OPUNTIA

54.3

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OPUNTIA is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for $3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US$ 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 OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines.

WHAT IS FAPA?

For those of you receiving this issue who do not know what an apa is, please read on.

This issue is for the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. (Details from Robert Lichtman, Box 30, Glen Ellen, California 95442) Modern zine publishing as we know it today began in the middle 1800s as cheap, home-use printing presses became available to the general public. Zinesters developed a distro method called the amateur press association (apa) where members sent x number of copies of their zine to a central mailer (also known as the official editor). The zines are collated into bundles, and each member gets back one bundle of everyone's zines. There is an annual fee to cover postage. Apas have a minimum level of activity required, such as publishing 8 pages a year. It must be emphasized that apas are not for passive subscribers; you must commit to the minimum activity level or you will be booted out. FAPA has been going for more than 65 years. The oldest apa is the National A.P.A., which was also the first apa, founded 1876.

x.3 OPUNTIAs are for FAPA. In addition to articles, there will be mailing comments on other apazines in the last FAPA bundle. I usually quote the remark I am commenting on, so hopefully an outsider can still read the comments with interest.

EDITORIAL

In order to simplify my life somewhat, I am reducing the plethora of zine styles and titles I produce. My main, and first, zine has always been OPUNTIA, produced in the format you see here. When I joined FAPA, I was under the impression that FAPAzines had to be the standard 8½ by 11, but I have since seen that smaller formats are acceptable since FAPA is a bundle, not a bound compilation like some apas. I will still be using SANSEVIERIA for Point of Divergence APA, which is an 8½ by 11 bound compilation format apa devoted to alternative history.

OPUNTIA is done for me at a print shop, whereas I assemble SANSEVIERIA myself at a copy shop. Much easier to let someone else do the work. It is also considerably cheaper to mail OPUNTIA than SANSEVIERIA, as I found out when I mailed the last SANSEVIERIA to FAPA. Canada Post raised the postage rates on January 12, 2004, in such a way that OPUNTIA is still cheap to mail but 8½ x 11 zines are a staggering price when sent in batch mode to apa distributors.

The x.3 issues will have the apazine comments. I will probably be sending my non-apa issues in between to meet the FAPA deadlines. Whole-numbered issues are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, and x.5 issues are perzines. I do not necessarily produce all the variety numbers in a cycle.

FAPA CLEARCUT AWARD

(for most pages published in a mailing) goes to Michael Waite for 78 pages in FAPA #266. The Clearcut Award for FAPA #267 goes to Tim Marion, who had 51 pages.

MAILING COMMENTS ON FAPA #266

FAPA #266 received in Calgary on February 26, 2004.

Ben's Beat #75 Re: you getting a rejection slip from THE NEW YORKER, then paraphrasing it to reject their subsequent subscription offer. This is an idea to be encouraged elsewhere!

Exclaim #1 Re: the use of "you know" as a pause filler in conversational sentences. This goes back to at least 1893, as I found it in the original publication of the Sherlock Holmes short story "The Adventure Of The Resident Patient" in the STRAND MAGAZINE. This rhetorical phrase is most annoying when the listener does not, in fact, know.

Edgar's Journal #1 Re: your massive Fanzine List. I have been doing a Subject Index To Canadian Zines, now up to about 2 megabytes on a WordPerfect document. We are both of us members of the Harmless Drudge Society.

Re: Your concern about how to classify fanzines. I quickly gave up on this, what with SF zines that never mention science fiction, punk zines that rant about politics instead of music, and political zines that mostly review books. I now only classify them as a zine if it is available for The Usual, and a small-press magazine must be subscribed to for money.

Your Edgar Allan Poe filmography was very useful.

Gegenschein #96 Re: privatizing electricity. Alberta did this several years ago, and the result was higher prices and rolling brownouts. The City of Calgary converted its Electric System Dept. into a corporation called Enmax, and the City of Edmonton did likewise with Epcor. Both municipalities came under pressure from Tories to sell out to private industry (cheaper, more efficient, etcetera) but incoming mayors resisted. Enmax now returns a profit of $50 million a year which is used to fund projects the City otherwise could not afford. For once the Tories and their corrupt friends have been visibly abashed (in Alberta they are known as FORKs, "Friends of Ralph Klein", after Premier Ralph Klein, who is honest but keeps picking third-rate cabinet ministers). Enmax, Epcor, and others moved into surrounding municipalities that were dumb enough to privatize their systems, bought out their suppliers, and now use those profits to the benefit of Calgary and Edmonton, or foreign stockholders.

Ride The Lightning Your comment to me: "*Does the 307 fanzines you received in 2003 include FAPA zines?*" I count each apa bundle as one zine, since it is in effect an editorial collective. What matters most about keeping zine statistics is the year-to-year trend. So far, I see no serious decline in zinedom.

My prediction is that Papernet zines will slowly come back into favour with the next generation of zinesters as people begin to realize how easy it is for employers, school principals, and, of course, the constabulary, to monitor the Internet. As more people are fired, suspended, expelled, or arrested because their rants were Googled on-line, they will come to appreciate the better security of the Papernet, which requires manual monitoring and many more staff hours to track, assuming of course, that Big Brother even knows your Papernet zine exists. Authorities don't have to know where your e-zine exists if Google does, but your boss can't inspect your personal mail at home.

As Cold As A Politician's Heart Re: Your visit to Noyo Harbour, Fort Bragg: "*The oddest sight we saw there was a couple of boats hanging from ropes high up in the air; Chip guessed it was to prevent thefts.*" I've seen this in Alberta lakes. The reason seems to be reducing wear and tear on a boat if left at anchor for long periods of time, just as cars are put up on blocks for long-term storage.

"*It's nice to be able to live in a part of the country where there's so much to see ...* " This is part of the reason why I don't travel long distances, but instead make frequent day trips into the Rocky Mountains. Just within a two-day drive of Calgary is a lifetime supply of mountains, canyons, waterfalls, and lakes to explore. I think it much better to do one place in detail rather than hit twenty highlights per day in a cross-country trip. My father liked long-distance traveling, and when we were kids our family went across the continent in summer in every direction from Alaska to Nova Scotia to California. Our parents assured us "You'll be glad you have these memories", but I have almost none from that age.

Fanalysis #30 Re: your remark that synchronized swimming "*clearly would be more interesting with the inclusion of firearms.*" I've always wondered why the biathlon is considered a sport. It doesn't seem to me that there is an obvious connection between cross-country skiing and target shooting, outside the Finnish Army. Allowing that it is a sport, it would seem a good method of making it more exciting would be to permit the competitors to squeeze off a few shots against each other. If I were 11 seconds behind the front runner, I'd forget about the target range. Okay, so the wimps wouldn't agree to live ammo, but what about paintball rifles? Wouldn't relay footraces be more exciting in the Summer Olympics if the team runners not holding the baton could run interference against the other teams? What if swimmers could cross lanes and kick each other in the face?

Lofgeornost #74 Re: losing your political faith. It isn't just the USA; we have the same cynicism in Canada. Prime Minister Jean Chretien jumped before he could be pushed, and the Liberal party elected a new leader in December 2003, former Finance Minister Paul Martin. There is little love lost between the two, Martin having been fired from cabinet by Chretien for being too ambitious. Now Martin is pinning a patronage scandal on Chretien.

The two right wing federal parties, the Progressive Conservatives and the Canadian Alliance, merged in December to form the Conservative party. There was a leadership race between Stephen Harper, the former Alliance leader, Belinda Stronach, and a faint-hope third candidate. Stronach is a 37-year-old blonde bombshell with no political experience, but she was making $12 million a year as the head of Magna International, founded by her father as an auto parts supplier. If you drive any North American-built vehicle, Magna almost certainly supplied some of the parts. Alliance hijacked the federal Tories, and the Red Tories (the 'Progressive' in 'Progressive Conservative') are using Stronach for a reverse takeover. Alliance can't get elected east of the Manitoba border, and the Red Tories are struggling in eastern Canada, so the Liberals will win easy. Harper won the race but Stronach is standing for election in her home riding. The provincial wings of the Tories are still the Progressive Conservatives, since Alliance was only a federal party. Alberta

has been Tory since 1971. Farmers and suburbanites keep it in power regardless. This despite botched electrical deregulation, which increased prices and reduced service, higher natural gas prices despite producing most of Canada's supply, and lack of school funding despite billion-dollar budget surpluses.

In the last few elections, I've ended up voting for the Greens for lack of alternatives.

Triquetrum Welcome back to zinedom. You write "*I'm sure there are those that think that all forms of fanac are exactly equal in merit and lasting value* ... " The only form with lasting value is zine publishing, because it preserves a record of the past. Con-runners would be forgotten if not for someone recording the details. Electronic text is not archiveable in the long run due to constantly changing hardware and software. Memory soon fades or vanishes with the people who were there back when. Littera scripta manet.

Re: no one recognizing you at Con-Version in Calgary. They wouldn't, would they? You are not a television fan, anime fan, or writers' workshop addict, the three major groups of Calgary fandom. You've been an easterner living in Ontario for lo! these many years, and zinedom is irrelevant to Calgary fans. I tried in past years to cultivate new zinesters at Con-Version but to no avail. They have no concept of The Usual, just $15 per issue anime fanzines (Start Trek is extinct in Calgary), or wanna-be pros in the writers' workshops who only publish in obscure small press periodicals. Everyone else has a blog or is a nomenklatura on the Con-Version committee. I doubt that ten people at Con-Version know who I am. As far as I know, I am the only zine publisher in Calgary. There are lots of "underground" small press magazines or advertiser-supported giveaways, but true zines available for The Usual are certainly well hidden.

Synapse Please spell my name correctly as Speirs, not Sp ie rs. Thanks.

"*Has Alberta found a means of extracting oil from tar sands economically enough to sell at $25 a barrel?*" Since the 1980s, actually. The technology is constantly improving and the tar sands projects are now profitable at $20 or even lower. It takes less energy to produce the oil than what is extracted.

Re: advice to prune back to the next branch and not leave a stub. The callus tissue that covers a wound grows only from the ridge where the branch joined its source. It thus takes far longer to cover a stub, which increases internal decay through the exposed dead wood.

All other zines Read, but no comments.

MAILING COMMENTS ON FAPA #267

FAPA #267 received in Calgary on May 19, 2004.

Picayune I've never owned a television set, and have seldom watched it at other people's houses since I went off to university in 1973. I was too poor as a student to afford a telly and got out of the habit completely. I have read about the 'reality' shows and wonder how even the dumbest lumpenproletariat could take it seriously. You mention Uri Geller was a reality show contestant. Probably they couldn't get David Icke.

Ben's Beat #76 To correct a comment you made; I did not donate the Bob Gibson collection of SF to the University of Calgary Library. His son and heir did; I just donated $7,500 for its upkeep.

Your mention of the play ANNA IN THE TROPICS by Nilo Cruz, about a lector (reader) in a cigar factory, caught my attention as I have been accumulating references for an eventual history of public readers. England used to have 'penny readers' in Victorian times, who would read novels aloud in theatres, admission 1d.

Nice Distinctions #5 Re: getting your way when dealing with bureaucrats by being nice to them and recognizing they are stuck in a brain-damaged system. Too true! As a 25-year employee of a municipality, I respond the same way. The screamer who demands instant action will have the rules quoted to him verbatim. Those who explain their problem in a calm manner get more consideration and we will work to get a satisfactory solution. Citizens (which is the actual term we use) often threaten to go directly to the Mayor for action. This doesn't bother us, since it actually gives us a couple of weeks breathing space. The Mayor's office gets the call, but since he doesn't know what the story is, he sends it to the Parks Dept. Director, who in turn sends it to the Division Manager, who sends it to the Area Superintendent, who passes it on to us for comment. If someone in the chain is on vacation it might be a month.

Better yet, someone might bury it under a slush pile of urgent letters where it won't be resurrected for months. I discovered the effectiveness of this method early in my career when I took a week's vacation and my gardener, who was relieving for me, shoved everything into a desk drawer I seldom used and forgot to tell me. Half a year later, I opened the drawer by accident and found the complaints. Not one citizen had called back in the meantime, nor any query received from management.

Re: same-sex marriages. Very controversial in Canada, and will cost the Liberals votes in the next election. I didn't like the idea but someone pointed out to me that about half of heterosexual marriages end in divorce, so if they don't take it seriously, why

should I worry about the fags? This point struck me forcefully enough that I had to agree. The Alberta Tories, vehemently against the Supreme Court of Canada ruling, did something very strange and which from some aspects is even more extreme than gay marriage. They changed the law (provinces have authority over marriages, not the feds) to one that recognizes only co-dependent relationships. This not only acknowledges hetero- and homo-sexual marriages, but also parents with dependent adult children. That last item is going to trigger some booby traps when the layabout son who lived in Mom's basement gets her estate while his siblings who went out on their own only get the leavings.

Worse yet, divorce will not end entitlements by the ex-spouse once the alimony period has expired. Both the new law and recent court judgements have required former spouses to support their ex-es indefinitely if the ex becomes ill and unable to work, even if there is no alimony or other entitlement. Further, homosexuals who split with their partner who later dies will be able to get a share of the estate. The Tories, and the courts, are both thinking along the same lines. Marriage and cohabitational relationships are too easy to get in and out of, and that must end. People have to learn that it is a lifetime commitment, not to be made casually. One Tory cabinet minister remarked that they will do nothing to publicize this but instead let the messy court cases make people think on their own.

Yhos #61 Sorry, but I gave up reading this after a few pages because of the fonetic speling. Written English and spoken English are two different languages and the latter makes poor reading.

All Sinking, No Power #1 Welcome to zinedom. Your title reminds me of the Royal Navy captain who singlehanded wiped out an enemy fleet and wired back to Admiralty House "Sighted navy, sank same."

Re: your book reviews. You mentioned Pierre Berton's history of Arctic exploration. Berton is probably the best-selling Canadian author there ever was, and specializes in popular histories. You might like to read his book on the War of 1812, which is his thesis that the British defeat of the USA was responsible for the origin of Canada as a self-aware nation rather than a collection of British ex-pats living in the colonies. Berton grew up in Yukon Territory, and has had a long career as a newspaper journalist and television personality.

Re: trying other fandoms. I'm big in philately and aquarium keeping. Having more than one hobby allows one to switch around when getting bored with one particular hobby, then come back later with renewed enthusiasm. A change is indeed as good as a rest.

Alphabet Soup #42 Re: fanzine checklists. I don't bother too much with checklists, which is why I am doing a subject index of Canadian zines instead.

Re: filing unknown or anonymous writers under Ozymandias. Brilliant idea for librarians! Over to you, Fred Lerner.

Sweet Jane #40 Re: William Jennings Bryan. One branch of my mother's family was from Finland by way of Cumberland, Wyoming (when the open pit mine ate up the town, they moved to Alberta). Mom died in 2002, and among her effects I found photos and posters for Bryan that had been passed down to her. Bryan was immensely popular among the working class of Wyoming. We remember him today only for his declining years at the Scopes Monkey Trial, but it must be remembered that he advocated an eight-hour work day in a time when to do so was politically dangerous. Nothing made the upper class, who didn't work, angrier than the idea that the lower class should only have to work eight hours a day.

Re: other Presidents. I was listening to the car radio a while back when I heard the comedian Nipsey Russell in a stand-up routine recorded in the middle 1960s. He said "*My friends warned me that if I voted for Goldwater, the war in Vietnam would be escalated, there would be rioting in the streets of America, and we would have inflation. I didn't listen to them and voted for Goldwater anyway. Sure enough, they were right; the war in Vietnam was escalated, there was rioting the streets, and we had inflation!*"

Crazy From The Heat #2 Re: failure of ezines to get responses the way realzines do. I think this comes from the gift economy; the editor provided nothing tangible, so the reader feels no guilt in not responding. I'm rather doubtful that printing and postage costs are the real reason for people quitting realzines, just an excuse. They still have hundreds of dollars to spend on hotels, travel, and convention memberships, or beer and other impedimenta. Yes, I know there are old pharts living on a scanty pension, and young punks living on minimum wage, but it is still quite cheap to send letters of comment via real mail and thus participate in zinedom.

The Bowling Alone syndrome is affecting all hobbies. In philately, stamp collectors are agonizing whether their clubs and magazines will still be around in the future. The Calgary Aquarium Society for several decades had a very intense youth programme; not one of those hundreds of kids have taken up the hobby as an adult.

I stopped worrying about the future of any hobby or nation when I realized that ultimately all protons will decay, and entropy will be victorious in the universe.

Re: setting up the Parts Unknown Fan Fund to send someone to parts unknown. How about a Trans-Arctic Fan Fund? Send someone on an all-expenses paid trip to the polar desert of Nunavut, where the Mars Society is busy training astronauts in the closest simulation there is on Earth of the red planet (I am not making that up; they really are).

Edgar's Journal #2 Re: definition of a dream. My favourite definition is that dreaming is the brain defragmenting itself.

The Annex #19 "*A surprising number of readers say they just don't like poetry, period.*" I do like some poetry but not 99.99% of modern poetry. Poems were meant to be spoken, not read. They should not be vague or gibberish, with no defined ending. Rhyme provides discipline. Humour is okay if it has a point. Ogden Nash I enjoy because he had a point to his jolliness. His poem about the advertising executive on Madison Avenue who asks himself if he has a responsible job havenue? carries a sting in its tail. What I don't like is angst over the futility of life or other wimpish narcissism. I'm a strong supporter of the Dead Poets Society; we need more dead poets.

Consulting my card index, I see that in TRAP DOOR #20 (published by Robert Lichtman, 2000, page 44) there is a letter of comment by Harry Turner about the 1950s fad among SF fans for a type of light verse called Widower's. To quote Turner:

"*Widower's ad jingles first made their appearance in the second issue of NOW AND THEN: THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE ROMILEY FAN VETERANS AND SCOTTISH DANCING SOCIETY, published on 16 November 1954 as a contribution to the second mailing of the newly-launched Offtrail Magazine Publishers Association. Co-editor Eric Needham was ... Rushed off his feet with work, he'd no time to shop, and all he found in his larder ... were a few tins of Batchelor's Baked Beans. ... After chomping them all week he'd grown heartily sick of the diet, and his frustration worked itself out in an ad jingle. We cast about for a replacement of the Batchelor's brand name (not wishing to give them a free ad) ... So the very first Widower's ad emerged as:*

Socrates died by his own hand
Imagine what this means ...
A whole life wasted - he never tasted
Widower's Wonderful Beans!"

There were quite a few Widower's verses over the years. The American equivalent, I suppose, would be the now-extinct roadside signs extolling in verse the virtues of Burma Shave.

Lofgeornost #75 You mentioned visiting Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. Did you see Canada's most famous sailing ship while you were there? The Bluenose 2 is a replica of the original Bluenose, immortalized on Canada's dimes, and is moored in Lunenburg. The original Bluenose was not only a working fishing schooner but the most successful racing ship of its time. It sank on a Caribbean reef but still lives on as a Canadian icon.

Re: touring a museum and seeing how well dried codfish keeps. During the Dirty Thirties, when the Canadian prairies were shriveling up in drought, well-meaning Maritimers sent dried codfish out west. Farmers never saw them before and used them as roof shingles.

Re: the Citadel of Halifax. Canadian humourist Max Ferguson, who lived in Halifax for many years, liked to say that the only shot ever fired in anger from the Citadel was by the commissionaire on a rainy day when he was trying to fire the noon-hour gun with a packet of wet matches.

Unsalvageable Trajectory Re: your comment to Sabella about Gerry de la Ree building a climate-controlled building to hold his collection. That's one advantage of living in southern Alberta; humidity is never mentioned in weather forecasts because it is always low. Our climate is relatively cool; 30°C is considered a headline story for a heat wave. I've noticed that the books and magazines in my collection which have spent most or all of their time in Alberta have no foxing, but old books I bring in from eastern North America or Europe that are the same age have foxing or brittle pages.

Fish Wrap Re: your complaints about American politicians and your election. In Canada, Prime Minister Paul Martin called a federal election on May 23 to be held June 28. The campaign signs are already up all over the place, annoying us Parks employees to no end because politicians are exempt from sign by-laws which allow us to yank advertising signs on medians and boulevards. Mowers waste time maneuvering around the clutter. The Greens are the among the worst; we expect it of the Tories, Liberals, and NDP, but not the ecofreaks. Do as we say, etcetera.

Arimoniitti #1 *"I hope that you, Dear Reader!, will enjoy this here issue of Finnishness."* Yes indeed. My mother's family was Finnish, originating from Kanuus on her mother's side and Isokyro on her father's side. I don't know any Suomalais myself, since like most immigrant families the language dies out with the younger generation born in the New World.

Trial And Air #14 (postmailing for FAPA #266) A valuable reference because of its material on the late Harry Warner Jr and John Foyster.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Whitfield, J. (2004) **Time lords.** NATURE 429:124-125

The International Commission on Stratigraphy has recently published the latest revision of the geological time scale. Eras from the Cambrian to the present have been dated to within one significant digit to the right of the decimal point, but older eras can only be estimated due to lack of marker rocks. An extract of the new dating is as follows.

Hadean:	greater than 3,800 megayears ago	
Archaean:	3,800 to 2,500 mya	(earliest algae)
Proterozoic:	2,500 to 1,000 mya	
Neoproterozoic:	1,000 to 542 mya	
Ediacaran:	600 to 542 mya	(multicellular life)
Cambrian:	542.0 to 488.3 mya	(burst of speciation)
Ordovician:	488.3 to 443.7 mya	
Silurian:	443.7 to 416.0 mya	
Devonian:	416.0 to 299.0 mya	(land plants appear)
Permian:	299.0 to 251.0 mya	(97% extinction at end)
Triassic:	251.0 to 199.6 mya	(life re-starts)
Jurassic:	199.6 to 145.5 mya	
Cretaceous:	145.5 to 65.5 mya	(dinosaurs die out at end)
Palaeogene:	65.5 to 23.03 mya	(rise of mammals)
Neogene:	23.03 mya to date	(rise of primates)

Avery, George (2004) **Bioterrorism, fear, and public health reform: Matching a policy solution to the wrong window.** PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW 64:275-288

The bioterrorist panic after 2001 was used by many security organizations as an excuse for funds to modernize. "*By defining bioterrorism as a security rather than a public health issue, policy entrepreneurs squander the opportunity to institute broad-based reforms that would improve not only the ability to manage a terrorist incident, but also meet other public health needs. The bioterrorism program proves a useful case study in how the goals of policy entrepreneurs can be displaced by attaching policy preferences to the wrong policy stream.*"

Speirs: The Canadian Ministry of Health recently spent oodles of money preparing and deploying vaccines and other anti-bioterrorism supplies. A recent survey showed local emergency officials were unaware of the program, much less where the supplies were and who to contact.

Jasienska, G., et al (2004) **Large breasts and narrow waists indicate high reproductive potential in women.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF LONDON 271B:1213-1217

The article title leaves nothing to add by way of commentary. I threw this one in for Tim Marion.

Rehn, A. (2004) **The politics of contraband: The honor economics of the warez scene.** JOURNAL OF SOCIO-ECONOMICS 33:359-374

"*Lodged within the Internet's increasingly commercialized webs there exists a thriving subculture that has developed an economy all its own. Specifically, a modern gift economy, a consistent and internally rational structure of actively anti-economic behavior that presents an interesting juxtaposition to our contemporary notions of economy. Based on an extended ethnography, this subculture is analyzed as a society ordered by agonistic play and gift-giving as economy. The contribution can best be described as adding ethnographic data from the post-industrial phase in Western economic development to the discussion of gift economies, a discourse that has usually dealt only with archaic communities.*"

Speirs: The warez subculture of stolen software and the online child pornography community share with the zine culture the idea of gift giving and trading, whether zines, hot videogames, or porn. Perhaps the economy of abundance (a la Star Trek) might operate in the same manner as a gift economy.

Godwin, Mike (1994 October) **Meme, counter-meme.** WIRED 2.10:85

Godwin's Law: As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches one. Cliff Stoll's Restatement of Godwin's Law: Once a discussion reaches a comparison to Nazis or Hitler, its usefulness is over.

Vigne, J.D., et al (2004) **Early taming of the cat in Cyprus.** SCIENCE 304:259

Neolithic site at Shillourokambos, Cyprus, dates about 9,200 to 9,500 years ago. At a grave site there, the skeleton of a carefully buried human was found along with grave goods and an intact cat skeleton laid out beside it. The cat was larger than modern-day house cats but definitely domesticated, not a wild scavenger. This is the oldest known domestic cat discovered.

IN MEMORIAM: ROBYN HERRINGTON

by Dale Speirs

Calgary fandom lost Robyn Herrington to cancer on May 3, 2004. She is survived by her husband Bruce, two siblings, and her parents. Robyn's brother died six months earlier, so her parents have suffered tremendously to lose two children like this. She was in her 40s, and was famous in Calgary for her very positive attitude to life, boundless energy, and outright cheerfulness in the face of adversity.

Robyn worked in the University of Calgary Information Resources section. Among many other duties, she edited the alumni magazine in which she once published a letter of mine despite the fact that I have never been student or faculty there. The University, with a nicety of protocol that does well for a high-society enclave, normally only lowers its flags to half-mast on the death of students, professors, or heads of government, and not for non-academic staff, but they made an exception in her case.

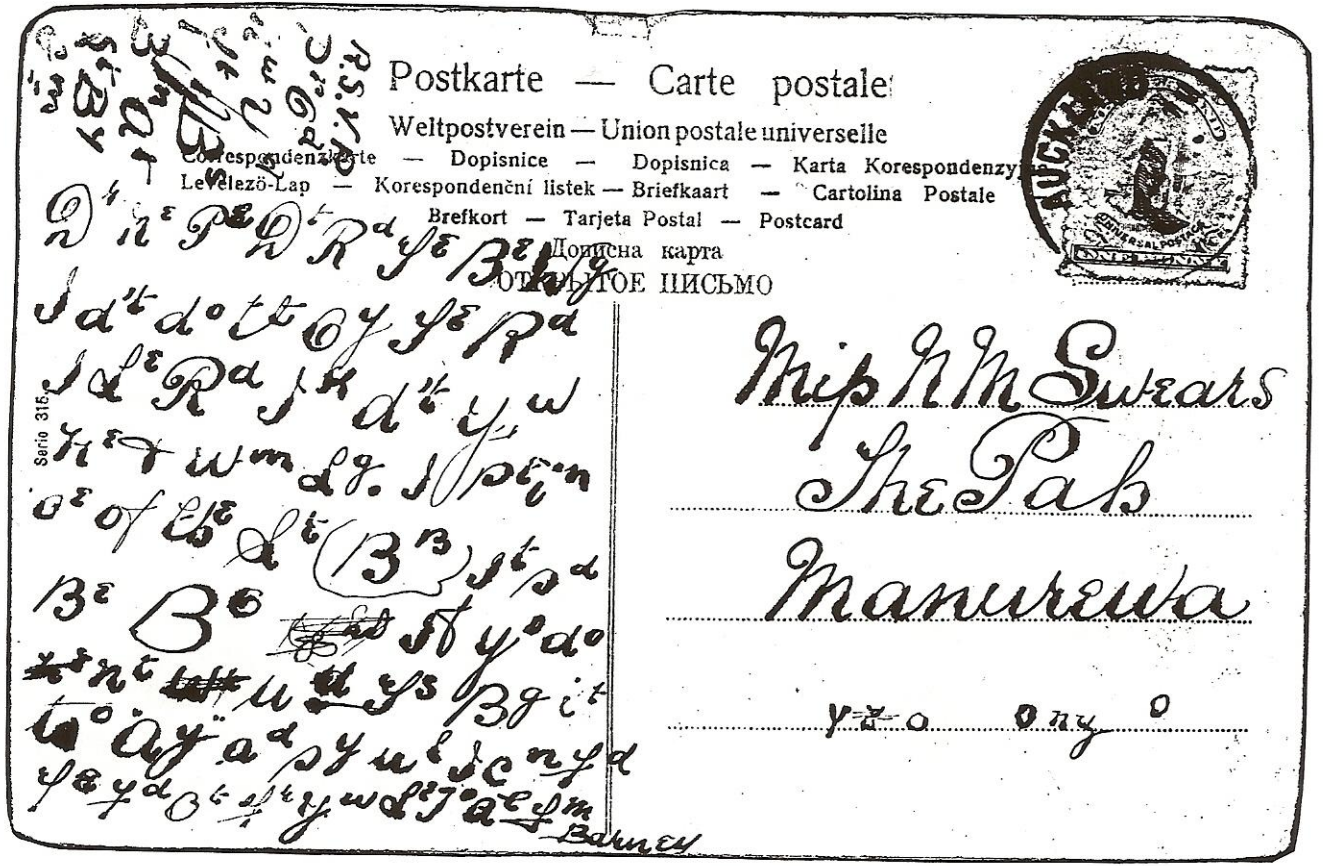
I usually saw Robyn once a year at Calgary's annual SF convention Con-Version, where she could usually be seen zooming by at near warp speed. One of her hobbies was glass-blowing, and her paperweights always got the best prices at the Con-Version auctions. She never belonged to an organization without being actively involved in it, such as the Calgary writers' group Imaginative Fiction Writers Association. She had just begun her professional writing career, having published in various small-press periodicals, and had a story in Mike Resnick's latest anthology NEW VOICES IN SCIENCE FICTION. Her impact for a beginning author was such that Hugo-winning novelist Robert J. Sawyer flew in from Toronto to deliver the eulogy.

SECRET CODES ON POSTCARDS

by Dale Speirs

I've recently started up yet another postal history collection, that of postcards with messages on them written in secret code. The one shown on the next page was mailed in New Zealand in 1901, and so far its coded message has stymied me. It doesn't help that the writer had sloppy handwriting and did not lift the pen from paper when forming letters.

It doesn't seem to be a straightforward substitution code. Each letter has another letter superscripted to it. It might be a keyphrase code but I'm wondering if it could be some form of speedwriting. I checked the usual references, both on cryptography and shorthand/speedwriting, but nothing similar is evident. Since all knowledge is contained in zines, I'll throw this out to you. Do you recognize the coding method?



Postkarte — Carte postale

Weltpostverein — Union postale universelle

Correspondenzkarte — Dopisnice — Dopisnica — Karta Korespondenzy
Levelező-Lap — Korespondenční listek — Briefkaart — Cartolina Postale
Brefkort — Tarjeta Postal — Postcard
Дописна карта
ОТКРЫТОЕ ПИСЬМО

Serie 315

Mrs N M Swears
The Pah
Manurewa

ALIENS BEAM INTO CALGARY

by Dale Speirs

Well, the newspapers always use that cliche for a headline about SF conventions, so why can't I? The weekend of February 6 and 7, 2004, saw Mount Royal College host the "Symposium On SF And Social Change". Since I work weekend shift Friday to Sunday, I wasn't able to attend but I noticed a report on it by Kirsten Morrell of the University of Calgary [1], so I'll use that as a source.

The featured attraction was Robert Sawyer, three-time winner of the Harlan Ellison Memorial Award for Congeniality, who got his picture in the paper being kissed by two 'groupies'. There were also the usual suspects from the Canlitcrit crowd, the ones who only publish in small press and academic reviews. The Thursday night before, the Calgary Public Library hosted a reading. Morrell scanned the crowd and commented: "*I recognized few faces in the lobby, a sad testament to the fragmentation of Calgary's science fiction and fantasy community. Only some of those I spoke to even realized Calgary has had an annual SF/F convention for the past 20 years.*" Calgary has a local writers' group called Imaginative Fiction Writers Association (IFWA) which is prominent at the annual convention Con-Version. Morrell didn't see them there either, and remarked: "*Sadly, I could not understand why the local SF/F writers' group was conspicuously absent from the reading, except that their monthly meeting coincided with this event. Sometimes one can look too far inward, to the exclusion of a world of possibility.*"

Friday and Saturday morning was the reading of academic papers on SF from people who take it entirely too seriously and write only for other academics, not the general public. There was a plenary session Saturday afternoon with the Guests of Honour discussing the great questions of SF, such as predictive writing and the nature of change. Sawyer, in the opinion of Morrell, was the only one who seemed to be making a good effort to bridge the gap between the general reader and the litcrit academics. However, this was redeemed when participants adjourned to restaurants in the evening and carried on their discussions in more social terms instead of droning from from a prepared text. I've talked to Sawyer at Con-Versions and he is a gentleman and a scholar (I was just joking about the Ellison award). He impresses me as someone who knows where he is going, and vigourously proselytizes SF among the heathen.

Reference.

Morrell, Kirstin (2004-02-12) Can sci-fi change society? GAUNTLET (University of Calgary student newspaper), page 10

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."*

"All mankind has heard much of M. Lesseps and his Suez canal. On that matter I do not mean to say much here. I have a very strong opinion that such canal will not and cannot be made; that all the strength of the arguments adduced in the matter are hostile to it; and that steam navigation by land will and ought to be the means of transit through Egypt."

The novelist Anthony Trollope, in his travel book THE WEST INDIES AND THE SPANISH MAIN. Published by Chapman & Hall, England, 1860. Second edition, page 338.

BUT THEN AGAIN ...

I am gradually re-reading all my SF prozines, and recently started on my set of MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. For many decades, Isaac Asimov had a regular science fact column in that periodical. In the August 1962 issue, he explained the electromagnetic spectrum, how to broadcast radio waves, and discussed a newly-invented device called a laser, at that time only two years old. Asimov then wrote about the idea of sending television signals through a light pipe:

"It is possible however that light might be sent through plastic pipes, from which leads could reach each television set in the area. (Does that mean the streets all get dug up, or will pipes run along telephone poles, or what?)"

This seems to me to be a pretty good anticipation not only of fibre optics, but the still unresolved problem of "the last mile", whereby the telcos and cable companies had to get those high-speed networks from the back alley into the house. Asimov goes on to consider what we actually do with that fibre:

"These days, when I watch television here at home, I have my choice of four channels that I can get with reasonable clearness and audibility. Even with only four channels at their disposal, however, the television moguls can supply me with a tremendous quantity of rubbish. Imagine what the keen minds of our entertainment industry could do if they realized they had a hundred million channels into which they could funnel new and undreamed-of varieties of trash."