

# OPUNTIA

## #41.1B



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**OPUNTIA** is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment.

**ART CREDIT:** The cover depicts *Opuntia davisii*, by an unknown artist in the 1856 House of Representatives (USA) REPORTS OF EXPLORATIONS AND SURVEYS TO ASCERTAIN THE MOST PRACTICABLE AND ECONOMICAL ROUTE FOR A RAILROAD FROM THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN, Volume 4.

## ZINE LISTINGS

by Dale Speirs

ESCAPE FROM GRAVITY #6 (L1 from Association of Autonomous Astronauts, BM Jed, London WC1N 3XX, England) Community-based space travel organization, aiming to circumvent the traditional government, corporate, and military control of space exploration. So far though, activities consist mainly of

playing 3-sided football, going to dance clubs, and attending conferences in Italy.

ANNA'S BANANA BULLETIN #2 (Probably \$2 or mail art trade such as zine or stickers, from Anna Banana, Box 2480, Sechelt, British Columbia V0N 3A0) Single-sheet newsletter of a mail artist, with a summary of her trip to Italy, news of her fight with a mundane corporation that wants to take the trademark "Anna Banana", and miscellaneous items about bananas such as Caribbean trade wars over the yellow fruit and former Zimbabwe President Canaan Banana being convicted of sodomy in Kenya.

BRAIN CELL #426 (Mail art or zine trade to Ryosuke Cohen, 3-76-1-A-613 Yagumokitacho, Moriguchi-city, Osaka 570, Japan) This is not a zine in the regular sense of the word but rather a poster assembling mail art onto a colourful 11 x 17 sheet of paper, together with a list of addresses of the contributors. A nice way to decorate your walls and start conversations with mundane visitors.

CRIFANAC #10 (The Usual from Ken Forman, 7215 Nordic Lights Drive, Las Vegas, Nevada 89119) Specializing in news and notes about SF fanzine fans. #10 has commentary on zine conventions Corflu (Belfast is bidding for 2001), Ditto (current and future), fanzines (past and present), and numerous letters from readers on the state of zinedom.



THOUGHT BOMBS #8 (The Usual from Anthony Rayson, 27009 South Egyptian Trail, Monee, Illinois 60449) Clip-and-paste zine covering the endless struggle against racism, with reports on Wisconsin interference with Chippewa fishermen, Sheffield, England, anarchists, and American health care.

FABLES OF IRISH FANDOM #2 (L2 or US\$5 from Ken Cheslin, 29 Kestrel Road, Halesowen, West Midlands B63 2PH, England) Reprint of stories from zinedom of the 1950s. These are humorous tales of Irish SF fans, based somewhat on fact, but without too much fuss over it. You don't need to know the background, as the stories stand well enough on their own.

FOSSILBED #12 (The Usual from Guy Miller, 4 West Main Street, Suite 421, Springfield, Ohio 45502) The Fossils are zinesters and apahacks devoted to the history and social activities of the hobby. This issue has brief notes on the Library of Amateur Journalism in Stayton, Oregon, which has thousands of zines dating back to the 1850s.

NUMERO #4 (DM5 from Wilfried Nold, Eppsteinerstr. 22, D-60323 Frankfurt am Main, Germany) Nicely-produced mail art zine, digest size with card covers, 90% in English. Articles on the history of mail art, networking artists' problems and opportunities, circulating notebook projects, problems in archiving mail art, and numerous listings of projects.

INTERESTING #13 (US\$1.50 or arranged zine trade from Rich Sagall, 747 South 3rd Street #3, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19147) Collection of old jokes and doubtful statistics from newspaper clippings and Internet downloads.

THE KNARLEY KNEWS #73 (The Usual from Henry Welch, 1525 - 16 Avenue, Grafton, Wisconsin 53024-2017) SF genzine, with the usual letters and reviews. Welch tells how he and his wife induce the sense of wonder in their children's Christmas by having toy elves mysteriously appear and travel around the house. Elsewhere in this zine is commentary on writing as legitimate work (as opposed to shoveling 16 tons of coal) and another installment of an endless bicycle tour around Australia, this time with a \$200 pit stop to see Wagnerian opera.

PHILOSOFY #11 (The Usual from Alexander Slate, 8603 Shallow Ridge Drive, San Antonio, Texas 78239-4022) SF perzine with reviews and letters like others, but distinguishing itself by an emphasis on philosophical issues. This issue discusses morality and ethics of medical law and of governance, the latter item suggested by Clinton's impeachment.

ERG #144 (The Usual from Terry Jeeves, 56 Red Scar Drive, Scarborough, North Yorkshire YO12 5RQ, England) Articles include a look at old popular science magazines and their

predictions for the future, scientific time travel theory, overweight SF fans, closed versus open shop workplaces, and letters.

WARP #45 (The Usual from Montreal SF and Fantasy Association, Box 1186, Place du Parc, Montreal, Quebec H2W 2P4) Clubzine of media SF fans. The main item in this issue is the parody movie the club filmed "The FedEx Files: Moxie". A club member reports on a Las Vegas trip to see the Star Trek casino. Lots of news about Montreal fandom, reviews of books and movies, and letters.

DRIFT #100 (The Usual from C.F. Kennedy, 39 Claremore Avenue, Scarborough, Ontario M1N 3S5) A mixture of essays, poems, fiction, and detourned collages.

THUNDERBOX #1 (The Usual from Ann and Steve Green, 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ, England) A humourous piece on human packrats and their varieties, fairies, and an analysis of the band Pulp.

ETHEL THE AARDVARK #82 (The Usual from Melbourne SF Club, Box 212, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 3005, Australia) Some of the normal club business, news, notes, and reviews in here, but most of the issue is taken up with tributes to Ian Gunn, deceased 1998-11-08 of cancer. His humourous cartoons appeared in zines around the world, including covers of

OPUNTIA. 40 is too young to die, but if *Littera scripta manet* holds for the written word, it also holds for art, and Gunn's work will continue provide a memorial to his life.

THE GEIS LETTER #57 (US\$1 from Richard Geis, Box 11408, Portland, Oregon 97211-0408) Newsletter covering conspiracy theory from banking to petroleum to Clinton to Y2K, but leavened with SF commentary and reviews.

LONDON PSYCHOGEOGRAPHICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER #18 (L1 or stamps from LPA (ELS), Box 15, 138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS, England) A mixture of calendar reform and conspiracy theory, leavened with Y2K millennial madness, from a communist/anarchist perspective. I will admit that I have difficulty figuring out if these people are serious or they are just hoaxing.

VANAMONDE #289 (The Usual from John Hertz, 236 South Coronado Street, #409, Los Angeles, California 90057) Weekly single-sheet apazine, which adds up to an 8-page zine per month. This issue mentions the 1959 WorldCon where a panel discussion on fanzines went on until 04h30 the next morning. There were still 60 people in the room at 03h00. Quite a change from today where a fanzine panel would be lucky to scrape up a dozen people for an hour.

## FROM HANDWRITING TO TYPESETTING

Reviews of *SHOVELS, SHOES, AND THE SLOW ROTATION OF LETTERS* by Robert Bringhurst (Alcuin Society, 1986) and *LETTER FORMS* by Stanley Morison (Hartley & Marks, 1997, ISBN 0-88179-136-9).

When any new methodology arises and displaces an existing one, there is a transitional period when the new resembles the old. We are seeing this now with the personal computer, just as several centuries ago it happened with the printing press. Computers load a 'desktop' onto the initial display screen, because the majority of users are comfortable with such a concept. But computers do not organize files and prepare documents as if they were using an invisible desktop made of electrons. As time goes by, computer users will become adapted to new methods of storing data with displays not yet thought of. Some of the old ways will linger, just as mass-market television, now in its sixth decade, still uses talking heads instead of pictures to discuss things, something that radio did with more justification.

Copying business ledgers or correspondence by hand lasted into our grandparents' time. The printing press is not suited for such things, and never did displace handcopying documents. It took other machines such as mimeographs and photocopiers to do that.

Printing presses did quickly displace handcopying as a means of book production though. The trouble and time of setting up frames of type is easily outweighed by the speed at which copies can be made thereafter. The old ways did linger in some respects, for the majority of book users were comfortable with the concept of handcopied manuscripts. The early printers therefore imitated manuscripts in form and lettering. There was a gradual shift to the style of printing we read today, just as desktop computers will slowly shift into some new style for future users.

Morison's book is a reprint of two lengthy essays he published in obscure books not available for general sale. He was considered the greatest historian of this century in typography, and designed many typefaces for Monotype. Times New Roman type and the Gollancz yellow dustjacket style are part of his legacy.

In the first of the essays reprinted, he considers the history of logically classifying typefaces, which leads back to the classification of handwriting styles. He wrote that: "*... the shapes of printed letters inevitably depended upon the contemporary written letters ...*". Early printers of the late 1400s and 1500s advertised their capabilities by publishing specimen sheets of the typefaces they had available. In this, they were following the tradition of scribes, who did the same with samples of their handwriting styles.



Typesfoundries were an international operation, and European printers spread styles from one country to another, but always in typefaces that, at their core, resembled handwriting or at least purported to be imitated by the human hand. It was the French king Louis XIV who changed the course of typography by commissioning the Paris Scientific type of 1702. This typeface was not calligraphic, but regularized and mechanistic, a precursor to the machine age that was to come.

In Morison's second essay, he discusses the change in calligraphy that went in the opposite direction. Concurrently with the birth and spread of printing, handwriting went from the formal styles labouriously lettered by monks in scriptoria to the cursive free-flowing style. This style was known as cancellarescha corsiva, and it is the style universally used in all Roman-alphabet countries. Your handwriting is this style, no matter how you dot the i or cross the t, no matter if you slope the letters to the left or to the right.

If it does not seem like much of a jump from early printing to today's books, consider the words of Robert Bringhurst in his chapbook. He points out that modern typeset letters cannot be handprinted: *"These letters cannot be written even with discomfort; they must be constructed with tiny compasses and a rule. At this stage, the letter has ceased altogether to be a sign of bodily movement ... It foretells a world in which the mind thinks*

*without reference to the body, while all motion and work are performed by machines. ... the human arm, which from the first manuscript books until the eighteenth century, had connected the reader to his book, is amputated at last by the uncompromising logic of the typographical form."*

The early readers of printed books could imagine that they could have written it. With the arrival of mechanistic typefaces, there came a separation between handwriting and printing. One cannot imitate by hand letters made from master punches which are perfectly vertical. Consider how you write something by hand. Your wrist bends, and the elbow goes out from the body. Trying to handprint vertically at speed or in quantity does not work well. This is, incidentally, why split keyboards were developed for computers. The fixed typewriter keyboard was tolerated out of mechanical necessity, but computer keyboards, with their wired non-mechanical keys, can be re-arranged to allow the wrists and arms to bend naturally. These natural keyboards will eventually displace the linear style, but in the same slow process that typefaces and handwriting changed.

One thing will not change. Multiple typefaces on a single page slow down comprehension. Many zine publishers have 600 fonts on their hard drive and seem determined to use all in one issue.

Review of *THE STORY OF LIBRARIES FROM THE INVENTION OF WRITING TO THE COMPUTER AGE* by Fred Lerner (Continuum Publ., 1998, ISBN 0-8264-1114-2)

The humourist Stephen Leacock once wrote that if he were able to found a university, he would first build and stock a good library. Then, if more money was available, he would add a common room. Classrooms were last on his list. He was not entirely in jest in writing this, for most scholars would agree that the library of a university plays the dominant part in determining its academic excellence.

I am inclined to agree, as I have always felt that I learned more reading on my own in grade school and university libraries than I ever did in the classroom. When I think of the places I grew up, it is not the farms and houses we lived in, to which I have no sentimental attachment, but the libraries. North Hill Elementary School sticks in my mind for its part in my discovery of reading. While my classmates struggled through "See Spot run, see Jane run, see Dick run", the school librarian let me read *WIND IN THE WILLOWS*, the Oz series, Dr. Dolittle, and other "advanced" books. The Red Deer Public Library introduced me to science fiction and science fact. Its collection of such books were the standards by Asimov, Heinlein, Clarke, Norton, and some

miscellaneous authors on the SF shelves. Gamow, De Camp, Willy Ley, and the ubiquitous Asimov introduced me to the wonders of history and science. Librarians in rural areas such as the Eckville and Red Deer districts played the major part in bringing civilization to those young minds wanting it. In the days before television it was the only means for a young farm boy to learn something other than how to swear like the hired hand or the relationship between the price of wheat and livestock auction sales. Everyone where I grew up had their lunch at home with the radio tuned to CBC Radio Canada's farm commodities report so they could get the price fixings for grain or livestock. No one spent any time contemplating book-learning stuff save the educated few such as the school teachers and librarians. Some clergy were educated in the truest sense of the word, but most had no more than two years at a Bible college, not much better than a high school.

After I graduated in 1978 from the University of Alberta in Edmonton, I moved to Calgary, mainly because I couldn't bear the thought of spending another winter in Edmonton. Calgary at least gets chinooks to interrupt the cold spells, and being 200 km south of Edmonton, has slightly more light in winter. As soon as I settled in Calgary, I explored both the Calgary Public Library, which has the largest circulation of any library in Canada, and the University of Calgary Library, whose stacks were open to the



general public as well as students and staff. I've been using them ever since. I still marvel from time to time at being able to walk in and take down a bound volume that was printed 200 years ago. The writers dead for centuries still make their thoughts known by the printed word, and the librarians who guard those words will, to me at least, always have far greater prestige than any billionaire real-estate developer or star hockey player.

With this background in mind, I bring you to Fred Lerner's book on the history of libraries. This is not a dry tome that details the histories of individual libraries one by one in exhaustive detail of interest only to a specialist. It is an overview of how libraries developed over time and space during the last five millennia, considered by themes such as origins (Sumerian merchants stored clay tablets that were transaction receipts), by time (the Dark Ages), by space (the Orient), by culture (Islamic libraries), by form (Gutenberg's legacy), and the future (computer databases).

The first libraries can be considered as the storerooms of clay tablets used to record transactions or temple records. They had the familiar problems of cataloguing and storage. As Lerner writes: "*Like modern organizations, the temples often generated more records than they had room for. Archaeologists excavating the temples have found tablets stored on floors and in corridors.*". We look at our own modern age, where the promise by technophiles that all knowledge will be stored on a small chip

looks increasingly laughable as terabyte hard drives are swamped by the information flood. The ancients catalogued texts by using incipits (the first line of each text), a form of keyword searching. Shelf lists to find tablets, scrolls, or codexes indicate the annoyances of information retrieval are no new thing. Today search engines will list 20,000 references on a keyword search, all but one or two irrelevant to the intended query. After reading Lerner's book, I will never again call up an Internet search engine without thinking of a Sumerian priest muttering to himself as he clambers up and down ladders trying to find a tablet recording the tithes donated by some obscure village upstream from Babylon, unsuccessful because it was mis-filed under 'Ur' by a careless scribe.

I have always had an impression in the back of my mind of libraries being permanent repositories of books. Yes, I knew libraries got bombed out in war, destroyed by fire or flood, or left to damp and vermin by neglect, but didn't realize how frequent this was. I do not classify the frequent lootings by kings and popes of enemies' or friends' libraries as a disaster. This was just a form of aggressive interlibrary lending. As Lerner chronicles one library destruction after another, one wonders how any books survived at all. The light that shines through this gloom is the equally frequent copyist, labouriously copying manuscripts for some other library. The best method of preserving knowledge is to spread it as widely as possible.



It was the copyist who made the books for libraries, not always with the owner's permission. The first copyright dispute involved the Irish monk Columba, who copied a book without permission. He was ordered to surrender the copy to the owner of the original, under traditional Irish law of "To every cow her calf". The photocopier afflicts modern libraries with similar problems. Another problem that remains eternal is book theft. In the libraries of yore, books were chained to the shelves. Now they have electronic telltales stuck in the gutter of a signature.

Legal deposit laws are occasionally a topic of discussion amongst zinesters today. These laws date from the 16th century. Today the National Library of Canada or the Library of Congress don't care about the content of the books, only that they get copies to save for posterity. Lerner remarks that originally there was another purpose for legal deposit laws: "*These laws not only ensured that the intellectual output of the kingdom or duchy was gathered in a central location: they also simplified the process of keeping a watchful eye on what was being written and printed.*" Not a few zinesters today refuse to deposit copies in their national libraries for fear of that second reason. One never knows when one's words might come back to haunt.

The greatest difficulty besetting librarians has always been finding the right item in the stacks. Shelflists gave way to the Dewey Decimal System and the Library of Congress call letters. Both are

elaborated by libraries for their own use, much as software companies use variants of Unix or Java. I never realized this until I moved from Edmonton to Calgary. The universities in both cities use the Library of Congress system. As a student at the University of Alberta, I always jotted down the call numbers of any item I put on a 3x5 index card. On attempting to use some of those references at the University of Calgary, I discovered that while most were the same, I kept ending up in the wrong part of the stacks for some items. Lerner gets in a sly dig about the Library of Congress variations: "*It has been adopted by national and university libraries worldwide, sometimes with locally produced modifications to cover in detail those aspects of national life not completely understood in Washington.*".

In the 1900s (I originally wrote "in this century", but with the millennium coming up I must break myself of that habit in referring to the events of my lifetime), the information flood forced libraries to begin specializing and co-ordinating their collections with each other. Interlibrary lending, document retrieval services, and computer databases are the waves of the future that first began approaching the shoreline a couple of decades ago and is now washing at the building foundations. With books cheaper than ever before, the public does not use the libraries as before. With scientific journals outrageously priced by robber press barons, university libraries are cutting back

subscriptions; in any event the scientists prefer e-mail to disseminate their research results.

The occupation of librarian is a relatively new one. Lerner notes that: "*The librarians at Alexandria never went to library school, and nobody at Urbino* [an Italian ducal library of the 1400s] *ever read a library journal.*" Now librarians are becoming information retrieval specialists. Lerner goes on to consider the future of the book (still good), and some unexpected consequences of the computer age, such as having to store old machines to play back obsolete electronic data storage records. That struck home to me, as at the time I was reading this book I was migrating my computer files at work from Xedit to WordPerfect, a three-day task.

Lerner does a good job in his book of showing the long-term trends and philosophies of libraries, rather than burying the reader under a mass of details. One appreciates the patience and doggedness of those who came before us. They were determined to preserve the information they had so painstakingly gained, and hand it down to posterity. We can do no less ourselves.

## VERBA VOLAT

Review of *ON THE AIR: THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OLD-TIME RADIO* by John Dunning (Oxford University Press 1998, ISBN 0-

19-507678-8). This is a massive 800-page hardcover listing 1,500

radio shows from the 1920s to the early 1960s, when the last programme-style shows finally died out on commercial radio. (They still exist on CBC Radio Canada, BBC, and other public networks.) This book is an updated version of Dunning's previous work *TUNE IN YESTERDAY*, and covers American radio only. A surprising number of old shows still exist as recordings, about 100,000, and many stations today still broadcast transcripts for home tapers. My interest in this began one night several years ago driving home late at night. While fiddling with the car radio, I accidentally bumped the dial onto a station that was playing a Jack Benny show. I made a note of the frequency and time, found out that the station played old shows every night after the 23h00 news, and have been taping them ever since. Dunning's guide is of great value in learning the details behind those shows, especially for someone like me who never heard them in their glory days.

The encyclopedia lists the shows alphabetically by title, with a good index to cross-reference with actors. The listings seem to be reasonably well balanced with the show's importance, not just a mass of details regardless of the show. A minor show that was only aired locally or for a short time gets a few paragraphs. Shows like Jack Benny or Fibber McGee get exhaustive treatment covering pages, as they should.



## KAFKAESQUE ADVENTURES

Tales of bureaucratic derring-do have always held an interest for me, being a government worker myself. Franz Kafka's *THE CASTLE* chronicles the struggles of a man sent to work for the lord of a castle but who can't get near the place because of bureaucratic obstruction. Vladimir Voinovich wrote tales of the Soviet regime that poked so much fun at the commissars that he was paid the ultimate compliment of being sent into exile. *THE IVANKIAD* was based on Voinovich's clashes with housing authorities in getting an apartment. The hero of that novel at first cannot get any support from his comrades in the quest to get a place to live. No one wants to be perceived as being on the side of a loser, but when he suddenly sneaks in a small victory, everyone abruptly changes sides to support him for fear of being caught on the wrong side.

The subject at hand is another Voinovich novel, *THE LIFE AND EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF PRIVATE IVAN CHONKIN* (Penguin 1978). Chonkin is what soldiers refer to as a rag-bag. He is a stolid but messy soldier, the despair of his superiors in the Red Army, and a personal affront to those trying unsuccessfully to re-mold him into a Soviet Man. When an obsolete plane crashes near the kolkhoz (rural collective) of Krasnoye in May 1941, the regiment is ordered to detach a soldier to guard the worthless wreckage for a week. The C.O. and his

staff didn't have to look far for such a man, and Chonkin is sent off with instructions to await further orders when they come.

The orders never seem to come though. There are more important things to come. Germany invades the Soviet Union. The kolkhoz inhabitants are worried of what will happen when the war reaches them. Chonkin's faraway regiment goes off to war, forgetting him at his post. The hoarding starts. Everyone must look after their own in the collectives, which leads to a lot of individuals fighting over bars of soap and sacks of table salt.

Chonkin spends his time with Nyura Belyashova, a lonely spinster who is the village postmistress. The plane having crashed near her cottage, Chonkin drags the wreckage into her yard to make guard duty more convenient. Characters met with along the way are Chairman Golubev, an indecisive and fearful man who is suspicious that Chonkin is a spy sent to watch him on the pretext of guarding the wrecked plane. Kilin, the political agent, has his own career to worry about. How can he plan spontaneous demonstrations if the villagers insist on spontaneously assembling before he has given orders to do so? His superiors are no help, for they wait for instructions from their own superiors, and so on up the line to Stalin, who is paralyzed by the shock that Germans are as untrustworthy as him. Kilin is not much helped by his assistants, one of whom thinks that

Tsar Nikolai Alexandrovich

was the son of Prime Minister Alexander Kerensky.

Kuzma Gladishev is the kolkhoz's resident genius, currently attempting a plant breeding project that will cross the potato with the tomato and thus provide both potato tubers and tomato fruit. So far though, his Path To Socialism hybrids keep coming out with tomato roots and potato fruits. Gladishev and Chonkin become good friends. The former is pleased to have someone to explain his scientific progress to, and the latter is bored and happy just for the company while Nyura is working at the post office. The friendship is somewhat marred by Chonkin's discovery that the home-brewed booze that Gladishev provided him was made from excrement: "*Very simple recipe ... You take a kilo of sugar to a kilo of shit ...*". In turnabout fashion, Nyura's cow gets into Gladishev's garden and eats all the hybrids. Beside this tragedy, the war is as nothing.

The characterization of this novel is good. People behave the way they do for reasons, not because the characters were cut out of cardboard as in all too many fantasy trilogies. Voinovich fills out the motivations of the characters by using dream sequences, which, while doing the task, seemed more like verbose padding. The bureaucrats behave as they do in the real world, from the motive of fear. Fear of being disciplined by superiors, who in turn are fearful of their supervisors. Fear is what motivates bureaucrats around the world and in every culture. It used to be fear of

banishment or execution.

Today it is fear of privatization and losing one's pension. It used to be fear of starvation; now it is fear of not being able to keep up the mortgage payments.

Gladishev denounces Chonkin to the authorities in revenge for the loss of his hybrids. Captain Afanasy Milyaga, at the Institution, decides to investigate, if only because he had a rough day. A Jew had been arrested for telling an officer his name was Stalin. It turned out the Jew's name really was Stalin, as opposed to the other Stalin, whose real name wasn't Stalin. The Jew obviously was not a relative of the Man of Steel, but fear of having to explain to higher-ups why a Stalin was arrested, just as the Germans were invading, made the Institution give up the whole thing as a bad job. There is nothing more embarrassing to the Russian secret police than having to apologize to a Jew and make amends to him, so Milyaga decides to recover face by investigating Chonkin.

When Milyaga's s men arrive in Krasnoye, Chairman Golubev thinks they have come for him and collapses. Not to be distracted, the troops move off to detain Chonkin, but he has firepower and ends up detaining them. The Captain goes to investigate, and the upshot is that the entire staff of the Institution vanish into the figurative and actual quagmire that is Krasnoye. As the action



works its way up the chain of command, everyone is in fear. Is it a purge? German saboteurs? A revived White Russia movement? Perhaps a second Institution should have been established, so that if one of them suddenly vanishes, the other can report the details. The local newspaper *BOLSHEVIK TEMPOS* tries to distract attention from all the rumours by publishing an essay calling for a new moral standard and a return to good manners. This touches off new fear among the people that some new policy shift is underway. They do not want to be caught wavering from Party policy; one should always waver with Party policy.

An infantry unit of the Red Army, with a SMERSH officer along for good reason, is detached to investigate. They are ordered to liquidate the Chonkin gang of German saboteurs and White Russians, under the mistaken impression that the prisoners are part of Chonkin's gang. The farce of the invasion stumbles its way through the mud and succeeds in spite of itself (nobody told the soldiers that you are supposed to light Molotov cocktails before you throw them). Chonkin is arrested. There are no happy endings in the Soviet Union.

## STEPHEN LEACOCK ON DRUGS

Review of *THE BLASTER AL ACKERMAN OMNIBUS* by Al Ackerman (Feh! Press 1994, ISBN 0-945209-09-6). Trade

paperback, 288 pages, 57 humorous short stories plus introduction by Bob Black. SASE to Feh! Press, 200 East 10 Street, #603, New York, New York 10003, for price list of publications.

Ackerman stories start out in this world and then suddenly shift into a parallel universe without warning. Often that shift is not obvious. Our world is strange enough to begin with, and it is sometimes difficult to tell where the author leaves reportage behind and veers into fantasy and/or lunacy. The Bill and Monica story currently engaging the attention of pundits sounds like something Ackerman wrote, with his crowning touch being the American Congress releasing Website documents and videotapes about oral sex while simultaneously attempting to pass legislation banning pornography on the Internet. This sort of thing could only happen in an Ackerman parallel universe, for who can believe it would happen in our space-time continuum?

"The Crab" is the lead-off story and Ackerman's declared favourite, an account of enjoying a two-week vacation by applying for jobs he was not qualified for, using names like Fulton J. Sheen or Friedrich Engels. He deliberately hoaxed the personnel managers by showing up unshaven and apparently drunk, or exhibiting strange behaviours.

It was partly in the spirit of revenge: *"In most of the personnel offices in this country there seems to be at least a tenuous rule in effect prohibiting the staff from attempting to hurt the prospective applicants by physical means. But there is no law against low psychology and many humiliating tricks ... it was a heady sensation indeed for me to feel that I was, at least for the moment, turning the tables ... "*

The stories range widely and wildly. There is the couple who stay in abandoned hotels (you can always get a room and don't have to worry about tipping), an idea that sounds logical enough until they come down for breakfast one morning and find King Skippy, a man who worships peanut butter.

The story "2,197 Vienna Sausages" is about a man who makes and wears a suit composed of that quantity and type of meat. This one didn't read too well for me, not through any fault of the author, but because a few years ago a Calgary artist made a dress from beef cuts and wore it in public. She was making some kind of statement, but about what I never paid attention to. Calgary is Canada's petroleum capital today but was originally ranching country, and still is nicknamed Cowtown. The meat dress stirred up a lot of argument between the steak-and-stuffed-potato crowd over at the Petroleum Club and the vegetarians down in the Kensington Road district, not to mention the art gallery denizens of 17 Avenue SW. Ackerman's protagonist has a more mundane

purpose in mind, but the project ultimately falls apart on him.

Neoism is gloriously trashed in a story about Istvan Kantor/Monty Cantsin and how to shoplift from mom-and-pop convenience stores using performance art. The catch was that it only worked to get soda pop. Following that story is an account of ragged tears in the Papernet, entitled "TLP". The abbreviation means 'tacky little pamphlet', *"... the typical tlp operates outside the realm of any rational configuration or logic ... the sort of publication that can make the unwary reader resent his own literacy."* Sounds like too many mail art or punk zines I've gotten over the years. Sharyn McCrumb would enjoy this story.

A chapter of Ackerman letters is mostly incoherent and too much like space-filling rambling. Stream of consciousness isn't that effective anymore as a literary device. Ackerman does explain in one of his chapter introductions that a number of pieces in this anthology were written as mail art. When reprinted elsewhere, the connection is broken that made them seem more understandable in the original context. Ackerman is like Shakespeare, in that his work is more enjoyable if you know the culture it came out of. Most of the stories in this anthology are good reading, as he writes in a conversational style that smoothly takes the reader into the zone where parody and reality are difficult to distinguish.



## **SPEAKING OF SURREALISM ...**

Jack Womack's novel *LET'S PUT THE FUTURE BEHIND US* (Grove Press, 1996, ISBN 0-8021-3503-X) is the hilarious narration of Maxim Alexeich Borodin, a businessman in the New Russia. He is insanely optimistic in an insane society, juggling a wife and a mistress while doing deals with the Georgian mafia, petty bureaucrats no longer restrained by Communism into at least paying lip service to the idea that they serve the people, and business associates several bricks short of a load. Well recommended.

## **PROTO-NEW WAVE SCIENCE FICTION**

Review of *EXPLOITS AND OPINIONS OF DR. FAUSTROLL, PATAPHYSICIAN* by Alfred Jarry (Exact Change 1996, ISBN 1-878972-07-3). This is a reprint of a 1965 translation of the French original by Alfred Jarry (1873-1907). Jarry described this as a neo-scientific novel. Had he lived long enough he might have taken satisfaction in seeing New Wave SF supply a proper category for the book. The basic plot concerns Doctor Faustroll being chased by a bailiff for back rent. The former turns the tables on the latter, seizes him instead of the other way around, and takes him off on a voyage to a series of exotic locales that provide opportunity for an equivalent series of satires and parodies.

Jarry used as a philosophical basis for this book his invention called pataphysics, the science of imaginary solutions. It was more daring in its time than today, especially to anyone who has read New Wave SF fiction. Pataphysics is introduced not with the usual "As you know, Professor, ... " type of lecture, but by Faustroll giving the bailiff a book and telling him to read it. And we, the readers, along with Panmuphle, read about pataphysics. Jarry's full definition of pataphysics is: " ... *the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments.*". This anticipates our modern society, where image takes precedence over content. The pataphysics texts parody academic literature in one chapter, and dialogues of the ancient Greek philosophers in another chapter, concluding with a mathematical proof that God is the tangential point between zero and infinity.

The numerous vignettes of the book are awash in adjectives and colours. The satirical ones often fail because they are about people and times long forgotten, if ever known even in their own day outside French art circles. They balance on the brink of internal logic but ultimately tip backwards into a morass of unnecessary inconsistencies, more the fault of lazy writing than any ulterior plan. The mental imagery of the book is clear and brilliant, even though the plot and scenes shift suddenly like dreams.

## PROLOGUE TO THE OPENING OF TORCON 3

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When fandom's triumph over her mundane foes  
First reared science fiction, immortal Gernsback rose.  
Each change of many-coloured life he drew,  
Exhausted worlds, and then imagined new.  
Existence saw him spurn her bounded reign,  
And panting Time toiled after him in vain.

But who the coming WorldCons can presage,  
And mark the future periods of the stage?  
Perhaps if skill could distant times explore,  
New WorldCons, new Torcons, yet remain in store.  
Perhaps, where Cancun has raved, and Berlin died,  
On flying cars new sorcerers may ride.

Ah! let not censure term our fate our choice  
The bid but echoes back the public voice.  
The WorldCon's laws their patrons give,  
For we that bid to please, must please to win.

To support Toronto's bid to host the 2003 World Science Fiction  
Convention, send C\$20.03 or US\$15 to: Toronto in '03, Box 3,  
Station A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1A2.

