light I can manage to read newspapers without my reading glasses. Before the operation I couldn't see anything more than 6 inches past my nose. SRSC have a web site at www.srsc.com.au.

Life at Airlie Beach

End of August. Finally got my computer unpacked, and the removable drive chassis fitted. As you can see, enough is done to at least prepare web pages. I remain in total awe of anyone who can move houses without finding it a totally traumatic experience.

My life isn't all beaches and bars. Normally I set off around dawn for a 40 minute walk along the beach path. Today it was overcast, and there was some rain. Instead I installed the software for my sound card, producing frowns from Jean, who dislikes any computer that produces any noises. Given her one makes horrible grinding noises from its fan, I find this attitude perplexing, to say the least.

I wasn't in the finest of form, since I'd had a very good time at the Friday night free wine and cheese tasting at the Jubilee Tavern. Even the 25 minute walk home hadn't entirely neutralised the effects of all that cheese ... well, that is my excuse.

By then it was eight, and time to walk down the stairs to the beach path, and the Saturday morning markets. As was traditional every market Saturday, it was overcast and threatening rain. Being the middle of winter, we had to bundle up with long trousers, and wear socks and shoes, although we didn't actually need a coat or jumper over our T shirts. The cold season lasted nearly two weeks.

The hippy who makes sand castles and dragons and other beasties on the beach during tourist events was only a little way into a fairly minor castle when we wandered along the beach path, so I reminded myself to come back and check progress later. There was no sign of the folks who had fresh coconuts this weekend.

It was warmer by the time we got back home so I changed into shorts and sandals. Being fairly high on a hillside, we get nice through ventilation, since the entire front of each of our rooms open onto the balconies. If we open the back door we tend to get a fairly decent wind tunnel effect if there is any breeze at all. If that isn't enough, we have ceiling fans and air conditioners, but being winter, we haven't needed them since I arrived.

During much of the past few weeks we had been entertained by the Hobie 16 World, a bunch of boat races (for which we didn't know the rules). We had a fine view from our balcony, so we tended to waste a fair bit of time watching the colourful sails through binoculars, and speculating on just where the course started and ended.

A pair of very bright and pretty rainbow lorikeets have been visiting our balcony and demanding to be fed. They were happy enough with breadcrumbs, but really seemed to like a mixture of honey and water. They hop from one balcony to another demanding tribute. Just as well the bush turkeys and the peacocks can't fly!

There are about a half dozen peacocks that wander around Whitsunday Terraces. It is a wonder they don't fall in the swimming pools or the spa. The spa near our building must be a constant menace to drunks also, as it is planted right in the middle of one of the paths and isn't fenced.

Sitting in the spa is an attractive alternative to doing anything energetic. They have cunningly mounted the timer on the wall, so every now and then you have to jump out and push the button again. Come summer, we used the swimming pool a lot also.

Green Power

After years of saying that there was no demand for sustainable energy production from solar or wind generators, a Sustainable Energy Development Authority (SEDA) was set up. They sought public purchase of renewable energy, by persuading power companies to offer renewable energy to customers, at a premium price.

At present Australia has an installed green power capacity of merely 13MW. And demand is increasing. In June 1998, all six NSW power retailers have green power on offer, as do two in Victoria and one in Queensland. It is cost neutral for the retailers, and irate customers yell at them if they don't offer to supply. For retail users, they agree to either pay full cost, or they agree to round up their bills by a fixed amount and take that amount of green power. Lots of people are willing to make such a $5 to $100 gesture, whereas financing a full self sustained power system is far too costly for them. I personally doubt that more than 5% of consumers will pay a premium, but even this vastly increases green generating capacity, and helps bring costs down.

Energy Australia recently built a $2 million solar farm at Singleton, in the NSW Upper Hunter Valley. The largest mains connected photo voltaic grid connected system in the Southern Hemisphere, it is rated at 200kW and generates 250MWh per year. Energy Australia had previous experience with rooftop solar, and with the aid of a long term loan from SEDA, decided to increase their experience with a greenfield installation in a 1.25 hectare field next to a sewage plant (where industrial development potential was otherwise limited). The site did not require levelling, thus avoiding any dustbowl effects.

The mountings were fixed rather than tracking, to ease maintenance problems, facing north at 30 degrees to the horizontal. The 3,456 Solarex panels each have 36 polycrystaline cells and are rated at 60 watts. This is exported to the grid at 11kV after conversion to AC via a single 50kW and three 4kW inverters from Power Solutions Australia, and 34 4kW inverters from CSA. This enabled performance comparisons of various inverter options.

Even this small installation provided some interesting lessons. Like install during the cooler months, as working among the panels is far too hot in summer. There was also a concern with reflection from the array at planes landing at the local airport. The current update to 400kW includes bird guards, an automated security system with dial up facilities. The new panels are amorphous silicon from Canon, and they slide into the mountings, rather than being screwed on and wired.

Pacific Power did a conversion of a GM Holden Rodeo 2.3 litre 4 cylinder 5 speed manual gearbox petrol car to electric. They used a 15kW AC induction motor on a 200V battery system and no gearbox, with design and development by the Electrical Engineering Department at the University of Sydney under a grant. The motor was a 4-pole squirrel cage induction job, 15kW continuous rating, 75kW peak, with 590Nm torque at 800 rpm and a maximum speed of 6000 rpm. They naturally used IGBT (insulated gate bipolar transistor) inverters with pulse width modulation and an 80C196 microprocessor controller. Regenerative breaking. Batteries were thirty two 6 volt maintenance free lead acid gel 160AH monoblocks. They had an on-board 200 volt charger for use with a standard 10 amp domestic power outlet.

The 1993 Aurora entrant in the across Australia Solar Challenge had some interesting design ideas. Each series connected solar cell needs to receive the same amount of sunlight. This is a difficult trick when mounted on a curved car body. They overlapped the "buried contact" solar cells to provide a larger surface

on curved areas than on flat, such that from above, each cell appeared the same size. The solar controllers came from Queenslander Stuart Watkinson, well known for power controller design.

Pacific Solar recently commissioned a pre-production pilot plant to make solar cells five times larger than its development centre could produce. They are thin film crystalline silicon on glass, with each cell 30x40cm. Commercial production expected by the end of 2000. The first factory will produce 20 mega Watt of modules a year, sufficient for 7000 homes. Each module will be about one metre square and include a modular inverter for direct wiring into the house mains.

Year 2000 Bug

Not a bug. It was a conscious (and correct) decision to save what was then scarce and valuable computer memory and processing, by having year dates occupy only sufficient space for two decimal digits, namely 00 to 99. The problem was, people didn't give up using the programs after a few years, while the people who wrote them were expecting to rewrite programs as needed.

Conceptually, solving Year 2000 problems is simple. Identify everything that uses a short date, and change it. The trouble is, many of the systems that will have this problem are no longer documented. There may well be no-one still alive who knows what was done with them.

You could try to get insurance against Year 2000 problems, but most insurance companies won't provide cover. Probably be expensive, if they do agree, and they will almost certainly demand a great effort at avoiding the problem. The insurance company I have my house insurance with now explicitly excludes anything relating to calendar problems from their house insurance policies.

You should write to all your suppliers, and the manufacturers of all the equipment you use, seeking assurances that there are no Year 2000 issues with their service or equipment. You may not like the answers, or you may not be able to get answers.

You can test equipment with known ways of changing dates, by doing so. Some problems dates may be 1st January 1999 (because calculations may range a year ahead - recall that for the past few years credit card expiry dates never exceeded 1999). 1st July 1999, because the financial year carries into 2000. Some people think 9 September 1999 may be a problem, as some old programs used 9999 as the end point for inputting data. Obviously 31 December 1999 and 1st January 2000.

Incidentally, this is not a Millennium bug. The first year AD was year one, not year zero, so only 99 years had passed at 100 A.D. The Millennium occurs at midnight 31st December 2000 (however I'd suggest celebrating it on the incorrect earlier date anyway ... and have the true party on the real Millennium).

I briefly thought there might be some work to be had in patching Year 2000 code problems. However upon looking at the reactions from insurance companies and lawyers, I now believe the law suits will be flying. I wouldn't even give free advice on Year 2000 problems now, in case someone sues me.

Down to Earth

If anyone else were writing this, it would be about sensible advice. However I'm writing about whether your hifi amplifier should be earthed (grounded).

Once all appliances were earthed, as a safety measure. If a short developed between an active power line and the (metal) case, the current flow through the case to the connected earth would blow the fuse, thus protecting the user. High gain amplifiers need an earth to reduce hum, and help decrease external electrical noise pickup. You did need to be careful about ground loops, but that simply meant having one master earth via the amplifier for the whole system. I wasn't the only one who thought that way. Jim Rowe, editor of Electronics Australia thought so, and so did Neville Thiele and Cyril Murray, who know more about speaker and amplifier design than I ever will.

If you double earth the amplifier, then the stray capacitance in the power transformer can cause the amplifier to 'float' at a high voltage with respect to earth, which gives a real good chance of inducing hum via the pickup cartridge, cassette head wiring, etc. They do float. Connect a CRO or a digital volt meter between chassis and earth and see if that isn't true. As well, RFI filters don't work all that well if not connected to earth.

Now it is difficult to actually earth a double insulated appliance, according to Standards Australia regulation 3250, section 5.2, since Class II (double insulated) appliances must not be provided with an earthing lead. However, single insulation and earthing (Class I) are regarded as equivalent for safety reasons, so it is up to the manufacturer to decide which method to use. Speculation arises that two wire double insulated hifi is now more common because some designs originate in the USA, where two wire mains power outlets are common.

Personally I think dropping earthing is an incredibly silly idea.

Books Read

As usual, much of what is appearing is bad fantasy, masquerading as science fiction. I suspect some of these authors, like Harding, just don't know the difference. Others, like Harland, know the difference, but it doesn't concern them at all. Both at least know how to tell a story, but it is a Hollywood type of story, with a seeming lack of internal consistency. Movie magic novels.

Acts of Conscience by William Barton

Warner, Feb 1998, 386pp, US$5.99
Competent twenty sixth century orbital mechanic uses the nanotech tools of his civilisation well, but his social life is not going well. Corporate power plays and lucky investments leave him owner of a faster than life spaceship. He starts travelling the universe, following a childhood dream, but as he sees how humans have destroyed alien cultures, his dreams begin to die and he wonders if the human race is worth saving.

He is not the only one to wonder. An incredibly old race is contemplating using the weapons of a 400 million year old war to wipe out all humans.

While some sections flag, overall this is way ahead of most sf novels in looking at tough questions.

Slant by Greg Bear

Tor, June 1998, 505pp, US$6.99 A$14.95
Set in the USA in the 2060's, this reminds me of Brin's *Earth* in terms of the realistic feel of the society and technologies. Nanotech is a well established, mature technology. Disease is all under control. Workable psychological methods, based on nano monitors, allow everyone working beyond their natural limits to remain mentally stable. The workday pressure on many people is so intense that these techniques are needed. However there is still prejudice in favour of "naturals". Artificial intelligence works, and there are a small number of (exceedingly expensive) "thinkers" assisting corporations.

Green Idaho rejects the modern world, nor are they the only ones. Some think therapy is a crutch, and want to remove it.

The story is akin to a police mystery, and moves along at a good pace, helped by some nice satire.

Foundation's Fear by Gregory Benford

Harper Prism, March 1998, 608pp, US$6.99
Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy is one of the most loved set of novels in science fiction. In a grand sweep, owing much to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, he told of the end of the Empire, and the rise of the Foundation, all guided by the dead hand of Hari Seldon's Psychohistory. Some neat sweeping concepts there. Asimov later attempted, surprisingly well considering, to fit together all his novels into an even grander single framework. He explained the disappearance of the robots, for example.

In this "second Foundation trilogy", Gregory Benford, Greg Bear and David Brin fill in more on Seldon's Plan.

Benford's long novel covers the politics and dangers of the period when Seldon becomes First Minister under Cleon. Seldon becomes a real action figure, more so than I expected from the academic approach his character is given at the start. Benford actually makes psychohistory sound much more plausible as a theory than did Asimov, possibly due to his close attention to academic ideas. He adds some absolutely lovely subplots. I particularly enjoyed the Voltaire simulation, and the satire on post modernists. This was a wonderful read, and I highly recommend it. If the two following novels are in the same class we will have a sequel that exceeds the original trilogy.

Moonrise by Ben Bova

Avon, March 1998, 560pp, US$6.99

Moonwar by Ben Bova

Avon, March 1998, 501pp, US$6.99
Moonbase is a reality, thanks to the Masterson Corporation, but internal power struggles make its continuation chancy, even before a world wide rejection of the nanotechnology that provides the lunar colony with oxygen from regolith. A thirty year family struggle, ending in war, all to keep the colony going. Epic in scope, but curiously flat in parts.

Shards of a Broken Crown by Raymond E Feist

Harper Collins, Dec 1998, 417pp, A$24.95 TPB
Volume four of the Serpentwar Saga.

Masters of Reality The Gathering by Traci Harding

Harper Collins Voyager, October 1998, 658pp, A$14.95
Book Three in The Ancient Futures Trilogy, this fantasy sports a well done science fictional cover by David Harding, which even illustrates a scene from the novel. And it is (mostly) set in the next fifty years. However humans are only spear carriers, all the action is handled by gods (from elsewhere, from Atlantis, etc.) When science is mentioned it is butchered ("inferred vision", p534 ok, maybe that was a type), parsecs used as a measure of distance (must have watched "Star Wars"), and then in a comparison with light speed, makes an orders of magnitude error. The main weakness seems to me that, having billed one character as someone who gets things done, she rushes into all manner of minor action, gets lots of things wrong, and then, in the final climatic scenes, the senior god steps in and fixes everything, using knowledge of events that indicate it could have all been done thousands of years previously. It just didn't hang together.

Taken by Force by Richard Harland

Pan (Macmillan), 1998, 551pp, A$15.95
Sequel to *The Dark Edge*, continues the adventures of Inspector Eddon Brac and Vail ev Vessintor, in yet another isolated group of more than passing strange people, with yet another set of serial killings. It is a murder mystery, with heaps of fantasy in the actions of the character Vail.

This has the surface trappings of science fiction, however it is embarrassingly bad science fiction. It has all the scientific plausibility of *Space Train*, if any of you recall that klunker. The author either never took

any sort of science course, or else is deliberately treating his audience with contempt. Asteroids with high surface gravity? Ships that drift from the galactic rim in not more than a century. Lots of ships wandering past an unpopulated solar system so pirates can capture them. The story underpinnings are bullshit.

However Harland obviously knows this, and is more intent on exploring his characters in what is more like a mystery horror tale than SF. Decidedly not to my taste, but your mileage may vary.

Last on Earth by Marilyn Kaye

Avon, Oct 1998, 186pp, US$4.99
Twenty five teenagers inherit the earth when everyone else disappears. Teenage angst, little Hitlers, and not all that well done at that. First in a series to avoid, I'd say.

Eternity Road by Jack McDevitt

HarperPrism, April 1998, 403pp, US$5.99
Although this has elements of "quest" stories, McDevitt brings fine writing to each of his stories. This evokes a fine picture of a group seeking an understanding of the Roadmakers, whose ancient ruins dot the American landscape. They come across other groups who have advanced somewhat beyond what they had in their wilderness area, and clues to a store of lost books, in a location known as Haven.

Myst The Book of D'Ni by Rand Miller with David Wingrove

Bantam (Transworld), Dec 1998, 337pp, A$15.95
For Myst fans.

The Last Continent by Terry Pratchett

Doubleday (Transworld), June 1998, 281pp, A$35
The wizards at Unseen University were having a little problem with morphic instability, manifested in the Librarian (not his True Name) morphing from an ape (which was not his original form) into other objects. Rincewind had been assistant Librarian at the time the Librarian originally changed, and therefore may know the Librarian's True Name, of great aid in changing the Librarian to some more stable form. Even the author doesn't mention whether Rincewind might have, however inadvertently, been responsible for the original change. However Rincewind appeared to have ended up in EcksEcksEcksEcks, and no-one knew where that was. As a wizzard, Rincewind was totally inept (he also couldn't spell "wizard"), but he did seem to have a certain talent for survival under the blazing sun of 4ecks, even if it was by falling into waterholes whenever he needed a drink.

I have no idea what Pratchett's UK and US readers will make of this particular Discworld novel, however for Australian readers, it manages to include many icons of Australian existence. Watch Rincewind learn to make thongs. Watch him invent Vegemite. Watch him deal with drop bears (even though they don't exist). Watch him meet Mad Max. Watch him outdo Ned Kelly, and watch him be the swaggy in Waltzing Matilda. Look for the particularly sensible approach taken to politicians in 4ecks. Australians, get this one (but try not to read it anyplace where those around you will be bothered by your rolling on the floor laughing).

User Friendly by Spider Robinson

Baen, February 1998, 282p, US$5.99
Collection of short stories plus a few articles and speeches from the ever entertaining Spider Robinson. Short stories are very often the best showcase for science fiction, and at his best Spider Robinson is very, very good indeed.

Splashdance Silver by Tansy Rayner Roberts

Bantam (Transworld), Sept 1998, 386pp, A$14.95
Young writer, winner of the recent George Turner prize. A fast paced and funny fantasy in the Terry Pratchett style. Bigbeard's daughter didn't want to be a pirate, but it is the family tradition. She didn't want to be a witch, and have to save the World, but when your grandfather turns out to be a God, sometimes you have to do your part. Of course, she shouldn't have caused all the trouble in the first place, but it wasn't as if it were deliberate. She certainly shouldn't have trusted Aragon Silversword, Champion of Emperors and betrayer of them also. In fact, none of the pirate crew could be trusted, and especially not the apprentice.

Illegal Alien by Robert J Sawyer

Harper Collins, 1998, 319pp, A$12.95
Aliens arrive on earth, they seem friendly enough, but then one of their first friends is horribly murdered, and it appears one of the friendly aliens did the deed.

Most of the novel is courtroom drama, although there is a SF subplot. In the fast paced story, Sawyer makes some telling points about the nature of the justice system, jury trials, the purpose of lawyers, and their essential conflict with the stated nature of justice, and much else we take for granted in our society. There have been calls in Australia recently for a rethink of the judicial system. A novel such as this makes one think the problem is more widespread than in just one country. Sawyer has done a previous novel *The Terminal Experiment*, making similar points. I believe this is a better work.

Zodiac by Neal Stephenson

The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988, 283pp
An eco-thriller, second work (the first was *The Big U*) by Stephenson, who later became very popular in SF circles with *Snow Crash* and *The Diamond Age*.

Features a smart ass, technically aware, eco-saboteur who really has a mean and nasty mind, up against a corporation that really will try anything, provided they can get away with it. It had some pretty neat scenes, and foreshadows some of the nature of *Snow Crash*.

The Searchers - City of Fire by Chet Williamson

Avon (Transworld), Aug 1998 (Oct 1998), 340pp, US$5.99 A$14.95
CIA team assigned to debunk psychic events find this is a cover for a larger deception. Obvious play for the *X Files* market. Seems well enough written, but not aimed at science fiction readers.

LoCs

Julie Vaux

If you're looking for a good sf novel to curl up with I recommend *SLANT* which I managed to acquire temporarily via library loan ... not so much a sequel as an accompaniment to *Queen of the Angels*!

Pamela Boal

PJBoal@aol.com Fri Oct 17 04:49 EST 1997
Subject: Thanks for Gegenschein 75-79
Although I find e-mail most useful I am still not a fan of the web. I find it time consuming, frequently frustrating (because I can't find things), costly (in phone charges) and hard on the eyes. Though when we come home from our final trip this year (we are just home for today) I will try to find your web page.

Neil Kaden

kaden@flash.net Wed Nov 12 14:49 EST 1997
Subject: Ditto-X pics
I may not yet have a trip report for Ditto-X/Octocon-34 in a zine, but I already have the photos to illustrate it on my web site. Check out the www.flash.net/~kaden/Photos/Kaden_Photo_Gallery.html on my web pages (access via my Home Page for a frame-based index to all my pages). I think I got at least 80% of the attendees (and *all* the participants who were at the ultra-exclusive Dead Dog Party). A resounding THANKS to Roger & Pat Sims, Bill Bowers, Bill Cavin, and all the others who made it possible. Note also info on the next Ditto on my skiffy topics page.

Edwina Harvey

e.harvey@unsw.edu.au Thu, 13 Nov 1997
Subject: Books and Geg
If you still have books looking for a new home, I'd be happy to take on a box or two and endeavour to sell them at various functions to raise money to donate to Juvenile Diabetes for FOLCC (or the Friends of Linda Cox Chan). Your readers might remember Linda; an active Sydney fan who passed away from diabetes complications in late 1991.

Through the sale of a large donation of books from John Tipper we were able to donate $140 to the charity earlier this year. It would be nice to keep the fundraising activities ticking over.

In reply to Richard Faulder's letter in *Geg 80*, I have no qualms at all with being described as a neo-fan. At the time of A in 85, I was fairly new to attending conventions; certainly more naive about fandom politics. (I often wish I could return to that state of grace). I was peripherally aware of the splintering he referred to.

The positive and long lasting effects I mentioned was seeing a number of my contemporaries become more active fans. Ian Gunn and James Allen in particular have contributed a lot to fandom in the past decade or so. As I recall, they were both "blooded" at the Worldcon in '85 and jumped in boots and all to try new fandom activities (MSFC & ANZAPA among others). There were others who were similarly affected in a myriad of other ways, trying their hands at costuming, publishing, writing and artwork for example, because they saw others doing it and were encouraged to "get in there and have a go."

Okay, so a Worldcon isn't everybody's cup of tea. And yes, Karen Herkes is right when she says "a new solo-interest fan probably wouldn't be interested in attending a Worldcon", but why can't we leave the door open? Let them make the decision for themselves. Show them what a con is all about and maybe they'll want to join in ? It seems a much better policy than slamming the door in the faces of potential Worldcon attendees, and telling them they're not welcome; which you seemed so intent on implying in your original thoughts on the subject.

I believe in it's *purest* form - without the personalities, politics and egos getting in the way (though they seem inevitable, and these days I have a better understanding of why) a Worldcon hosted by Australia is a positive thing for Australian fandom.

Jonathan Scott

From jbs@mpce.mq.edu.au Sat Jan 17 EST 1998
Subject: k.i.t.
I did not reply to Jean's original email about your attack, thinking that she would be inundated with stuff neither of you would want to be bothered hearing. Also, I figured I'd wait a polite interval before venturing any wise cracks, in case you kicked the bucket, as the expression so delightfully goes.

Now, however, I have read your own ill-health reports, it is mid January, you seem out of danger, and I feel that the time has come to point out one significant thing to you...

ANYONE WHO EATS BACON AND EGG MCMUFFINS DESERVES TO DIE.

Justin Semmel

charley@alphalink.com.au Mon Jan 19 EST 1998
Subject: Lie long and prostate
Well I take it on assumption that you're still alive to send me fanzines from the one that rocked up in my letter box. What a dreadful thing to happen.

I'm glad it was mild enough that you can at least do a rethink of what you're doing and where you're going. A rethink can keep you alive for the next forty years (according to my friend, Gen, whose dad had a nasty heart attack while young. He went off to become a specialist photographic consultant, doing stuff I don't know much about).

I've seen a few people come through pretty drastic situations like this, so I think you will too, though from your fanzine it might be time to cut back on the physical labour. My dad had quite a heart attack about ten years ago. He was thought to have 6 months to live, because a tumour had grown inside his heart, and he had lost 75% of its function, and it had become very weak. But he's still up and kicking now, a very active man, who rests twice a day for half an hour, and does a lot of want he wants. (The fact that he's a bit obsessive compulsive should be noted too. It means that he is almost always working on something, and has the same sort of wiry frame that you do. This gives him and you the advantage of fairly low blood pressure, and a heart

that probably will recover nicely)

So, hang in there mate. There's a nice bottle of bourbon I want to share with you!

Lloyd Penney

1706-24 Eva Rd. Etobicoke, ON CANADA M9C 2B2
Edwina Harvey brings up some cogent points on Worldcon ... I've probably told you this story already, but whatthehell ... in 1994, several of the local fanatical Trekfen grouped together to go to the Winnipeg Worldcon. Some of them arrived and were disappointed to find that the place was not swarming with Star Trek actors. They expected the World Star Trek Convention, and were sorely disappointed. They went home early. The rest stuck around, and had their eyes opened and minds expanded by the variety of interests, activities and people the Worldcon covered. One even told me that she was beginning to see why I liked going to Worldcons so much. Some of these people have taken the step of participating in other local fannish activities. Edwina, I hope other Australian mediafen will take that opportunity to see what goes on beyond the small corner of fandom media fandom occupies. However, tradition does dictate that a World Science Fiction Convention is largely literary, and will cater mostly to that crowd, with some attention paid to surrounding and associated interests.

Good thing Rich McAllister didn't go to Calgary in 1994 for Worldcon ... it wasn't there. It was in Winnipeg.

76 ... A Worldcon is an expensive proposition, no matter where it is. Expectation have been built up over time as to what a Worldcon included, and as you're finding that out now, the Toronto in 2003 bid is already discovering the costs involved. Reading about all the other bids is sending us to school, and will make our efforts (should we win) a little easier. Fortunately, we do have some allies in the tourism industry, and they are giving us invaluable information and assistance.

And, a grin, a laugh and a tip of the tattered hat to Leanne Frahm for her wonderful poem on the Battle of Worldcon in '96...

David Thayer says web sites and e-mail will take over fandom? Say it isn't so! The Glades of Gafia will beckon many of us at that time. Right now, the Net and Web are responsible for conventions and clubs declining in numbers. Give me a good paper fanzine and fun convention any day.

78 ... On your next trip to Las Vegas, you'll have to go see the new Star Trek theme building. I gather it looks like a starship or DS9-type space station, with Ferengi, Cardassians and Klingons wandering about.

Of all the books you list, there's one I have read ... The Transmigration of Souls by William Barton. You're right, it is a strange book, but with some smooth explaining, the book actually holds together, and creates a high, hard-SF adventure that was a lot of fun to read.

William. M. Breiding

From wbreiding@juno.com Thu Feb 12 EST 1998
Subject: Loc (?) to Gegenshein
I have had little contact with Australia fandom; in fact only with Irwin Hirsh when he was in Apa-50, but I have always found down under fandom to be of interest when I have run across it. Has anyone done a history of Australian Fandom?

I was slightly disappointed that when you were with the Haldeman's they didn't take you to Cross Creek, Florida, the home of Marjorie Rawlings, the author of "The Yearling" and many great short stories about rural Florida in the nineteen thirties. It is just a short jaunt from Micanopy. There is also a rather incredible Pet Cemetery just outside of Micanopy. The next time you visit Joe & Gay, be sure to impress upon them that you want to see these things!! As many times as I had driven through and/or visited Micanopy when I was staying in Gainsville (total of a couple of months) I never stopped to eat at Mildred's -- from your report I'm sorry that I hadn't.

Judith Hanna

jehanna@gn.apc.org Tue Mar 10 1998
Joseph somewhat disappointed by the mild balminess of Sydney, when he was craving baking debilitating Mad Dogs and Englishmen heat. Mind you, I kept him away from the steamy interior and we concentrated on harbourside Sydney, riding the ferries about -- including a river-trip to Parramatta, visiting Balmoral where I used to live, and taking the kiddies swimming in a sheltered bit of Manly Beach. Then in Canberra, Kojonup and Perth, JN got the real heat he craved, and sat in it -- to the concern of us real Aussies who kept asking if he was alright, if he wouldn't rather come into the shade, if he was slathered with sun-block, etc...

Joseph T Major

From jtmajor@iglou.com Fri Mar 20 1998
Subject: Gegenschein 80 LoC
I meant to get this done after Ditto, but I let it slip and found out why I have to get everything done the moment I think of it.

New Books:
You comment that character development is somewhat inhibited in "SW novels using the Lucas characters". Which is generally true of media adaptations. TV episodes are normalizing; the characters are expected to come back to the way they were in the beginning so the writer of the next episode can start from a known basis. And so with adaptations of TV shows and movies.

Back in the eighties, when it looked as if shared-world fiction was going to be the coming thing, I noted that this, for all its alleged superiorities, had the problem that every contributor had a number of characters who could not be changed -- the other writers' characters. And indeed the writer could not make any definitive change to the setting, only the editor could do that. All which served to vitiate the writing, and it is not surprising that they did not survive. I think _Wild Cards_, the superhero SF shared world, is the only one left, and then comics have that sort of media setup.

That is, they could not use my image of Jabba the Hutt being chased across the sands of Tattoine by Chewie, Han, Leia, and Luke carrying above their heads a giant salt shaker, until he crosses a dune and finds a swimming pool full of beer, which inexorably draws

him until he climbs on the diving board, falls in, and blissfully dies.

Did you know, by the way, that Rudy Rucker is from Louisville?

LoCs:
Birkhead: I have a Darwin fish bumper sticker which I bought from the Electric Eggs table -- there are enough hard-shell Baptists around here that I did not put it on, though.

Did a Russian invent radio?
There always seem to be claimants coming out of the wilderness after any great invention, claiming to have done it first but never bothered to get proof. E.g. Whitehead, Ader, etc. claiming to have usurped the Wright brothers.

Kentucky has a similar claimant for radio, a fellow named Nathan Stubblefield who lived in the western part of the state, near the Mississippi River. As usual, he was the local hero who never bothered to go national, probably because he would have had problems supporting his claim.

Allen J. Baum

abaum@pa.dec.com Mon, 6 Jul 1998
Wow, I thought that bit about no phone, TV, email account, etc. was joking, but I guess I was wrong.

F M Busby

Fmbusby001@aol.com Fri Jul 10 1998
Subject: Re:Keeping in touch
Yes I've owed you a note or loc or commiseration or SOMETHING, since half-past the beginning of time. Have been glad to read of your progressive improvement since your cardiac caper. Meanwhile, back in March I turned myself in to the chop shop for a couple of new arteries to put my legs back on the circulation route. It seems to have worked rather well, but don't ever go into Seattle's Swedish Hospital unless you are in superb good health at the outset. If you intend to get out alive, that is. That place is run in the classic tradition established by Torquemada.

Lloyd Penney

1706-24 Eva Rd. Etobicoke, ON CANADA M9C 2B2
August 31, 1998
80...I don't I've yet read much of Janice and Alan's trip report. I'd love nothing better than to come and visit with the lot of you, but only the national lottery's burdening me with untold wealth could ever make that come about.

I have not read Spider Robinson's *Lifehouse*, but I had it highly recommended to me for a strange reason...one enthusiastic reader said there are two characters the spitting images of Yvonne and myself. After your review, Eric, I'm no longer certain this is a good thing. However, I have ordered the book from Bakka, so I shall make that judgement for myself.

It is hard to believe that senior fans like F.M. Busby, Bill Bowers and even Mike Glicksohn are on-line. I suspect, though, that they use the Internet as I would...simply as a way to avoid postage costs, and to make the mail move much faster.

81...I had considered myself a candidate for a heart attack, given my own stressful work situation...I have just changed jobs to one that is fairly stress-free, but the old boss can't take the hint. He's threatening to sue me. I'm almost certain that he can't, but he's manic enough to keep trying.

Wish we could have been at that Ditto. The first Ditto was in Toronto, and I haven't been to one since. One Ditto was in Ann Arbor, MI, but at the time, we barely had enough money for bus fare.

Another fan who loves Ethiopian food! It has wonderful taste, as long as it stays hot. Once it cools down, there's a strange aftertaste I don't like. So, the only solution is to eat it fast.

Jeff Schalles was at the Baltimore Worldcon, but Geri was not... the pressures of work kept her at home. I missed her this year, and we've only met once.

82...All non-American currencies have taken a beating against the US$. The Canadian dollar stands at 64 cents or so, and I gather the Australian dollar hangs at about 60 cents.

The public response to the Internet seems to be on the wane. Many people are giving up their Internet accounts, even the free ones, and their web sites as well, finding that the least enjoyable part of maintaining those websites is updating them. It's cooler to have the site than to have anything to put on it. You may be getting away from an awful lot, but you are going to a more restful lifestyle. I suspect that should you semi-gafiate, you may miss fannish follies after a while.

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