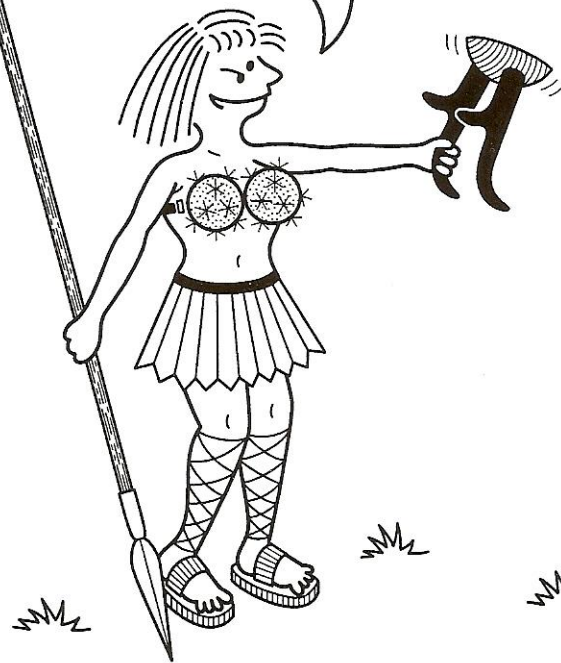


OPUNTIA

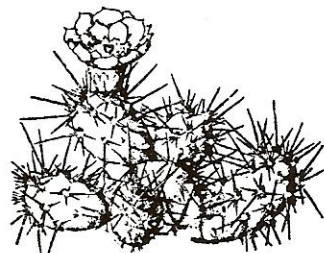
48.1A

He asked if I ever took
my helmet off for anything
and I told him for one
thing and one thing only.

How
did it strike
him when you
hit him with
it?



TEDDY
HARVIA



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: Teddy Harvia, 12341 Band Box Place, Dallas, Texas 75244-7001

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Sue Mason, Ken Miller, Picasso Gaglione, Henry Welch, Bruce Pelz, Giovanni StrADA DA Ravenna, Scott Crow, Chuck Stake, Tom Hendricks, Ned Brooks, Lois Klassen, Michael Waite, Sheryl Birkhead, Scott Garinger, Violet Jones, Robert Lichtman, Obvious Front (floppy disk mail art), Lloyd Penney, Harry Warner Jr

FROM: R'ykandar Korra'ti
5038 - 20 Avenue NE, Main House
Seattle, Washington 98105

2001-05-14

[As per their request, I sent some back issues of OPUNTIA to Norwescon 24 for their zine room.]

Well, that worked pretty well. Long-time contributors to the Norwescon Fanzine Lending Library will know that last year the Hospitality suite was re-configured, eliminating the quiet room and forcing us into different function space. The arrangement decided upon for last year didn't work really, at all.

This year we came up with another new configuration. We had a room that was ours alone from 4 p.m. until 10 a.m. each day, and handed over to programming for the remaining hours. We were up the hall from Hospitality, so people going to and from there

would see us. We had water in the room. I started putting the information cards on one of the small shelves, separate from the zines, with a little sign pointing to them. We had really big signs, both inside and outside the library room. And we had our usual quantity of comfy chairs.

It worked! It'd still be nicer to have the room full-time, but that didn't seem to hurt traffic very much. It might have helped that all those people going to panels in that room saw a large "Fanzine Lending Library" sign, with the hours posted. We picked up an audience we hadn't had before; there were a lot of people stopping by to read fanzines in the early morning, sometimes after going down to Hospitality to grab a little cereal. Being right by programming made this convenient. It was brought up at the "Onions and Roses" panel as a good change this year. Late-night readership was also up a lot, with five to eight people in working on the daily zine, and reading or talking about fanzines well after midnight. In fact, the only time I saw the room really empty during the convention was after 3 a.m. or at 4 p.m. when we were cleaning up from the last panel of the day.

So all around a pretty successful library. I'd particularly like to thank people who sent in zines for the first time this year. I'll make my annual request; if you know another publisher who might like to be on our mailing list, particularly someone who has just started publishing, particularly in the Pacific Northwest, tell

me about them. Or them about me, either way. I had one note this year from someone who had known about the library for years, but thought they needed an invitation to be involved and hadn't gotten one. You don't have to wait for me!

FROM: Chester Cuthbert
Winnipeg, Manitoba

2001-03-27

Transportation costs are now so high that the Internet prices are perhaps worth paying as a saving of time. Long ago, one of our local club members moved to the Toronto area and told me it was cheaper to buy from me by post than to pay travel and parking fees to locate books in Toronto. Of course, with postage now so high, the situation has changed.

FROM: Bridget Bradshaw
19 Hill Court Road
Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL52 3JJ, England

2001-03-28

Ah dear, I spend far too much time at work doing admin and formatting addresses to take account of Royal Mail regulations, and then I come home and for a hobby I send out convention admin and read about Canada Post regulations.

At least they seem vaguely sensible,

if a little picky about how you place the stamps. After all that though, they rarely seem to frank them properly. I'm not knocking it; there are some lovely stamps on the envelopes you send, and it's nice that Canada Post doesn't do what the USPS does, which appears to be to put all the envelopes containing fanzines on the floor, then ride a bicycle with carefully inked tires over them.

[I took a tour of the Calgary Mail Processing Plant a few years ago. The guide told us that Canada Post figures it costs more than it is worth to try to cancel every stamp on non-standard envelopes, so they don't worry about it too much. Instead, they weigh their incoming mail and compare it to local postage sales; the two should roughly match. If they are out of balance, then large-scale stamp re-use is the first suspect and an investigation begins.]

Can you re-use unfranked stamps and should I soak them off and save them for you, or is this a heinous abuse of the trust the Post Offices place in us?

[In Canada, this is a Criminal Code offence (federal felony). Nobody notices or cares about the occasional stamp that slips through a second time, but big-time operators soon get caught because the volume is noticeable. About once every five years some Canadian stands before Court of Queen's Bench for stamp washing.]

So far, it's only Teddy Harvia that has made people wear spines [in his goddess Opuntia cartoons]. Which makes me wonder why don't designers make clothes out of green, silky, cactus skin, using the opuntia budded structure to achieve that hourglass figure, and photograph the models sitting on a black leather sofa?

[Probably because the owner of the sofa would send an estimate for damages to the leather poked full of holes by the spines. But seriously though, although I'm not saying it would be impossible to make clothes out of opuntia epidermis, I don't see how it would work that well. Opuntias use wood fibres for mechanical support, wrapped with layers of cellulose and lignin, and coated with wax. Not what would seem to be suitable textile material as is.]

FROM: Anna Banana

2001-04-23

R.R. 2, 3747 Highway 101

Roberts Creek, British Columbia V0N 2W2

Re: Papernet still around in ten years? I'd say yes, and no doubt with changes. Computers, and their promise of a paperless world, have increased use of paper, not the other way around. Consider the zine scene now, and the zine scene in 1970, a far smaller one then. In 1970, you could actually keep track of who was publishing what.

FROM: E.B. Frohvet
4716 Dorsey Hall Drive #506
Ellicott City, Maryland 21042

2001-03-31

[Re:] your amazingly succinct fanzine reviews, mine getting, beyond address, 10 words. Of course as you say, the admirable durability of OPUNTIA stems largely from keeping it to a manageable size.

[That is why the heading says "Zine Listings", not "Zine Reviews". I don't have time to write essays on each issue of a zine, nor is it likely many people would read them all at leisure and in deep thought. I do occasionally single out a particular issue for extended review, but mainly the listings are there as a networking guide for readers wanting to expand their contacts in the Papernet.]

MAIL ART LISTINGS.

Portrait Of A Name: (Lois Klassen, Box 74540, Vancouver, British Columbia V6K 4P4) Send art (any media/technique) about your name or the name Lois. This project celebrates the existence of The Lois Club, recognized worldwide, and referenced in LARRY'S PARTY by Carol Shields. Any mail art submitted by

other Lois' will be highlighted and, of course, circulated to other Lois'. Documentation and possible exhibition to follow. Deadline is August 1, 2001.

Heads: (G.J. Nason, 3 Church Walk, Laxfield, Suffolk IP13 8DL, England) Mail art about heads. Size and technique open. No return, documentation to all. For exhibition at Halesworth Gallery, Suffolk, from August 15 to September 5, 2001.

Erik Satie: (Jean Hugues, 46 Rue de Gesvres, 60000 Beauvais, France) Do you like his music? That French composer was born in Honfleur in 1866. He worked with the greatest; Picasso, Picabia, Braque, Cocteau, Rene Clair. He influenced artists as prestigious as Debussy, Ravel, or Stravinsky. In his most famous creations, you can find 'Les Gymnopedies', 'Les Gnossiennes'. Please send me your mail art in A4 sheet size (21 cm x 30 cm), Any technique allowed.

Think Here: (Jose Roberto Sechi, Av. M29, N° 2183, Jd. Sao Joao, Rio Claro SP - 13505 - 410, Brazil) Mail art magazine. Drawing, design, painting, engraving, gluing, rubber stamp, writing, poetry, visual poetry, photograph, etc.. In black and white, please, maximum 13 cm x 7 cm (horizontal format). Theme free, no return, no jury, no deadline, documentation to every 18 participants.

The Working Life: (Ginger Mason, Box 39168, Vancouver, British Columbia V6R 1G0) Show me/tell me about your work. Is it a means to an end? Does it give you pleasure? Are you doing the work you want to do? Does your vision match your reality? Free medium, documentation to all: Deadline February 2002.

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.

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?

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.

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.

SCIENCE FICTION PREHISTORY

by Dale Speirs

Bakka Books of Toronto have started a reprint series of Canadian SF, and #1 in the series is now at hand. Canada's first SF novel was **A Strange Manuscript Found In A Copper Cylinder**, by James De Mille. It was published in 1888 after the author's death. The novel was actually written long before that, but De Mille was unsatisfied with the ending and therefore never published it. His widow needed money, which is the only reason it saw print.

This book is a fantastic-adventures novel which precedes Jules Verne and H. Rider Haggard, and is about as pulpish as they come. The reprint includes original illustrations, and is a trade paperback (Stone Fox Publishing, 2000, ISBN 1-895837-96-0). Price is \$19.95 from Insomniac Press, 192 Spadina Avenue, Suite 403, Toronto, Ontario M5T 2C2.

The story begins with the recovery of a manuscript from the sea, containing within an account by Adam More, late of Cumberland, England. In 1844, he set sail from Australia on a ship that stopped off in the Antarctica. More is stranded when his seal-hunting expedition is separated from the ship. Lost in the ice floes, he then lands at a lost world, back when lost worlds were still plausible.

The Kosekin, the people of that lost world, follow a philosophy that takes Judeo-Christian theology at face value and runs it into extremes. The plot moves along at a cracking good pace, with dinosaurs, pterosaurs, and pleisiosaurs abounding, mixed in with Hebraic Aztecs (the Kosekin), maidens in distress, volcanoes, human sacrifices, and all the other obligatory accessories of a lost world.

The theology of the Kosekin is ostensibly Hebraic/Christian. The rich man is condemned, and life is but a walking shadow of the future world on the other side of the grave. In Canada today, as it was back in the 1860s when De Mille wrote this story, we piously proclaim that possessions are burdensome, while nonetheless continuing to pay off the mortgage and shop til we drop. The Kosekin take this at face value, by giving the poor folk extreme political power. This leads to everyone trying to give their worldly goods to someone else, since the more they give with no thought of recompense, the more charitable they are considered. To give away a huge fortune and be left penniless puts one at the top of the pyramid, both figuratively and actually. This leads to endless struggle, as everyone tries to give their wealth to someone else while simultaneously trying to avoid any obligation to accept someone else's charity.

The long delay in publishing the original manuscript, and its rarity in print today, means that many careless readers will assume that

it is derivative of other lost-world stories.

That it also comes from Canada, whose literary tradition is usually ignored outside its borders, has also contributed to its obscurity. In fact, it is a ground-breaker in the lost worlds tradition of literary story telling, and every serious pulps collector should have a copy.

De Mille writes the story in episodic fashion, with a cliffhanger in each chapter. The prose flows smoothly and easily, a point that should be mentioned because most Victorian novels are today unreadable because of excessive verbiage in the Johnsonian style. The ending cuts off abruptly, and one can see why De Mille never sent it to print in his lifetime. Nonetheless, it is a good read, and well recommended.

FANDOM HISTORY: WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Reviews of: **International Revolutionary Gardener #4** (The Usual from Judith Hanna and Joseph Nicholas, 15 Jansons Road, Tottenham, London N15 4JU, England) and **Olympiad: An Historical Novel** by Tom Holt (Abacus, 2001, trade paperback, ISBN 0-349-11316-5).

I lurk on listservs such as Timebinders, Memoryhole, and cansf, and much of the commentary that comes through in the daily digests is quickly skimmed through. I have no interest in petty

squabbles by elderly fans over who did what to whom at the 1962 Worldcon, or why some machine shop lathe operator was an important writer in fandom. The big picture is quickly buried under a mess of scribbles, as any substantial post is soon diverted off topic by mediocre quips or cutesy remarks about a typographical error in a previous posting.

Although I don't write fanhistory, I have published substantial articles and books on Canadian aquarium and philatelic history. In my writings, I try to confine the detailed lists of club presidents and other functionaries to appendices. Nor do I simply recite facts in chronological order without commentary, as if history was supposed to be objective. I write to a theme.

Written references such as zines, books, letters, and other documents, may be not always reliable in the assertion of facts, but memory is even worse. "I seem to recall that ... " is a phrase often seen in letter columns and listservs, a phrase which indicates that which follows after it should be taken not with a grain of salt but several kilogrammes.

Change Of Subject.

Tom Holt is best known for his series of SF and fantasy novels, usually involving fantastical events and creatures set in contemporary surroundings. His style is a frenetic humourous one,

often too frenetic. He also has written a series of historical novels set in the ancient Mediterranean, not frenetic but still humourous. *Olympiad* is one such tale, told in the form of dinner table conversations between a group of Greek hosts and their honoured guest, a Phoenician trader stopping to do business with them. The main part of the novel is the story of how the hosts had set out many years ago in an unsuccessful attempt to invite other Greek cities to participate in some athletic games, what would be the misty origin of the Olympics. A well-told tale, and worth reading, but what I want to discuss are the ancillary conversations between the Phoenician and his hosts about writing and memory. The novel is set in pre-literate Greece, and the Phoenician is trying to convince his hosts of the utility of a new-fangled idea called writing. They aren't having any of it though, as they consider memory so much superior.

"The old man sat up. "Those scratches mean my name?" he said. "Really?"

"Really."

"And if you took that bit of wood home with you and gave it to someone else, they'd look at it and know my name?"

The guest nodded. "Any of my neighbours in Tyre could read that", he said.

The old man sat back against the wall and blinked. "Well", he said, "isn't that something? And if you kept that bit of wood safely, like in a box or on a shelf in the wall, it'd keep on saying my name even after I'm dead? Forever, even."

The Greeks at the table argue against the usefulness of writing: *"Glory isn't things you leave behind, or some sort of tally or message you scratch on bits of tree bark. It's how other people remember you. It's having people telling stories about you, and repeating the words you said, when you've long since flaked away to ashes and the sheep have scattered the stones of your cairn."*

To which the Phoenician replies: *"Suppose there was a great battle, everybody fighting bravely, great deeds of valour done on both sides; but one side's completely wiped out. Now, the survivors on the other side go away and tell their tale, and they're remembered all right, but what about the equally brave men on the losing side? They're forgotten; or maybe even worse, lies are told about them and repeated over and over again for generations. But if you write stuff down, you're talking directly to a man long after you're dead, without having to rely on other people to be truthful and have good memories."*

This sums up the greatest wonder of written language, the ability to speak directly to generations as yet unborn in one's exact words. Writing is not a guarantee that it will happen thus, for it

can be forgotten or lost,

but memory is even worse. The Greeks telling the story of the first Olympiad to the Phoenician admit their memories may have 'mended' some of the conversations of forty years ago, but still insist on its power over scratchings on wax and wood. Two millennia later, Homer would be forgotten had not some monks written down his epics.

Some SF fans insist on memory over paper, even if, as is commonly done, the story has been mended.

What Genuine Timebinding Really Is.

Which brings us to **International Revolutionary Gardener #4**, which starts off with a reminiscence by Judith Hanna about the books she read growing up in rural Australia. Books of fiction and poetry, which are bits of wood that keep on saying people's names after they're dead. Forever, even. Poems, for example, by Banjo Patterson, best known elsewhere in the world for "Waltzing Matilda". She learned by heart his poem "The Man From Snowy River". About the time she was doing that, young students in a rural Alberta school, myself among them, were also reading it. Not to memorize it, or pay much attention to the text, but in astonishment that Australia had snow.

The young Judith recited Gray's "Elegy In A Country Churchyard", written on the other side of the planet on the other side of time. In the generation before her, my father, in a south Saskatchewan rural school, learned by heart a poem about nine bean rows and a hive for the honey bees. He recited it so often when I was growing up that I always thought it was a traditional Saskatchewan folk song. Getting up from the dinner table, or called out to a veterinary emergency at some farm, he would usually say "I will arise and go now". In my twenties, I happened to glance into an anthology of poetry and was astonished to discover that the poem was written by an Irishman named William Butler Yeats. The poem was about a place called Innisfree that was an exact opposite to the dusty, treeless prairies of Saskatchewan. Irish memory would not have brought those words out to that distant rural school. It was the printed word that enabled an Irishman to keep on saying to unborn generations in places that were uninhabited during his time.

Following on after Hanna's essay, Joseph Nicholas writes on "Why Fan History Is Rubbish". He articulates a thought that some people such as I have had, but never dared to say out loud for fear of being stomped on by people who believe that a dozen SF fans gathering in a parish hall in the 1930s constituted an important event. Harry Warner Jr, the most prolific letterhack in zinedom, will probably best be remembered for his devastatingly accurate remark about Sam Moskowitz's THE IMMORTAL

STORM. This fanhistory, as Warner wrote, made World War Two seem like an anti-climax. Nicholas starts off his essay by quoting a similar remark by D. West, who said that fan history tended to regard World War Two as an inconvenient interruption in the postal service.

From the daily viewpoint of most people's lives, not just SF fans, this was true. I have an elderly friend who served with a Canadian regiment during that war, and who brought home an English bride. They became engaged during the London Blitz, and whenever he had leave, he stayed with her parents in town. His accounts of the war are not of battles fighting his way into the Netherlands, but that when he visited his fiancé's family, they had to sleep under the basement stairs, and were forever being roused out of a sound sleep to put out fires or stumble into an Anderson shelter. Finding a fresh orange or decent chocolate loomed larger in his mind than the time his company was pinned down in a waterlogged ditch by a German machine-gun nest.

The tendency to conflate a localized squabble with the importance of earth-shaking events is not confined to SF fandom. Nicholas writes: *"To be fair, a similar charge could be levelled at any history of any special interest group. Because of their inherently restricted focus, and consequent lack of externalizing context,*

such histories will always absurdly overinflate the importance and influence of the personalities and events concerned. For example, a squabble between two retired colonels over who has the right to organize the village's annual rose-growing competition will appear tedious and infantile to outsiders; but to the participants, it's a titanic struggle between ever-shifting alliances for village hegemony, with if not the promise of a gilded throne for the victor then at least an approving review in the parish newsletter."

Nicholas argues that the main failing of fanhistory is that it emphasizes the collection of facts and chronologies without placing them in context. There is little attempt to address the why and how, and to review the events against the understanding of the present day. There is no such thing as objective history. History considered without a theme or ideology in is simply an accumulation of facts, with no method to separate out the important ones from the trivial. In fanhistory, Nicholas writes that fanhistorians spend too much time debating if Fan X was the first to do something forty years ago: "*... and if the answer to such questions is in the affirmative then greatness is assumed to follow. Issues of relative merit and absolute value are avoided; preservation of their material for the betterment of future generations is taken as mandatory.*"

Nicholas has American and British fanhistory in mind, but in reading through his essay, I got to thinking about Garth Spencer's

series of fanhistories about Canadian fandom. Spencer is mostly still at the stage of collecting the basic facts and sorting out conflicting remembrances, rather than considering any themes that might arise out of what he has collected. However, he has made mention of some of the context of Canfandom's history, such as its remarkable fragmentation by geography and time. Spencer has demonstrated that not only has Canfandom consisted of isolated cities with little or no contact between each other, but within a given city there is no collective memory from one fannish generation to the next.

Nicholas mentions the veneration of Walt Willis and Irish fandom of the 1950s and 1960s, and its eventual passing. I have several Willis anthologies, such as WARHOON 28 and FANORAMA, and very enjoyable reading they are. I have also read many fanhistorical articles on Irish fandom, more so in recent years as the deaths of Willis and his fellow members of Irish fandom trigger panegyric obituaries. But the writings about Irish fandom are outside the context of what was happening in Ulster in the real world. Willis mentions in passing a few times that he had something to do in his civil service job with trying to ease the pain of The Troubles, but that is about the only mention of context I have seen. Fandom tries to isolate itself from the real world, but I don't see how a bookstore owner or the most nerdish fan could not be affected by car bombs, snipers, and military checkpoints.

Would that drive them into superscience space opera to forget the APCs rumbling past the house? Would those frenetic games of ghoddminton be just a little more frenetic because the players were trying to block out of their minds the latest newspaper headlines?

I would expect that once Canfandom history gets past the initial facts-gathering stage, that someone will consider it in the context of the times. An example that comes to mind is how it dwindled down in the late 1940s and 1950s to almost nothing. One man, Chester Cuthbert, of Winnipeg, basically kept the embers glowing long enough for others to come by and help fan the fire back to life.

Nils Helmer Frome, who published the first Canadian SF fanzine in 1937, died a forgotten suicide in Britain. It had to be an American, Sam Moskowitz, who kept alive his memory and writings. The Americans had a saying that fandom was a proud and lonely thing, but for Frome there was no pride in being lonely at a time when there were no other fans in Canada. There was no timebinding in the 1930s Canfandom, and precious little even today. Memory has not preserved the history of Canfandom, only the zines and historical accounts.

Vicious Fandom.

Being a review of **Fandom: Confidential** by Ron Frantz (2000, trade paperback, 212 pages). Available for US\$20.95 from Midguard Publishing, Box 1711, Mena, Arkansas 71953.

I've never been much for comic books and have seldom impinged on the world of comics fandom. After reading this book, I'm glad to have avoided it. Frantz covers his involvement in this fandom in the 1970s, when comics collecting abruptly went from a quiet network of nostalgia collectors to a shouting mob of greedy speculators interested only in the main chance.

The book starts off with the history of comics fandom from ancestral forms such as the dime novels of the late 1800s and the pulps of the 1920s to 1950s. The first commercially-issued comic book was FAMOUS FUNNIES #1 (July 1934) but it was the 1938 issue of ACTION COMICS debuting Superman that established comics in their modern form.

Dr. Fredric Wertham's book SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT was to comic books what the iceberg was to the Titanic. The 1950s were a disaster for comics publishers. Closely following Wertham were American Senators whose investigations triggered the Comics Code Authority to allow the industry to self-police itself.

Modern comics fandom began circa 1960 to 1961 with fanzines. The first comics convention was in 1964 and clubs began forming about the same time. In the late 1960s, comic books began inflating in price as more collectors entered the hobby. The ugly side of comics collecting began to show itself, such as price fixing, theft, and just plain greed. The first Overstreet price guide was published in 1970.

WEEKLY EXPRESS began in 1969 as a useful advertiser sheet for collectors who wanted to buy, sell, or trade individual issues of comics. It also helped developed pulp-era collecting and helped deal with mail fraud via a subsidiary called the National Central Bureau.

Frantz spent most of his time dealing with mail fraud problems. He noted that there were few pulp fraud cases he had to deal with. Circa 1976, about 65% of his investigations dealt with comics collectors, 25% with Star Trek, and 10% miscellaneous. The Trekkies were the most vicious and unprincipled. The cases were about one-third honest mistakes or misunderstandings between dealers and collectors, and the rest were wilful malice. Frantz built up evidence via letter writing and phone calls, then referred unresolvable cases to the USPS Postal Inspectors.

The closing chapters of this book deal with fanzine feuds, which were far beyond the science fiction fan feuds. Lawsuits were

common, and a favourite tactic was to file complaints with the F.B.I. or USPS Postal Inspectors.

The fanzines are more correctly described as adzines or semiprozines, not the standard fanzine of SFdom available for The Usual. Most of the feuds seemed to be the result of hastily jumping to conclusions, and/or responding to someone else's remarks with verbal vitriol instead of calmly seeking to negotiate. Hot tempers and emotional immaturity were standard among the feuders, regardless of their actual chronological age. A clear demonstration of how not to participate in a hobby. It brings to mind Samuel Johnson's lines about the one who "*left a name at which the world grew pale, to adorn a moral or point a tale*".

Although I am not of comics fandom, I found the book a fascinating read. The microcosmic struggles between comics dealers and collectors in the late 1970s and reported straightforwardly as the titanic struggles of, say, bison bulls in rutting time. This book makes the Gulf War seem like an anticlimax (with apologies to Harry Warner Jr).

In Which I Tie It All In Together.

Greek memory did not preserve the epics of Homer indefinitely. It is true they were passed down from generation to generation by oral tradition, but their survival today is because someone wrote

them down on paper. Memory would never have brought Gray's poetry to a young girl in the Australian outback, or an Irish poem to a Saskatchewan farm boy. Memory will not preserve fannish history; zines and books will. But will anyone read them? Will they deign to learn from them? Garth Spencer has shown in his Canfandom histories that those who most need to learn from the past are the least likely to heed the advice.

CATFANDOM

I have a small collection of novels and stories, almost entirely mysteries, set at SF conventions. The latest addition to this sub-genre is **Cat In A Kiwi Con** by Carole Nelson Douglas (Forge, 2001, mass-market paperback, ISBN 0-812-58425-2). It is also in another sub-genre, that of feline mysteries. I like cats as much as the next person, but can't see my way to murder mysteries whose heroes belong to a species mainly concerned with eating and sleeping, not helping out bipeds.

The cat in this novel is named Midnight Louie. This book is part of a series of Midnight Louie mysteries, and is not entirely self-contained. It carries over unresolved matters from some previous installments, and leaves some of them still unresolved at the end. The book is told from multiple character viewpoints, including the cat's. Most of the humans involved have decent parts, but it

baffles me what the four-legged narrator is doing in the story. He plays little part in the motivating plot, and if he was deleted from the text, the story would be no more difficult to follow. This is, not so incidently, the only volume in the Midnight Louie series I have read.

The main part of the story is set at a media convention called GigantiCon, taking place in Las Vegas. Douglas is reasonably accurate in describing fandom and conventions, from the overweight nerds to the dealer bourse. The only major gaffe I noticed was on page 232, where she attributed the invention of the phrase 'sci-fi' to Isaac Asimov instead of Forrest Ackerman, an insult to both men.

There is murder, more than once, and the victims were dressed in the same media costumes. This had made it difficult for the murderer, as he was aiming at one particular victim, but kept offing other people wearing the same costumes. More bizarrely, one of the attendees had brought a cage full of kiwi birds from New Zealand, but after a big buildup, the birds are given only a quick walk-on part. This hardly validated the title of the book. Altogether, I found this novel a middling read, one of those books where the author was apparently scrambling to think up something new while re-writing the same story for the umpteenth time.

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.]

Anarchy And Architecture #1 (The Usual from E.B. Klassen, Box 9, Site 1, RR #1, Legal, Alberta T0G 1L0) Some very good essays, from what keeps people trapped in dead-end jobs to a survey of roadside shrines in Alberta. More thoughtful than the usual sort of ranting one sees elsewhere. Klassen has been out of zinedom since the 1980s but he makes a good comeback here, and I hope to see him as a regular publisher in the future.

Shouting At The Postman #45 (The Usual from Ken Miller, Box 101, Newtown, Pennsylvania 18940-0101) The Millers stay a few days with a friend whose house is absolutely filthy, as in no place to sit down because of junk, sagging ceilings with exposed joists where the dryboard fell away, lice medication on the bathroom shelf, and a young son (Robert) in the house desperate for attention from his mother. This unfortunately true story (they have photos) has one of the most staggering endings I have read anywhere: *"We felt terrible for Robert. We always feel terrible for Robert. We were just visiting hell, but he has to live there."*

The Blotter #11 (The Usual

-16-

from Cliff Kennedy, 39 Claremore Avenue, Scarborough, Ontario M1N 3S1) The high-tech issue, with articles on how not to computerize a tavern, the future of the Papernet, and getting Part A to work with Part B.

FOSFAX #202 (The Usual from Falls of the Ohio SF&F Association, Box 37281, Louisville, Kentucky 40233-7281) Doorstop-thick zine with 84 pages of book reviews, convention reports, politics, and lots of letters of comment.

Kreuz-Aktionen 2001 (DM5 from Wilfried Nold, Eppsteinerstr. 22, D-60323 Frankfurt, Deutschland) Multilingual (mostly German) mail art zine, the theme of this issue being "The Cosmic Cross". Artwork from around the world on the cross, from the Christian form to the swastika.

Aztec Blue #3 (The Usual from Murray Moore, 1065 Henley Road, Mississauga, Ontario L4Y 1C8) Genzine, with trip reports to Montreal, Albania circa 1988, and numerous letters of comment.

Erg #153 (The Usual from Terry Jeeves, 56 Red Scar Drive, Scarborough, North Yorkshire YO12 5RQ, England) Essays on the history of aliens and monsters in SF, weird airplane designs, lottery odds, and letters of comment.