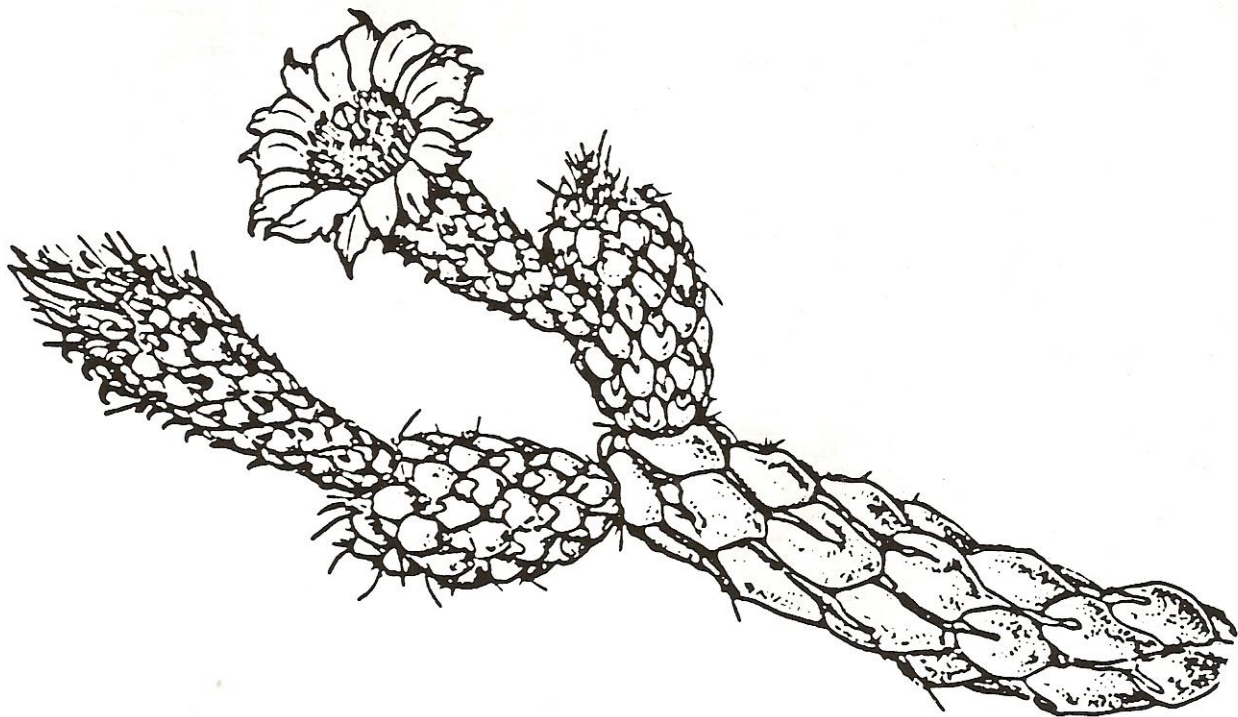


OPUNTIA #4



## OPUNTIA #4

November 1991

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OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It can be had for \$1 per issue, letter of comment, or trade for your zine. All back issues are still available at \$1 per issue.

ART CREDITS: The cover is from "The Native Cacti of California" (1968) and depicts Opuntia ramosissima, done by artist Lucretia Breazeale Hamilton. The illo on page 7 was done by an unknown artist for the May 1833 issue of SATURDAY MAGAZINE, and depicts O. ficus-indica. Page 3 is Fred T. Jane's work from the April 1895 issue of Pall Mall Magazine.

EDITORIAL: I buy other SF prozines occasionally but I only but two continuously, Analog and On Spec. Quite an odd combination to be sure, since they are polar opposites in content, frequency, and circulation. In the September 1991 Analog (page 9) is a rather disgusting ad by Questar (Warner Books) touting Ken Kato's epic called "Yamato - A Rage in Heaven". The blurb reads: "AD 2425. Yamato, the imperialistic, tyrannical Japanese Sector of colonized space has smashed treaties and brazenly conquered peaceful peoples. Its powerhungry emperor, armed with a wealth of devastating weapons and a billion devoted, hi-tech samurai, has Amerika in his sights. And unless the American colony galvanizes its forces against this fierce enemy, Yamato will unleash its might ... and enslave Amerika!"

Why was this rehash of Yellow Peril pulps allowed to see the light? I am surprised that no one has filed a complaint about the racism in this book. Substitute Israel for the Japanese, and the screaming would have been deafening.

[Change of subject]

The July 5, 1991, issue of PUBLISHERS WEEKLY had some interesting figures on the USA - Canada trade in publishing. About half of all books exported from USA go to Canada. Great Britain takes 1/3 as many books as Canada, and Australia's imports from USA are about 1/6. Surprisingly, Japan is the fourth largest customer, taking almost as many as Australia. The USA ratio of exports to imports ranged from 50/50 to 60/40 over the last two decades. In other words, the Americans imported about the same quantity as they exported. As a % of all book sales in USA, exports only accounted for 6% to 9.5% of sales.

Depressingly, Canada is only the fifth largest source of books imported into USA, behind Great Britain, Hong Kong, Japan, and Italy. The trade balance over the Canada-USA border is ten to one in favour of the USA. The Brits, by contrast, have about a 20% trade surplus over the USA.

A section on the numbers of titles issued from 1986 to 1988 shows that Canada and Australia both issued about the same number of books. In 1988, Canada published 7550 titles to the American quantity of 52069. Since the USA has ten times Canada's population, one would have expected it to put out 75500 titles or so. Some food for thought. The most prolific countries, in order, are USSR (83000 titles), Germany (West with about 68000 titles; adding in East Germany brings in another 6500), Great Britain (62000), USA, and Japan and South Korea tied for fifth place (about 42000).

I have recently heard complaints that USA publishers, hassled by paperwork, may reduce exports into Canada because of the General Sales Tax. After eight months of GST, the chain bookstores don't seem to have altered their stock much; American mass market paperbacks still dominate the shelves. It will be interesting to see what happens in the next few years.

## ANOTHER REASON WHY I DON'T TAKE SERIOUSLY THE SPECIAL-INTEREST GROUPS

Speaking of GST, I was rather amused at the booksellers' campaign against it on the grounds that the tax would increase illiteracy because people couldn't afford the extra 7%. Do illiterate people buy that many books? And if they cannot buy, one would think that they would be using the public library. The Calgary Public Library is the largest in Canada, but what percentage of their customers are illiterate? GST certainly didn't seem to affect their circulation figures very much.

Illiteracy is a social problem, not an economic problem. Turn the GST argument around. If bookstores decreased their prices by 14%, the illiteracy rate would not decline. So why would GST increase it?

Meanwhile, the video stores are still doing good business. That is where the illiterates go, not bookstores. It is not essential in today's society to be well read because one can always get by with television and radio.

The special-interest groups are always predicting dire consequences whenever their budgets are cut, yet little seems to happen. Their credibility is saved only by the short memories of the general public.

## WINNIPEG WINS CON

I'm certain that most of you already have heard that Winnipeg will host the 1994 World Con. I wasn't a presup-  
porting member but after the success was announced sent in my \$70 for a membership. I wonder if Canfans would be able to get their act together and do some bloc voting for Canuck authors and zines. How about Hugos for On Spec and BSCFAzine? Dare I say Marianne Nielsen for editor? Elisabeth Vonarburg? I'm sure that we could come up with some different choices.



GUESSES AT FUTURITY, NO. 7.  
INTERPLANETARY COMMUNICATION.  
GOLD MINING IN THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON.



## ANDROIDES AND ROBOTS

by Dale Speirs

While browsing through the August 16, 1823, issue of THE MIRROR, I came across an article entitled "Automata and Androides". It begins as follows:

"Automata, or self-moving machines, have been brought to a perfection, which, in former ages, would have been considered as supernatural. The highest class of automata are those which represent human figures, and hence are called Androides."

For someone to write almost 170 years ago that machines had been brought to perfection is a bit sobering in view of our own pride in living in the best of times. Our own machines, the computers, spacecraft, cars, will appear just as quaint to posterity 170 years ahead of us. But what really caught my eye was the use of the word android to refer to mechanical devices instead of test-tube grown artificial constructs.

When the first Star Wars movie came out, there was some fussing over the use of the word "'droids". SF purists were insulted; everyone knows that mechanical creatures are robots, not androids. And yet, it appears that the purists are using the two terms exactly opposite on the original meanings.

The word 'robot' is easy enough to trace. It comes from Karl Capeck's play "R.U.R.", based on the Czechoslovakian word "robota", which means compulsory service or forced labour. From this, modern SF developed the word for mechanical beings, despite the fact that Capek used it for organic beings. In SF, androids are the genuine organic beings, not robots.

The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines an android as an automaton resembling a human being, and dates this word to 1727. I'll take their dating as a given, although

I suspect that it could be traced back earlier. The earliest dictionary in which I found the word was the DICTIONARIUM BRITANNICUM of Nathan Bailey, published in 1730. That entry reads as below.

"Androides: an autometon in the form of a man, which by means of certain springs, and so on, justly contriv'd, walks, speaks, etc."

To sum up then, what we call today robots should more correctly be known as androids, and what we insist to be androids should be labelled robots. It may be a horrible thought, but Star Wars is right, and trufans are wrong.

## CONTRIBUTORS WANTED

I am looking for historical accounts on the history of Canadian fandom, with reference to cities that are not yet written up. I also would like to publish a checklist of Canadian zines. I have a card file with about sixty titles listed, but I have no doubt that it is only a fraction of the zines published. I don't have many listings from before my time in the hobby, so perhaps someone can help out here.

Many people shy away from writing histories because their accounts may be incomplete or written from a personal point of view. So they don't write, and the result is information forever lost. Even a partial history is better than nothing; it provides a starting point for future researchers. And all history is written from a personal point of view, as witness the different ways the War of 1812 is taught in Canadian and American schools, or the treatment Shakespeare gave Richard III.

I left Calgary 06h30, tunnelling through the dark in my trusty Nissan Micra, licence plate OPUNTIA. Destination was NonCon 14, held on the Thanksgiving weekend, October 11 to 13, at the Regency Hotel in Edmonton. As I passed Red Deer at 08h00, the sun was just over the horizon behind me. The weather in Alberta these last few days has been phenomenal. Temperatures were above 25°C, reasonable enough for August but sensational for mid-October. The newspapers say the El Niño current is acting up again, which means a warm winter for Alberta.

North of Red Deer, the flat prairie gives way to glacial knob-and-kettle landscape, with numerous ponds in the low spots and hills crowned by poplar bluffs. I listened to Beatles on the tape deck as I drove; I suppose this dates me as a leftover from the Sixties. There was a strong crosswind but the Micra handled it well. Better, certainly, than the Volkswagen Beetle I drove for many years. Any kind of wind would blow it around, and a strong head-on gust would sometimes almost stop the car. I mention this because when I was attending the University of Alberta in the early 1970s, I drove that Beetle back and forth between Red Deer (where I grew up) and Edmonton countless times. The wind never stops but it always complains. [Robert Runté was already a student there at the time, although I didn't know him then.]

Approaching the Ponoka area, I saw smoke in the sky and assumed that a farmer was burning woodland to convert it to grain fields. Driving nearer, however, it resolved itself into a burning farmstead building, with emergency vehicles clustered around it. Someone was not going to have a nice day.

I arrived Edmonton 09h30. Fifteen years ago, as a university student there, I saw construction begin on Whitemud Drive, a major freeway at the south end of the city. Fifteen years later, they are still working on

it. Like some fanzines, Whitemud Drive will be done Real Soon Now.

Several of the panels I attended were small enough that everyone gathered their chairs into a circle and had a nice chat. Much better, actually, than the usual separation of panelists from the audience, with the panelists huddled behind a rank of tables and the audience sitting at the back of the room with seven rows of empty chairs protecting them from the panelists.

At one such get-together, Cliff Samuels (ConVersion, Calgary) reported on his trip to Chicon, specifically the successful Winnipeg bid for the 1994 WorldCon. The City of Winnipeg sent a chef and an alderman to help the bid, and offered free bus transit to 1994 congoers wearing a badge. Winnipeg was sold as a safe city. The bid party at ChiCon was jammed; no junk food, but lots of fresh veggies and good cooking to freeload on. Winnipeg will have 1500 memberships by the end of 1991, and expects 5000 to 7000 total. Samuels predicted that other Canadian cons in 1994 will suffer attendance problems because congoers will be saving up for Winnipeg. Ron Gillies suggested a ViaCon, that is, book a train from Vancouver via Calgary to Winnipeg.

I didn't agree to being on a Fanzine panel, preferring to be in the audience, but it didn't matter with the panelists mixed in with the audience in a circle of chairs. It was a fairly well attended panel, and general agreement was that fanzines are doing okay. After all, there are more being published in western Canada than ever before.

"Social Evolution of Fandom" was another round-the-campfire group. Almost immediately, this topic was abandoned, and we went on to hidden censorship and how new SF is underground because mass-market publishers won't touch it. Hidden censorship occurs

when authors don't even bother writing something because they know it won't get past the editor or publisher. The panel finally got back on track when Robert Runté pointed out that fandom has evolved in one way with BBSs replacing the letterhacking used by First Fandom. However, there are limitations with BBSing. Users tend to write without thinking, and much of the material is sloppy. An argument on a BBS becomes repetitious quickly. Somewhat like FOSFAX loccers on abortion, I guess.

A more conventional panel, that is, panelists and audience estranged by tables and empty chairs, was "Publishers From Hell". Guest of Honour Guy Gavriel Kay mentioned the time when one of his books was published and he got 25 author's copies. Trouble was, they were the wrong author. Somebody else got his books. The publisher suggested the two of them contact each other and swop. Marianne Nielsen, editor of On Spec, said she would appreciate it if authors, when she phones them to say their story is accepted, would put their hand over the phone before screaming YEEEEEE HAW!. Kay pointed out that one reason for trouble between publishers, editors, and authors, is that few people in the industry have any business training. They are B.A.s or B.Sc.s, instead of B. Comm.s. Douglas Barbour said that large publishers serve Mammom, not Art, and small-press publishers have three people doing the work of eight. He has books from 1983, '85, and '87 waiting to be printed. While it is easy to criticize large publishers for delays, it is difficult to go after a small-press operator who just mortgaged his house to keep the press running. Kay said the only method to avoid troubles is to constantly stay after the publisher and be a nag.

The Art Show was a Déjà Vu Show, with lots of familiar stuff that was at ConText 91 and ConVersion 8. Lela Dowling's work "The Reptile Cafe II" caught my eye. It showed assorted lizards and snakes at a lunch counter dining on flies and mice, but what I noticed immediately was a turtle eating an opuntia. Must be from Galapagos.

Adrian Kleinbergen's 3-d works were good as always, collages and resin casts mounted in small picture frames. Martin Springett (Artist GoH) had prints for sale, these being the cover illustrations for Kay's Fionavar books. Ken Macklin is one of the few artists who can draw proper body proportions and movement; most SF art at cons lacks in this. Murray Lindsay's "Taste Challenge" depicted a miniature alien refuelling its UFO with Pepsi and Coke. A Richard Bartrop line drawing "Casper, the Friendly Shoggoth", showed a cheerful multi-eyed amoeboid smiling and waving its pseudopods.

The NonCon business meeting was Sunday morning. The NonCon 14 program book contained an article by Cath Jackel in which she mentioned that no bids had been received for NonCon 15. As a result, the NonCon Society might have to go into suspended animation. Some midnight bargaining Saturday night at the con produced a bid from Vancouver. An Alberta regional con in British Columbia. Ah well, if the Canadian Association of Aquarium Clubs can have its 1991 con in Ohio, why not? The Vancouver bid asked me to be Fan GoH, but I declined, as I go to cons to be a passive attendee with no responsibilities. I've been on enough aquarium and philatelic show committees to ever want to be on SF cons or panels. Calgary put in a bid for a Thanksgiving 1992 superrelaxicon. Both bids promised to bring in strawberries (the NonCon 14 business meeting started off with a large bowl of strawberries passed around the audience). Vancouver won. They promised it won't rain. Dave Panchyk will be Fan GoH, Secret GoH is R\*\*\*\*\* R\*\*\*\*\*. August 14 to 16 is the date. Tom Tereshima moved an amendment to the NonCon Society constitution to recognize it as a distinct society, which got a huge laugh from the audience. If you don't understand this joke, you probably live outside Canada.

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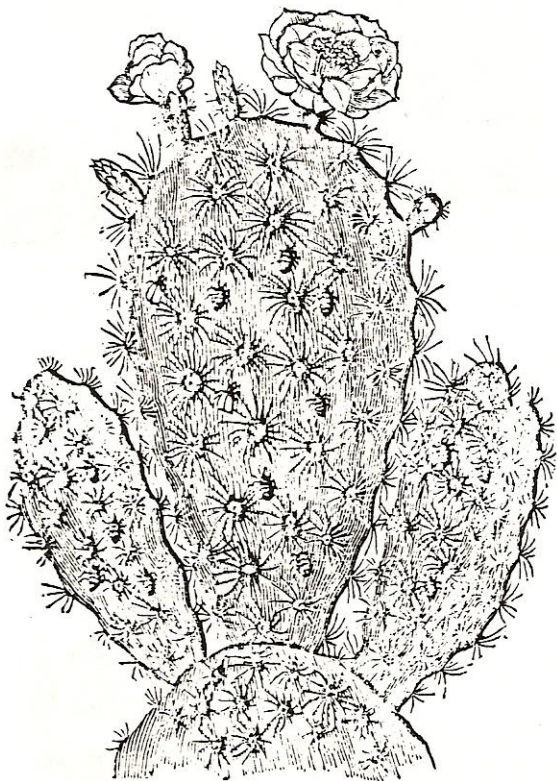
The last panel I attended was "Magazine Publishing". At the start, panelists outnumbered the audience five to four, but the balance gradually shifted as more people trickled in as the panel progressed. Representatives on hand were from On Spec, Horizons SF, Sepulchre, and Senary. I finally found out how On Spec's publisher, the Copper Pig Writer's Society, got its name. It originally started out as a weekly meeting of writers who had to present a new piece of writing each week or else pay a fine of 25¢. The fines were kept in a copper piggy bank and used to fund club parties. The latest issue of On Spec was released at NonCon 14.

I would have stayed for the On Spec release party, but immediately after the panel I had to leave in order to make it back to Calgary in time for a family dinner. The con never seemed crowded. I don't know the attendance figures but they were probably about the same as last year, which was a break-even con.

#### ASTRONOMICAL VEXILLOLOGY

Lots of flags have stylized stars on them, such as the American flag or those of now-defunct Communist regimes. But there are only two constellations shown on flags. What are they?

Australia, New Zealand, Western Samoa, and Papua New Guinea have the Southern Cross on their flags. Alaska has the Big Dipper on its flag.



EOPUNTIA DOUGLASSII: THE CACTUS THAT NEVER WAS  
by Dale Speirs

Science does not smoothly progress in one direction from fact to hypothesis to experiment to theory to dogma. It stumbles and weaves about like a drunken sailor, it goes up the wrong streets and into cul-de-sacs like a tourist without a road map. I write here not of deliberate and wilful fraud, but rather the innocent mistake or jumping to unsupported conclusions based on incorrect judgments. In modern times we have had polywater and cold fusion to divert resources away from better uses. In the field of palaeobotany, there is one case which is quite appropriate for this zine.

The Green River formation of Utah is of Eocene age, about 50,000,000 years old. The shales of this formation are famous for two things. They are a possible source of oil, and they are a definite source of some of the best preserved fossils in the world. The Green River formation is made up of lake deposits into which countless animals and plant parts were washed and subsequently fossilized. They are a mecca for fossil collectors, both amateur and professional.

In Watson, Uinta County, a collector named Earl Douglass worked his way through Green River deposits in 1926. At that time, oil shale was the coming thing, as it still would be fifty years later. During the middle 1920s, a large number of test pits were dug around the county and Douglass knew many of the wildcatters looking for rock-bound oil. He got them to set aside any fossils they could, so in addition to his own collecting, he had many others on the lookout. Douglass was working along the White River canyon with a friend named Nile Hugel, when the specimens that form the subject of this article were collected. Shown at right is the type specimen of what was considered to be an opuntia-type cactus. [This is a third-generation copy of the original photo so it might not be too legible.]





Almost twenty years later, the specimen was donated by Mrs. Douglass to the Carnegie Institution of Washington, which in turn passed it on to the University of California at Berkeley, where it came to the attention of Dr. Ralph W. Chaney. His name appears frequently in the annals of palaeobotany, firstly as he described numerous fossil floras, and secondly as other palaeobotanists had to go back several decades later and correct all his errors. His main failing was that he described plants on superficial impressions. If an ancient leaf looked like a poplar, then he would describe it as such without much detailed study.

And so it was that he decided the Douglass specimen was an opuntia of some type. Opuntias still grow in Utah, and indeed Chaney mentions them growing a short distance away from the fossil locality. The fossil was described in the October 1944 issue as Eopuntia douglassii. The generic name means "dawn cactus". Geologically, angiosperms (flowering plants) had evolved only a few tens of millions of years prior to the Eocene, an eyeblink in palaeontological terms. The presence of this fossil was therefore somewhat anomalous. Since cacti live in arid areas where preservation is non-existent, no one could prove when they evolved. Aridland plants are seldom preserved unless they happen to be washed into a river or lake and buried by sediments, as must have happened with Eopuntia.

Altogether, four specimens of Eopuntia were found. The type specimen, upon which the species was founded, shows three joints or pads, one fruit, and one fruit with remnants of a flower still attached.

The matter rested there for a number of years, but was not entirely forgotten. About a decade later, Roland W. Brown, of the U.S. Geological Survey, Washington, D.C., began to study fossil specimens which did not fit into the scheme of things, one of which was Eopuntia. In the January 1959 issue of the Journal of Paleontology, he

re-examined the specimens and came to the conclusion that Eopuntia was actually the tuberous rootstock of a sedge. Brown then renamed this fossil as Cyperus filiferus.

But the matter was still not put to rest forever. The fossil collectors were coming up with additional specimens out in the field. Knowledge gleaned from the extra samples suggested that while they were probably sedges, they were not Cyperus. Once more the fossils were written up in the literature, this time in the September/October 1962 issue of the Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club. The author was Herman Becker, of the New York Botanical Garden. He renamed the species as Cyperacites filiferus, and there, as far as I know, the matter remains.

But misinformation dies hard, and in this particular case, Eopuntia is constantly being resurrected by cactus fanciers. They come across Chaney's paper in the American Journal of Botany and immediately rush the misinformation into their local clubzine. Because the two rebuttals to Chaney were published in different journals, few people know of them and they are consequently overlooked. It is a peculiarity of modern science, and sloppy work, that many scientists do not publish a rebuttal in the same journal as the original article. This would be like a loccer criticizing a story in Analog, with the author replying a year later in Amazing.

Are there any fossil cacti? Well, some remains are known from cave deposits in southwestern United States, but they are only a few thousand years old, and of no value in determining the evolution of cacti. On comparative morphology of extant species, together with their current distributions, it is generally agreed that cacti originated in the Caribbean or Mexico and spread both north and south. Today, Opuntia is found from Patagonia to Alberta.

## LETTERS OF COMMENT

[Comments in square brackets are those of the editor.]

FROM: Lloyd Penney  
412 - 4 Lisa Street  
Brampton, Ontario, L6T 4B6

1991-7-21

Garth Spencer's article on Calgary fandom was very interesting to read. Canadian fandom doesn't have enough impartial fanhistorians. A couple of additions ... Lexie Pakulak moved to Calgary from Toronto, where she spent some time putting together a Star Trek fanzine with 1970s Toronto SF fan Margaret Rossiter.

After a frantic spurt of fan activity, Halifax fandom is consolidating, and communicating with the rest of Canadian fandom. Two regular conventions (one in November, one in March) are on the go, plus a newsletter called "The Seeress".

[Have you got addresses for Haligonians? Would like to make contact myself to trade zines.]

1991-8-6

You mention that ConVersion attracts the media, with far from the best results. With Ad Astra, we've tried to use the media only for listing the con as an Upcoming Event only, with mixed success. There were a few film crews at this year's con, but they asked to come. One crew was with the CBC, doing a documentary on SF conventions, and the interpersonal relationships possible when one attends such a gathering of people with similar interests, such as friendships, attachments, engagements, and marriages. It should be part of the CBC series "Life: The Programme".

Meanwhile, the local Trek con launched an impressive media blitz, and its membership totalled an amazing 3250. I don't want that kind of number for Ad Astra, and Trek

is more publicly marketable than literary SF, yet it shows what the media can do. Still, the newspaper articles on the Trekcon showed people in costume acting silly. Ad Astra relies on the fannish press, room parties, and the freebie table to advertise, and I'm sure most SF cons do, too.

In the Grimbleton Down article, two things, I believe have already happened. The implantation of a cow with the embryo of its twin has already taken place, and last summer a local student did develop a black-and-white photograph in Lake Ontario, rife with chemicals. Fiction takes time to become reality, sometimes forever, and sometimes a very short time indeed.

Leanteri Polvikoski ... what kind of plant is that, Dale? Fooled no one on that name, I imagine.

[Leanteri is not a plant. The Polvikoski's emigrated from Isokyro, Finland, to Alberta, and settled on a farm just north of my birthplace of Eckville.]

FROM: Thomas Sadler  
422 W. Maple Avenue  
Adrian, MI 49221

1991-7-29

Until rather recently, the immediate area in which I live had, as far as I'm aware, no sort of organized fandom. In fact, I'm not sure if there were even any acknowledged fans anywhere within my hometown. For that reason, I find articles on fannish activities in various cities and regions quite interesting. "Towards a Calgary Fanhistory" proves that there was and is more such fannish activity in that part of Canada than in and around Adrian. That's not to say I could not have located places that were equally active or nearly so if I had tried. Up until a few years ago,

[continued next page]

I never really tried because I was one of those closet fans who enjoyed SF without having any contact with other fans even via correspondence. Here's hoping you feature more such articles in future Opuntias.

[I certainly do hope to publish such items, and if any readers out there have items on Canadian fanhistory, you know my address. If you have American fanhistories, I strongly recommend they be sent to the zine "Mimosa", in care of Dick and Nicki Lynch, Box 1270, Germantown, Maryland 20875. \$2 will get you a sample copy of Mimosa.]

Grimbledon Down sounds like a wild, crazy organization where the unexpected and unusual are the norms. Sort of like some aspects of real-life bureaucracies, and the type of place that an SF fan might enjoy visiting.

"Plato's Guardians" was equally interesting and thought provoking, and, as the author says, one does not "... know whether to laugh or cry.". I personally have never been able to fathom what, if anything, goes on inside the minds of such people as Mr. Polvikoski mentions in the article. There is indeed a fine line between censorship and editing, and too many people fail to see the difference.

FROM: Ned Brooks  
713 Paul Street  
Newport News, Virginia 23605

1991-7-27

Thanks for Opuntia #3. I think many people would have realized the page 10 cactus illo was from an antique source; artistic conventions were a bit different then. I have an early Durer (a copy in a book, that is) in which what are apparently meant to be shadows of stones in the road look more like 'speed lines', as if we were to imagine that the stones were streaking across the ground. What is the post-like object to the right in this illus-

tration? Is this part of the cactus, or does the cactus grow on old wood as well as from the ground?

[The jumping-cactus or cholla type opuntias produce woody trunks with age, and the illo shows a section.]

Your homemade justification of the righthand margin looks no worse than what the original WordStar software for IBM PCs would do. I don't think justification is really warranted until after you are using proportional letters, but then I am inherently lazy. Double column doesn't look good with a ragged right margin. I don't often go to the additional labour of double-column, although I like the appearance of it.

[I find that double columns and justifying are not an excessive workload with a typewriter, once I get into the swing of it.]

My sister, who works in a cloth store in Decatur, Georgia, says that a 300 lb member of the Society of Creative Anachronism came in to buy cloth to make tights with. How was this done when tights were actually worn by many people? They could not buy stretch fabrics in Shakespeare's time, they didn't even have rubber yet, much less synthetics. And yet illustrations from the period do show men wearing very close-fitting leggings.

The Grimbledon Down cartoon sounds like fun! The art, from the sample you print, seems a little cruder than I like in cartoons.

[The blame should go on the reproduction. The original cartoon was about 2 cm high. I enlarged it to 10 cm for the camera-ready copy on 8½ by 11 pages. This faded the black into gray, so I felt-penned the black back in, causing some of the tones to be lost. The image was then reduced about 50% for the printing plate, and copied a final time.]



FROM: Karl Johanson  
4129 Carey Road  
Victoria, B.C., V8Z 4G5

1991-8-2

As to your question about the byte capacity of the human brain, I think it's something over 50.

Your article about the Pogo ad shows a common problem with public attention to something. About a decade ago, two stores opened up next to each other on the main street of Victoria. One rented and sold pornographic videos, the other sold guns, combat gear, fighting knives, weapons books and similar items under the name of "The Survivalist Store". Numerous protests of "Red Hot Video" boosted their number of clients, and the store is still around. The unprotected weapons shop died a quiet death within two years of opening. The protests weren't the only factor involved, but they seemed to be a contributor.

I share your disdain for newspapers hyping some of the arguably less sophisticated parts of conventions. I've managed finally to completely shut up one coworker who always manages to come up with some non-clever unfunny putdown of SF every time I take off for a con. I told him about the Spam cons in the USA. And yes, the media focuses on the Spam can costumes and the cold Spam eating contests, and ignores the more cerebral aspects of the conventions. My coworker bought some SF books at a garage sale which he intended to sell to me. When I politely declined, having read them already, he actually read them himself.

[My mind boggles at what the more cerebral aspects of a Spam con might be. Panels on taste-testing? Collecting labels from the tins? What, if anything, is Canadian Spam?]

In Opuntia #3, Harry Warner Jr. mentioned Snoopy's uncle Spike. Wasn't Spike his cousin?

FROM: Henry L. Welch  
5538 N. Shasta Drive  
Glendale, WI 53209

1991-7-30

Thanks for issues 1, 2, and 3 of Opuntia. Let me respond to each issue in turn.

Issue #1: While I am intellectually aware that Canadian culture differs from that of the USA, I too often slip into the habit of thinking that it is only superficially different from the culture here, or I am biased by Americanized versions as seen on TV, ex. Bob and Doug McKenzie's "Great White North".

[To be fair, while Americans stereotype Canucks, the same is true in reverse. I wonder if Americans have ever stopped to think about the image Hollywood exports to the rest of the world, that of a violent society where drugs and corruption are everywhere.]

As I write this letter though, it occurs to me that vast cultural differences exist between the middle-class white majority in this country as well. The basic culture of southeastern Virginia differs radically from that of southwestern Virginia as does that of Wisconsin. Thus, the idea of a Canadian SF may or may not have meaning.

[Someone once remarked that one of the great tragedies of North America is that the major political division runs east-west (49th parallel) instead of north-south. Western Canada has more in common with western USA than either have with the eastern part of the continent. As far as Canadian SF is concerned, the community is still small enough and mobile that no west versus east divisions can develop. Otherwise, my article would have been titled "What, if anything, is western Canadian SF?"]

[continued next page]

I had an interesting idea for your story contest. However, I'm a terrible writer, and rather than attempt the story, I'll just send you the outline. Working with your statement that opuntias are very adaptable, my idea starts with a sentient, highly-adaptable strain of cacti. I later discovered a story with similar plants ("Seeds of the Dusk" by Raymond Z. Gallun, from *Adventures in Time and Space*, pp 252-278). Through some external mechanism (advent of man, end of ice age, meteorite, etc.) a new virus/bacteria would be introduced which attacks opuntias. The greatest opuntian biochemists go to work and develop a serum to battle the plague. Unfortunately development of this serum causes a chain reaction which destroys the sentience of opuntias, and leaves as a by-product the chemical opuntiol. Maybe this is a cliché, but I can't ever remember reading it anywhere before.

Issue #2: I found Garth Spencer's history of Calgary fandom both disturbing and enlightening. I've been in fandom for about eleven years, with most of my experience limited to the fandom of southeastern Virginia. In this time, I have noticed a number of abortive power plays (usually not very sophisticated), one changing of the guard from incompetent to acceptable, and a number of smaller fringe groups which came and went. This is positively peaceful compared to what has been going on in Calgary. Even the Milwaukee area, which boasts one large schism in the past fifteen years seems placid in comparison. But then again, I hear rumors of what goes on in the New York City area, and I begin to wonder if I've had a sheltered indoctrination or not? Hmmm ...

[This is nothing compared to the aquarium hobby. The directors of the American Cichlid Association, largest aquarium society in North America, are in two different feuds, one with their bulletin editor, and the other with their concom, which has put on two worldcon-type events in recent years.]

Issue #3: "Grimbledon Down" sounds very interesting. I

am curious as to the format. Is it a single frame, three or four frame strip, or a full-page format? This may be irrelevant to its content, but I'm interested in finding out.

[Normally it is a three or four frame strip, but on some occasions takes up a full page.]

FROM: Brian Earl Brown  
11675 Beaconsfield  
Detroit, Michigan 48224

1991-8-9

"Grimbledon Down" sounds like a much funnier comic strip than most that appear in the papers today. It probably helps that, as a strip intended for New Scientist, it actually assumes a certain amount of intelligence from its readers. Some of the strips I see in the Detroit papers are so lacking in humour or artistic ability I don't know why they were ever syndicated. What is particularly sad is that newspapers will drop strips like Batman or Modesty Blaise, excellent continuity strips, in favour of mindless gag-a-day stuff. The newspaper strip reached its zenith with the continuity adventure strips, which makes this all the sadder.

What were they thinking with this "Moma don't allow" ad campaign anyway? But then you've got to wonder about the people who heard that jingle, didn't remember the old song it was based upon (or maybe they did) and felt that this was detrimental to mothers. And you got to wonder where are these people when beer companies start running commercials that are overwhelmingly sexist. Sometimes I just don't think they've got their priorities right.

FROM: Harry Warner Jr.  
423 Summit Avenue  
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

1991-8-2

First of all, I did get the third issue of Opuntia open. It took either four or six minutes, depending on whether you count the preliminary time involved in thinking out the problem before starting actual operations. I hope you're giving a prize or something to the speediest and most efficient recipients in this respect. I didn't damage any portion of the fanzine while opening it.

[Chris Drumm, the SF book dealer, does the same thing for his catalogues. The easy method of opening is to stick your fingernail between the pages and quickly run it along the edges. When I first started mailing out Opuntia, I used short pieces of tape to seal the edges. Unfortunately, some sharp-eyed postie returned them to me on the grounds that they have to be fully sealed on all edges to qualify for the cheaper postage, ie., tape all the way along the edges.]

Your method of obtaining even righthand margins is basically the same as Bob Tucker's system back in the years when he was publishing fanzines. The only difference is that Bob, when stenciling his own prose, would select a word that had the correct number of letters or could be hyphenated at the proper place, to be the last one in each line.

I hadn't heard about the Pogo crisis until reading about it in Opuntia. Now I wonder if that song which the lottery people borrowed for their purpose is to blame for all the deficiencies of the proletariat in the past few decades. I'm not sure when the song was written but I suspect it dates back to the 1930s when I seem to remember having first heard it on hillbilly radio programs. As you probably know, Mama objected first to guitar playing, then to a series of other things the singer intended to do. Could the endless repetitions of the song

as well as the rather rudimentary nature of its words and music have so deeply impressed themselves into the public conscience that all the rebellion, civic disobedience, and crime of the last half of the 20th century resulted from it?

[My favourite explanation for our troubled times was the one put forth by book reviewer David Twiston Davies, who felt that blame should be laid on the influence of James Boswell's diary being published. Specifically that portion known as the London Journal, a breathtakingly frank record of young Boswell's time in the English capital, wherein, among other things, the biographer of Johnson records bouts with "Signor Gonorrhoea". Here's a challenge for you loccers, to write about the craziest hypothesis you've seen that purports to explain our times. Don't make anything up please, just quote me somebody who had all the answers. We'll take Biblethumpers as a given, so no need to mention them.]

Harry Golden's report about a questionnaire imposed on those who want to keep a book out of public school might be applied to authorities who refuse to allow Bibles to be shelved in school libraries.

There must be some SF fans in the Hagerstown area who I don't know about. The last time I went to a worldcon, I learned that two or three women from Hagerstown were on hand but I never ran across them or heard of them again. The newspapers once ran a picture and story about an SF club meeting at the local public library, but the individuals pictured were so alarmingly young and Star Trek oriented that I made no effort to contact them, and I've heard nothing of the club since then. Occasionally I visit a yard sale where practically all the books on display are SF. I tell the owner that I'm in the same organization with the fellow who wrote all these Robert Silverberg books and I met Doc E.E. Smith once at a convention, but this never evokes any interest.



FROM: Alexander V. Vasilkovsky  
Poste restante, General P.O.  
252001, Kiev-1, Ukraine

1991-7-18

Thank you for sending me Opuntia #1 and 2. I liked the attention to the problems of Canadian fandom and SF. The subject is interesting because the problems of cultural autonomy are very real now here in Ukraine, though the situation is somewhat different from what you have in Canada. You may know that during almost all the Soviet period of history, SF, fantasy, and especially horror were oppressed and neglected as genres. But some books were nevertheless published. To survive professionally, SF writers in Ukraine were forced by publishing policy to write mainly in Russian for all-Union distribution. Those who still wrote in Ukrainian were almost never translated into Russian, hence unknown to the all-Union audience, hence their professional prospects were poor. In recent years, the situation has changed, but Ukrainian SF is now defined as SF written in Ukraine by Ukrainian author, either in Ukrainian or in Russian. Some authors wrote (and still write) in Russian, but their SF and especially fantasy should be classified as Ukrainian because they are rooted more in Ukrainian culture, traditions, beliefs, and history. A good example of such an author is Andrei Dmitruk, writer of "The Dream of the Forest Lake", a fantasy novella set in 17th century Ukraine. This novella is Ukrainian to the utmost point, but it was written and first published in Russian, then translated into Ukrainian several months later. During the last few years a number of new authors have emerged, and most of them write in Ukrainian. This new generation is our hope, because they will be able to change the language situation in Ukrainian SF to what it should be.

There are a number of authors in Canada and USA who write in Ukrainian, but I have never seen any mention of their SF&F works. It is understandable, since SF&F as it is now is taken as a phenomenon of English-language

culture, and to write in these genres for a market it means to write in English. And our national culture does have something to show the other cultures, especially in fantasy and horror, because since the beginning of time Ukraine was considered as the witches country. There are great folk traditions of witchcraft and magic, and it was all described in our rich folklore and in literature. Remember Gogol's fantasies (and he was Ukrainian by origin, though he wrote in Russian). To develop Ukrainian fantasy is to promote our country and culture among other countries and cultures, and it is a great and very useful thing to do.

Do all postal workers in Canada know where Ukraine is situated? I ask this because you haven't written USSR in my address. It's okay for me; I prefer it to be without those four letters, but can the mail reach me in this case?

[Western Canada was settled by Ukrainians; in fact it is the second or third language in some places after English. I can't imagine any postal worker not knowing where it is, especially since Canada Post issued four stamps in August 1991 honouring the migration of Ukrainians into Canada. (I'll try and use those on mail to you if I can get the stamps. Right now the postal workers are on strike.) I have heard that the USSR may refuse letters addressed to the republics rather than USSR, but if you got Opuntia, then this may not be true. It is the same as letters to Great Britain; officially they are supposed to say "United Kingdom", but I always write Scotland or England only as the case may be.]

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Harry Andruschak, Jeff Behrnes, Buck Coulson, Chuck Conner, R'ykander Korra'ti, Mark Manning, and Robert Sabella.

FROM: Dale Speirs  
Box 6830  
Calgary, Alberta  
CANADA, T2P 2E7

WHY YOU GOT THIS ZINE

TO:

- \_\_\_ Noblesse oblige.
- \_\_\_ You contributed (this ish).
- \_\_\_ You contributed (next ish).
- \_\_\_ We trade.
- \_\_\_ We should trade. Interested?
- \_\_\_ You sent money. Thanks.
- \_\_\_ How about a letter of comment?
- \_\_\_ This is the last issue you'll  
receive unless you Do Something.