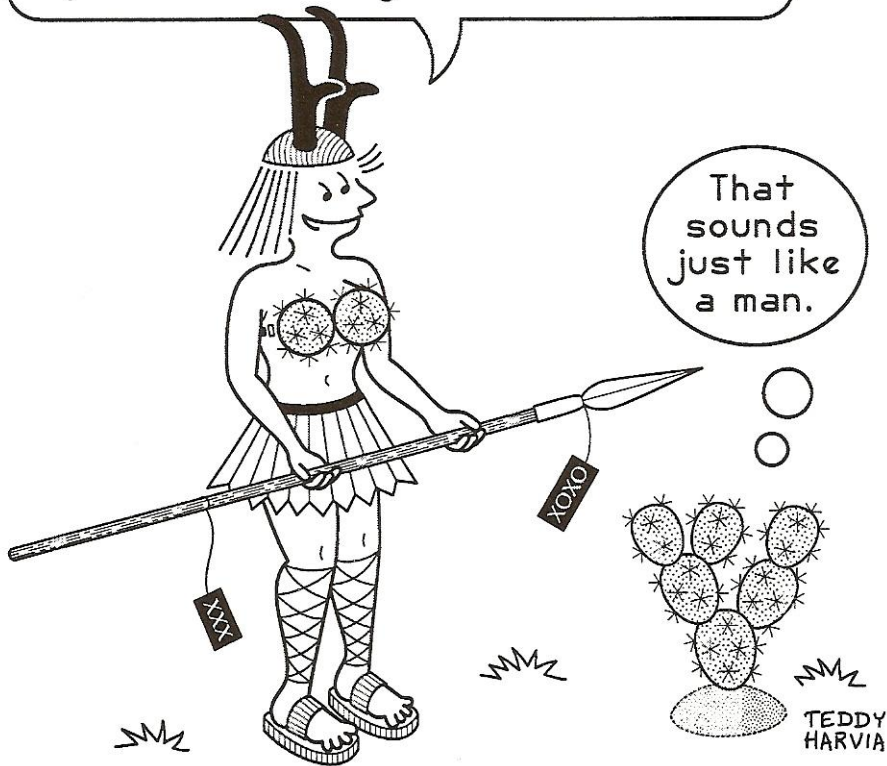


OPUNTIA

47.1B

The goddess Hera gave me a new spear point but Zeus gave me the shaft.



ISSN 1183-2703

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. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage outside USA and I don't collect them.

Whole-numbered OPUNTIA's are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, and x.5 issues are perzines.

COVER ART CREDIT: The goddess Opuntia has been unaccountably overlooked in standard references on mythology. Teddy Harvia makes good that deficiency from his palatial studio at 12341 Band Box Place, Dallas, Texas 75244-7001 .

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Scott Garinger, Ken Miller, Antonio Kruger, John Held Jr, Henry Welch, Scott Crow, Ned Brooks, Lloyd Penney, Joseph Major, Martha Shivvers

JUST THOUGHT I'D MENTION IT

by Dale Speirs

This issue of OPUNTIA is the 124th issue published and the 10th anniversary of the premiere issue in March 1991. That works out to just slightly over monthly frequency, although officially this zine remains an irregular so that I can never be late with an issue.

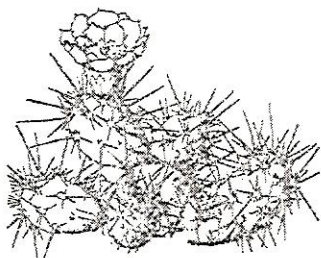
How do I keep up the frequency? Firstly, I don't have a television set. People always laugh when I say that, but the opiate of the masses is a terrible time waster. It's amazing how much work you can get done in a half hour on a zine instead of vegetating through whatever's forgettable on the telly.

Secondly, this zine is deliberately small but frequent, with a maximum of 16 pages. Too many zines start out small and grow like a cancer until they hit telephone directory size. The publisher then fails under the workload and the frequency drops to zero.

While the Papernet still be around in ten years? I think so, although I have no doubt it will have undergone changes. Paper zines can't be automatically scanned by ECHELON, or Carnivore, as the Internet now is. Paper is archival; electronic media are not. The Internet will displace newszines, but zines with solid content and sober thought will continue. *Litera scripta manet.*

**LETTERS TO
THE EDITOR**

[Editor's
remarks
in square
brackets]



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

2001-03-02

If secondhand book dealers are reserving the good stuff for selling via computer, that seems to me to be the best argument against purchasing books and magazines via the Internet. The only reason this is happening is the ability to get higher prices for the older and rarer stuff.

I never accepted the idea of focal-point fanzines after the first few years of their existence. Starting very early in the 1940s, fandom gained so many more members and those members tended to have specialized interests, so there was no longer any fanzine that catered to everyone and was distributed to just about all fans. FANTASY MAGAZINE was probably the last focal point fanzine. What fans have been calling focal point fanzines ever since have been those that cater to their particular fields of interest.

FROM: Chester Cuthbert
Winnipeg, Manitoba

2001-02-23

[Re: dealing in one's books] Winnipeg dealers are seldom offering more than 30% of their selling price for stock, yet the cost of importing material at current postage rates is prohibitive. I have always felt that dealers should pay more; they complain that a book may sit on their shelves for a couple of years, yet a collector may have stored the book for fifty years.

A shop specializing in occult and psychic books offered me 35 cents each for 300 paperbacks in those categories, and said no dealer in Winnipeg would offer more. I refused the offer. I don't blame dealers for wanting to pay minimal prices, but there is an unfortunate result that collectors will not part with good material, so the stocks of local shops are hardly worth looking at, and more and more collectors are dealing with each other.

[Calgary secondhand book dealers are just as marginal as Winnipeg dealers. Neo-Luddite though I may be, I suspect that when it comes time to sell my library, I will do so through the Internet.]

ZINE LISTINGS

by Dale Speirs

[The Usual means \$2 or \$3 cash, trade for your zine, or letter of comment on a previous issue. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas (the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount) or mint USA stamps (which are not valid for postage outside USA). US\$ banknotes are acceptable around the world.]

Covert Communications From Zeta Corvi #7 (The Usual from Andrew Murdoch, #508 - 6800 Westminster Highway, Richmond, British Columbia V7C 1C5) Awards lists and letters of comment. Murray Moore's trip report to Robert Sawyer's palatial penthouse apartment is a jump-off point (figuratively, that is) on Moore's travels through SFdom and how he came to be there.

File 770 #137 (US\$8 for five issues from Mike Glycer, 705 Valley View Avenue, Monrovia, California 91016) SF newszine. In addition to the usual news, notes, and letters of comment, this issue is mainly devoted to a recap of the 2000 Worldcon in Chicago.

Popular Reality V436#7 (US\$1 from Susan Poe, 1116 Shepard Street, Lansing, Michigan 48912) Newsprint tabloid of reprints from the underground. This issue starts off with a lament that conspiracy theory ain't what it used to be, with a list of conspiracies that had their 15 minutes of fame and are now

discarded and forgotten. There is a technically bad article about the hazards of electromagnetic radiation for the scientifically illiterate, and a similar type of rant about fluoride. Jim Goad discusses his trial and conviction for an assault. There are various other rants on various other topics, including an attack on Stewart Home, the bete noir of European anarchists.

Gegenschein #89 (The Usual from Eric Lindsay, Box 640, Airlie Beach, Queensland 4802, Australia) Perzine, with most of this issue taken up by an account of a motorhome trip through the backwoods of Australia. Also some book reviews.

Idea #12 (The Usual from Geri Sullivan, 3444 Blaisdell Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55408-4315) SF fanzine, with convention reports, fan fund trip reports, and lots of letters of comment.

Slush #13 (\$3.50 from Bev Rosenbaum, 1245 Caledonia Road, Toronto, Ontario M6A 2X6) The zine for failed writers, as it bills itself. Leading off is an article on using rejection letters as an excuse to send a revised version to the editor, a published novelist who does eight drafts of each of his books, and various news, notes, and clippings. If you still haven't been able to move your 1500-page manuscript THOG THE BARBARIAN, then this zine can't help you but it can give you moral support along the way.

Challenger #13 (The Usual from Guy Lillian, Box 53092, New Orleans, Louisiana 70153-3092) 100-page doorstep zine, with articles on the Chicago Worldcon last year, how to write computer code to count votes (does Perl have a function for dimpled chad?), watching a shuttle launch, and many other items. Also zine reviews and letters of comment.

Forty Two #5 (The Usual from Mark Strickert, 4772 Santa Fe Street, Yorba Linda, California 92886) Commentaries of a traveling man who is a fan of urban transit systems, radio taping, county collecting, and sports arenas.

Plokta #20 (The Usual from Alison Scott, 24 St. Mary Road, Walthamstow, London E17 9RG, England) SF convention reports, Tasmanian forest fires, SETI at home, fun with Gantt charts, and letters of comment.

Shouting At The Postman #43 and #44 (Mail art Usual from Ken Miller, Box 101, Newtown, Pennsylvania 18940-0101) This issue taken up by a trip report about Budapest and Prague, including fun with the buses, being fined by bus conductors, and chatting with mail art friends about what it was like to live under Communist governments. Issue #44 is the compilation of Abraham Lincoln heads with Miller mailed out earlier and asked to be made into mail art. Most were cut and pasted onto pictures of other people, particularly females. Beyond that obvious stuff,

there is some more original material such as Abe's head on a patent specification for perfusing an animal head.

The Ratty's Gazette #10 (The Usual from Pag Hat, Box 20610, Seattle, Washington 98102) Single-sheet zine which manages to pack a powerful punch with one short essay about the author helping a homeless person search for his lost pet cat. An unsuccessful search, and another hard blow for the unhappy transient.

Caustic Truths #77 (The Usual from Richard Tanana, Box 92548, Toronto, Ontario M5A 2K0) Punkzine with interviews and music reviews.

The Fossil #311 (US\$10 per year from The Fossils Inc, c/o Gary Bossler, 145 Genoa Avenue SW, Massillon, Ohio 44646) Clubzine of apa alumni. An apa is an amateur press association. This is a type of zine distro whereby a group of zine publishers send in x copies of the zine to a central mailer, who then collates them into bundles and returns one bundle to each member. In this issue, besides the usual club news and notes, Ken Faig Jr discusses the forthcoming centenary of The Fossils, founded 1904. Zinesters who think the hobby began with FACTSHEET FIVE in the 1970s need to know that the first apa, still with us, was the National A.P.A., founded in 1876. The United A.P.A., also still with us, was founded 1895.

The Knarley Knews #86 (The Usual from Henry Welch, 1525 - 16 Avenue, Grafton, Wisconsin 53024-2017) Personal doings, reviews, lots of letters of comments.

Thyme #129 (The Usual from Alan Stewart, Box 222, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 8005, Australia) Newszine of goings-on in Australian SF fandom and publishing. This issue has a number of reports on the 1999 Worldcon in Australia, publishing reports, reviews, and letters of comment.

Warp #50 (The Usual from Montreal SF and Fantasy Association, Box 1186, Place du Parc, Montreal, Quebec H2W 2P4). SF clubzine with lots of meeting reports, ongoing video movies they are making, and media SF reviews.

Mr. Peebody's Soiled Trousers And Other Delights #8 (US\$2 from Jason Koivu, Box 931333, Los Angeles, California 90093) Diaryzine; this installment covers Koivu's shutting down his record store in new England prior to moving to California.

Snake Den #12 (The Usual from Ken Faig Jr, 2311 Swainwood Drive, Glenview, Illinois 60025-2741) Apazine for a Lovecraftian group. Of particular interest is a reprint of an article by Francis T. Laney about a zine publisher named Howard Davison. The latter was supposed to be active in zinedom just prior to World War One, and Laney claimed to have found

Lovecraft manuscripts and letters sent to Davison. No one can find any record of Davison, and there are questions about the supposed manuscripts. Was it a hoax?

Southern Fandom Confederation Bulletin V7#8 (The Usual from Julie Wall, 470 Ridge Road, Birmingham, Alabama 35206-2816) SF clubzine with news and notes, listings of zines, clubs, and conventions, and lots of convention reports.

Murderous Signs #2 (The Usual from Grant Wilkins, Box 53106, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 1C5) Literary zine, mostly poetry, but a good starting essay on the sad state of the news media when the Survivor television series was given headline status.

Musea #93 (The Usual from Tom Hendricks, 4000 Hawthorne #5, Dallas, Texas 75219) Come the Revolution, the art dealers will be first up against the wall. This zine advocates reform in the arts world, runs news clippings (CD manufacturers just nailed for price fixing), and does zine reviews.

The Thought #121 to #123 (US\$2 from Ronald Tobin, Box 10760, Glendale, Arizona 85318-0760) Political zine with debates about anarchism, a firsthand account of prison censorship, dream reports, the American presidential election, and miscellaneous.

This Here #7 (The Usual from Nic Farey, Box 178, St. Leonard, Maryland 20685) Personal accounts, wrestling reports, music, and lots of letters of comment

Vanamonde #368 to #387 (The Usual from John Hertz, 236 South Coronado Street #409, Los Angeles, California 90057) Single-sheet apazine which appears weekly, so that over a few months it is equivalent of a regular zine in text. Topics range widely over a random miscellany.

ScatZine (The Usual from Andy Hooper, 4228 Francis Avenue North, #103, Seattle, Washington 98103) One-shot zine mostly divided between a history of the Fan Activity Achievement Awards and a critique of a television show about the history of jazz.

Tortoise #10 (The Usual from Sue Jones, Flat 5, 32/33 Castle Street, Shrewsbury SY1 2BQ, England) Flood stories (fortunately she lives on the third floor), letters of comment, and reviews.

Mythological Creatures (US\$1 or mail art Usual from Babynous Cult, 110 1/2 State Avenue, Bremerton, Washington 98337) Mail art one-shot of short-short stories and commentaries based on found photos.

Twink #19 (The Usual from E.B. Frohvet, 4716 Dorsey Hall Drive #506, Ellicott City, Maryland 21042) SF genzine with reviews, convention reports, and letters of comment.

The New Port News #195 (The Usual from Ned Brooks, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720) Apazine, with a fair bit of commentary on older books and etymology.

The Royal Swiss Navy Gazette #6 (The Usual from Garth Spencer, Box 15335, Vancouver, British Columbia V6B 5B1) Irregularly published perzine, with various musings on SF fandom, convention reports, and letters of comment.

MAIL ART LISTINGS

Abstract in Black & White: (G. Simons Graveuse, 26-28 Rue de la Metairie, 1082 Bruxelles, Belgium) Maximum dimension A4. Deadline is end of 2001. Free medium, exhibition and documentation to all.

I Hear My Tree: (G. Simons Graveuse, 26-28 Rue de la Metairie, 1082 Bruxelles, Belgium) Maximum dimension A4. Deadline is end of 2001. Free medium, exhibition and documentation to all.

World Wide Party #8: (Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta T2P 2E7, Canada) On June 21st, year 2001, will be the 8th annual World Wide Party. At 21h00 your time, raise a glass and toast your friends in the Papernet around the world. Have a party if you will, do a one-shot zine, prepare and post a batch of mail art, or whatever else you may think of. The World Wide Party was first suggested by Benoit Girard of Quebec and boosted by Franz Miklis of Austria. The idea behind a 21h00 toast is to get a wave circling the planet celebrating zineish friends and connecting everyone in the Papernet briefly by a common activity. Write to me how you celebrated WWP #8; documentation to all.

The Tree Of Poetry: (dott.ssa Tiziana Baracchi, Via Cavallotti, 83-B, 30171 Venezia-Mestre, Italy) The Tree of Poetry is a very uncommon species of plant; it is an American maple which is in Venezia-Mestre in 83/B Cavallotti Street, Itinerari '80 Centre. Giancarlo Da Lio dedicated this tree to poetry in a lot of artistic performances. Below its fronds, sheets with verses, in plastic envelopes to preserve from rain, hang down. The poets read their lines in the shade of the tree. Painters and sculptors put their works on walls and grass. Itinerari '80 is an artistic movement; from different trends many excellent artists gather strength around Giancarlo Da Lio. Moreover, as well as they work, they must manage their work making use of everything and everywhere. Well, it is necessary to show works not only in the official galleries, but above all in the alternative art spaces: where people

go and come, on the road, in the shops, in the gardens too; so the Tree of Poetry was born and is growing. Do you want to send your mail art or mail poesy?

Photo Exchange: (Scott Garinger, Box 321, El Segundo, California 90245-0321) Will trade photographs, any subject.

Mani Art: (Pascal Lenoir, 11 Ruelle de Champagne, 60680 Grand Fresnoy, France) 60 copies of 15 cm x 21 cm artwork or 60 postcards. No black-and-white photocopies. Leave 1 cm margin on longest side. Nicely bound volume of mail art assembling, with the postcards slipped into a pocket. Addresses of the contributors are included as part of the usual "doc to all".

Collage d'aujourd'hui: (Dianne Bertrand, Art terre, 9109 Deschambault, Saint Leonard, Quebec, H1R 2C6) Mail art collage.

Brain Cell Fractal: (Ryosuke Cohen, 3-76-I-A-613, Yagumokitacho, Moriguchi-City, Osaka 570, Japan) Send 150 stickers or some other type of small mail art image. These are collated into a collage on an 11" x 17" poster, and a copy sent back to each contributor, along with a list of names and addresses of those participating.

Artist Trading Cards: (Chuck Stake, 736 - 5 Street NW, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1P9, Canada) ATCs are works of art created on 64 mm x 89 mm card stock. They are the same size as hockey trading cards, but the similarity stops here. Cards may depict anything, be 2-D or 3-D, they may be original, a series, an edition, or a multiple. Cards are signed on the back by the artist and, if necessary, an edition number is included. ATCs are paintings, drawings, collages, photographs, rubberstamp works, mixed-media, etchings, found images, recycled works of art, assemblages, etcetera. The only stipulation is that the card fits in the standard plastic sheets that hockey cards are normally stored within.

Stampzine: (Picasso Gaglione, 5033 North Mozart Street, Chicago, Illinois 60625) STAMPZINE is edited and published by Picasso Gaglione and friends. It is an assembling collection of rubber stamp art, featuring the handstamped works of international artists. To contribute, send 75 handstamped copies of 8.5 x 11 rubber stamp artwork. All contributors will receive a free copy.

BOOK REVIEWS

by Dale Speirs

Evolutionary Cul-de-sacs.

Old Typewriters by Duncan James (1993), L2.25 from Shire Publications, Cromwell House, Church Street, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire HP27 9AA, England. Mastercard/Visa accepted. This is an introductory chapbook for the subject of early typewriters. Profusely illustrated, colour card covers.

The evolution of typewriters (and other machines) is much like the evolution of life. In the initial stages, the originating species quickly branch into a profusion of new forms, filling every available niche, whether viable or not. Fossils and old typewriters have that in common. There are lineages that die out for no apparent good reason. Some forms are so bizarre or complicated that the wonder about them is not that they became extinct but that they actually managed to evolve in the first instance. Eventually the shrub of evolution gets thinned down to a tree. The trunk is often malformed by its vicissitudes in early life, which then casts the remainder in a fixed form not particularly logical, be it the human appendix or the qwerty keyboard.

like some mechanical coelacanth.

The radial thrust typewriter looked like a pincushion, with the keys arranged over the surface of a hemisphere (see Figure 1). Again, it was a simple design; the appropriate spring-loaded key was selected and pushed down. These two designs perished against competition from the keyboard typewriter, which was a nightmare to design and build but was much faster.

The early impetus for typewriters was as an aid to the blind in reading by making embossed letters. Although a patent was first filed in England in 1714, the first working typewriter was built by an Italian and used as early as 1808 by a blind Countess. The first mass-production typewriter appeared in 1870 from a Danish firm. The modern typewriter era dates from 1874, when the Remington factory produced the Sholes & Glidden machine in the USA.

The Sholes & Glidden typewriter had one lasting feature that, just as Roman Republic wagon widths determined North American railroad gauges, determined the keyboard we still use today on computers. Its keys were arranged in the infamous QWERTY style, never successfully displaced despite many attempts. For many decades it was supposed that the QWERTY keyboard was inefficient to use and that a different style called the Dvorak keyboard after its inventor was superior. This claim was demolished in 1990 by S.J. Liebowitz and S.E. Margolis, who

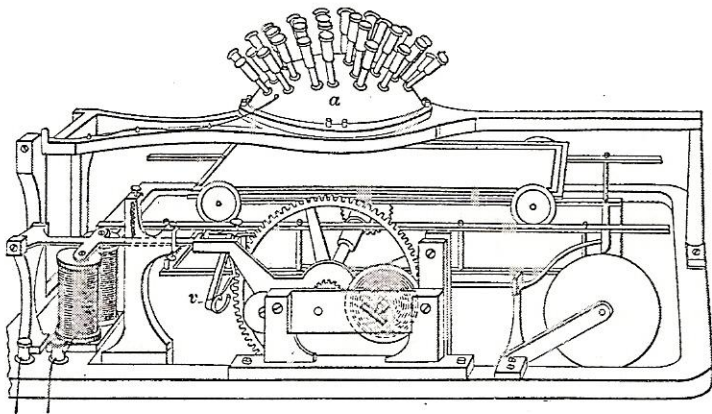
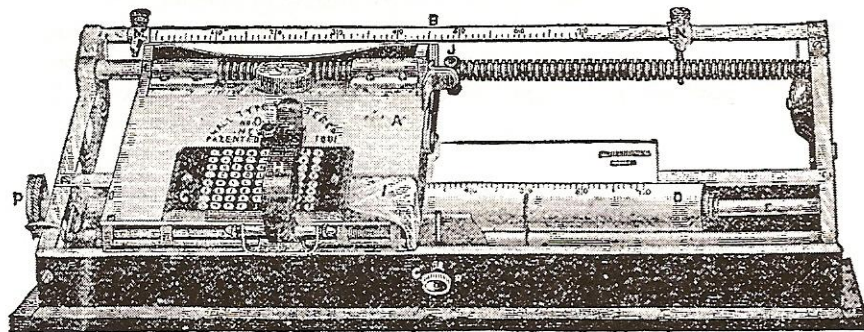


Figure 1: From: E.H. Knight (1876-01-15) Review of recent inventions. HARPER'S WEEKLY 20:58(supplement)

Typewriters, like the 500 megayear Burgess Shale fossils of the Cambrian era, often took bizarre forms in the youth of their lineages. There were three major branches on the typewriter evolutionary tree, the index, the radial thrust, and the keyboard. The index typewriter used a pointer to select the desired letter and then pressed down. It was a simple design but very slow. The index typewriter died out but left one tiny twig behind, the Dymo-type tape label maker, which still survives today in a niche market

Price £8 8s. Weight, 8 lb. Size, 14 by 7 by 2½ in.

THE ONLY PORTABLE AND COMPLETE MACHINE EXTANT. UNIQUE IN ITS SIMPLICITY.



THE "HALL" TYPE-WRITER.

The "Times" referred to this Machine on March 11, 1884, as follows:—"Messrs. WITHERBY may claim the credit of having introduced from America a NEW TYPE-WRITER, which is both cheap and portable. . . . The principle of this beautiful little Machine. . . . It may be used in any position, on a desk or in a railway-carriage. . . . A practised hand can achieve from thirty to forty words a minute, which is a good deal faster than most people can write. . . . The plate is fitted with capitals and small letters, stops, numerals, &c.

PROSPECTUSES AND ALL PARTICULARS POST-FREE FROM

WITHERBY and CO., 325A, High Holborn; and 74, Cornhill, London.

Figure 2: Index typewriter advertisement (1884-09-06), from ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS 85:239.

published a paper that year in THE JOURNAL OF LAW AND ECONOMICS showing that the Dvorak keyboard is not significantly better. They traced the claim of Dvorak superiority to a 1944 U.S. Navy study carried out by Dvorak himself. In 1956, Earle Strong restudied the matter and found no difference in keyboards.

Over the next century, typewriters underwent considerable evolution, just as desktop computers have radically changed since the 1980s. Originally the paper being typed upon was not visible, but by 1897, after several false starts, visible-paper platens were on the market, just as WYSIWYG word processing in GUIs displaced the command line in personal computers. The portable typewriter branched off into its own evolutionary design, just as the personal computer dichotomized into laptops.

This book illustrates fascinating typewriter designs, with photos of some bizarre typewriters that were Burgess Shale equivalents in the mechanical world. It does not pretend to be a definitive source about typewriters but is a nice inexpensive introductory volume.

A Geoscience Guide To The Burgess Shale by Murray Coppold and Wayne Powell (2000), available for \$15.00 from the Yoho-Burgess Shale Foundation, Box 148, Field, British Columbia V0A 1G0. Trade paperback, 60 pages, colour throughout.

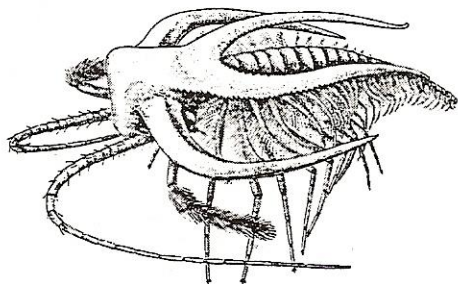


Figure 3: *Marrella* From THE FOSSILS OF THE BURGESS SHALE (1994) by D.E.G. Briggs, D.H. Erwin, and F.J. Collier. Published by Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.

Yoho National Park, on the British Columbia side of the continental divide, is Canada's second national park. It was established in 1886, the same year fossils were discovered there on Mount Stephen. In 1909, Charles Walcott of the Smithsonian Institution discovered the Burgess Shale quarry, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

515 million years ago, when the Burgess Shale animals began their immense journey through time as fossils, the world was quite different. The central core of North America, called Laurentia, was the only part of this continent then existing. It straddled the equator, tilted so that what is now north was then pointed east. The days were 21 hours long, there were 420 days in a year, and the Sun was dimmer. The Moon loomed much closer and consequently the tides were much stronger. There were no land plants, and the naked continents eroded much faster.

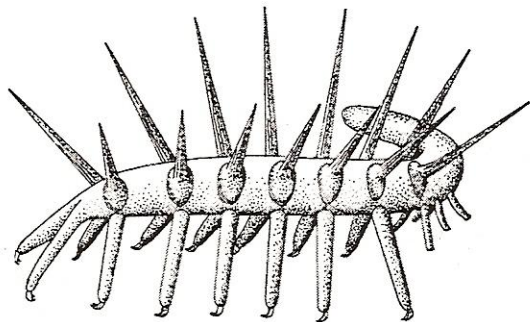


Figure 4: *Hallucigenia*. From THE FOSSILS OF THE BURGESS SHALE (1994) by D.E.G. Briggs, D.H. Erwin, and F.J. Collier. Published by Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.

What is now British Columbia and Alberta was then warm, shallow seas. The bizarre animals of the Burgess Shale were not confined to that locality; they are reported from thirty other Cambrian deposits in Canada, Greenland, China, Siberia, and Australia. The great value of the Burgess Shale fossils is that they are soft-bodied species, not ordinarily preserved as fossils and only in a few locations due to freaks of geological deposition.

This book is intended for tourists. It covers the geological history of the Burgess Shale, the origin and development of life, and the Cambrian explosion, when life suddenly radiated into tens of thousands of species when atmospheric oxygen increased significantly.

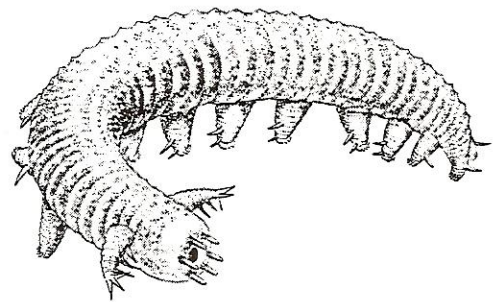


Figure 5: *Aysheaia*. From THE FOSSILS OF THE BURGESS SHALE (1994) by D.E.G. Briggs, D.H. Erwin, and F.J. Collier. Published by Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.

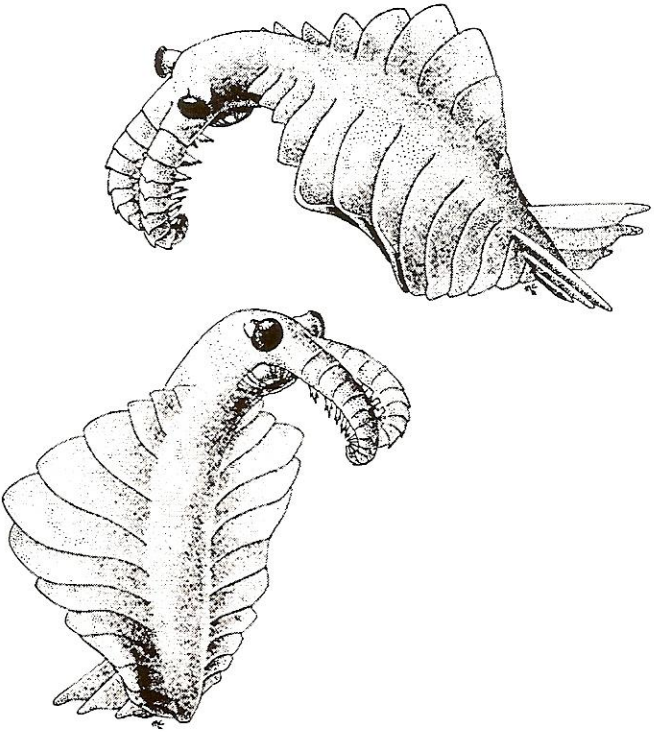


Figure 6: *Anomalocaris*. From: JOURNAL OF PALEONTOLOGY (1996) 70:288

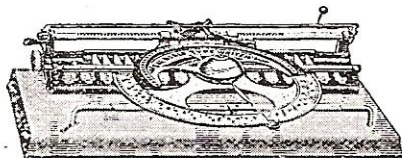
Walcott worked the quarry annually until 1925, two years before his death. Each year he brought his wife and children with him. It is speculated that one reason he spent so much time at this site was the spectacular view. The quarry is just below a mountaintop escarpment. Below it is a mountain-ringed bowl containing Emerald Lake, a turquoise-water lake. To the north, glaciers crown the mountains, and to the south is Kicking Horse Pass. There may be better views on this planet, but not many.

The book also covers the trilobites from nearby mountains, and gives an account of the post-glacial history of the area. Emerald Lake, for example, is gradually being filled in by erosion from the mountains. The Burgess Shale quarry is on a cliff face that is slowly crumbling into a side valley of the lake. The fossils would be completing their 515 million year journey through time as they erode into the valley below, save for the intervention of hominids starting them off on another journey to museums far away.

-14-

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OVER 50,000 IN USE.

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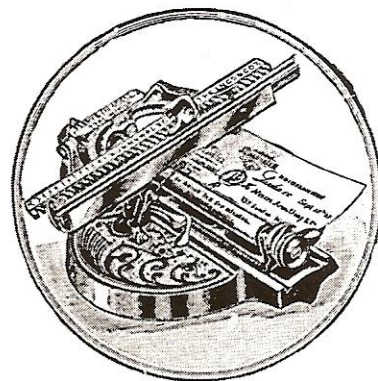


Figure 7: Advertisement for index typewriter from the Burgess Shale, pardon me, from ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS (1891-10-24) 99:555

Figure 8: Odell index typewriter, from ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS (1893-07-01) 103:24

A MODERN CROP OF EVOLUTIONARY DEAD-ENDS.

The Darwin Awards by Wendy Northcutt (Dutton, 2000, ISBN 0-525-94572-5) is a hardcover compilation of anecdotes from the famous Website. Most stories have been confirmed, some are listed as urban legends, and all deal with people who voluntarily remove themselves from the gene pool by gross stupidity or inappropriate action suggesting an insufficient cognitive ability.

The book is right up to date; I noted the July 14, 2000, death of Calgary's own Sheldon Soltys (page 212), who, exiting a drunken party, got tired of waiting for the elevator. He climbed into a garbage chute to take the quick way down and fell 12 stories headfirst into a garbage compactor. There is also JFK Jr and his final flight at night, in poor weather, with a broken foot, in an unfamiliar aircraft. The glee of evolutionists about this case of natural selection must, unfortunately, be tempered with sadness that he took two innocent lives as well.

The book compiles a wide variety of stupidity, ranging from sticking an arm through the bars of a zoo cage to pet a tiger to the old classic of using a lit match to see down the barrel of a muzzle-loader gun. Those who complain about Daylight Saving Time will be pleased to read of the Palestinian terrorists who died when the bombs they were carrying went off an hour early. The bomb makers set the fuses on Daylight Time but the drivers

delivering the devices had their watches on Standard Time. The gun control problem solved itself automatically in the case of the man who tried to play Russian roulette with a semi-automatic pistol instead of a revolver. And to think that creationists don't believe in natural selection!

CHEAT THE PROPHET

G.K. Chesterton, in the opening paragraph of his 1904 novel *THE NAPOLEON OF NOTTING HILL*, writes about a game called 'Cheat the Prophet': "*The players listen very carefully and respectfully to all that the clever men have to say about what is to happen in the next generation. The players then wait until all the clever men are dead, and bury them nicely. They then go and do something else. That is all. For a race of simple tastes, however, it is great fun.*"

"There is no doubt in the mind of any careful observer but that the age of reading is over and someone should chant its dirge. ... Like all things mortal, reading has run its course. Beginning as a widespread general cult with the invention of printing and the great subsequent outburst of expression during the Renaissance in Italy and the Elizabethan period in England, it probably reached its culmination in the Victorian era and then began to die slowly by suffocation."

Miss L.C. Willcox "The decay of reading."

Published in 1913 in *HARPER'S WEEKLY*.

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