

# OPUNTIA

## 63.3

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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?

This issue is for the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. (Details from Robert Lichtman, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, California 994611-1948) For those of you receiving this issue who do not know what an apa is, please read on.

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., 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.

**FAPA CLEARCUT AWARD** (for most pages published in a mailing) goes to Stevens Frank for 50 pages in FAPA #277 and Robert Sabella for 31 pages in #278 and 46 pages in #279.

## MAILING COMMENTS ON FAPA #277

FAPA #277 received in Calgary on November 29, 2006.

**Darn That Dream** Re: the 1963 PLAYBOY interview of a dozen SF writers asked to predict the future of 1984. This shows how we tend to expect the future to arrive sooner than it actually does, and underestimate the staying power of the past. That several SF authors predicted the demise of private passenger vehicles within 20 years, and everyone living in high-density rabbit warrens shows how group think can warp predictions. Those who made that prediction were urban dwellers from New York City who probably didn't understand just how much empty land there is in, say, North Dakota or Saskatchewan.

**Ouroboros #20** This is the first time I've seen a checklist of a press' output with some of the actual output tipped in! The front cover shows a photo of you with your zines spread around you plus two housecats. I went back through the checklist but couldn't seem to spot the cats in the press list. I assume, therefore, that the felines are either printer's waste or press overruns.

## Sweet Jane #49

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You remarked about the FAPA bundles that “ ... *the mailings themselves appear to be pretty much as big as they ever were* ... ” This prompted me to go through the back issues and check the page counts of FAPA bundles since I joined in 1997. That 2007 marks my first decade in FAPA came as a surprise to me; it seems like only a few years ago that I joined. Your surmise is correct. FAPA bundles have been fairly consistent over the last decade, regardless of the actual membership count. The spikes in bundle pages are due to someone enclosing convention programme books, or A. Langley Searles' magnificent zine about the history of SF, the FANTASY COMMENTATOR.

## Pages Per Bundle

Bundle #	Year	Pages
238	1997	276
239		364
240		390
241		318
242	1998	372
243		407
244		367
245		308

Bundle #	Year	Pages	Bundle #	Year	Pages
246	1999	646	266	2004	410
247		357	267		619
248		275	268		353
249		262	269		521
250	2000	349	270	2005	218
251		274	271		257
252		317	272		292
253		523	273		298
254	2001	461	274	2006	261
255		271	275		286
256		255	276		354
257		279	277		386
258	2002	264	Excluding the spikes, the average FAPA bundle has remained consistently in the 250 to 350 page range over the past decade. This apa has been anomalous over the decades in that it was one of the largest, with 65 members, whereas most other apas are smaller, seldom more than 30. A smaller apa allows members to produce a larger zine for the same cost, and spend more time reading the bundles for comment-making purposes.		
259		292			
260		357			
261		476			
262	2003	246			
263		280			
264		448			
265		299			

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**Science Fiction Adventure Magazine V1#2** Re: your question about whether or not printing a story in a FAPAzine would constitute prior publication if you went to market them later to a commercial publisher. I would say no, as long as you don't post a Web version of your zine on the Internet. Given the restricted circulation of apas such as FAPA or POD, I can't see why a publisher would refuse to handle your novel because you had serialized it in an apazine. For that matter, publishers have never hesitated to reprint in book form various novels that were previously serialized in magazines. Charles Dickens did it, and so have many SF authors from Isaac Asimov on down.

**Exclaim #4** *"I've seen people mention writer's block, and I've also seen people claim that there is no such thing."* I use the method of Isaac Asimov, which is to keep several different projects going on at the same time. If you get tired of one, switch over to another, on the principle that a change is as good as a rest.

**Feline Mewsings #26** Re: your trip report of your visit to Mono Lake and how its level has dropped 40 feet since Los Angeles began tapping it for water in 1941. This story was recently discussed in Calgary because we will be facing similar problems in the not too distant future. Calgary's traditional water sources, the Rocky Mountain glaciers of the Bow River valley, are fading away fast, and at the same time Calgary is adding 25,000 people a year to its current 1,000,000 population. It won't happen in my

lifetime, but water rights will become serious business to the next generation when the last glacier in the Bow River valley vanishes. Since Calgary is repeating every mistake Los Angeles made regarding endless urban sprawl, I expect they will make the same mistakes about water supply. Recently the City waterworks department ordered a ban on lawn watering for a few weeks while they upgraded a water treatment plant. The uproar couldn't have been louder if the City had proposed a \$200 annual tax on dogs and cats.

**Print Zine #4** Re: your campaign for college student council, in which you were heavily opposed by the Greek fraternities. I was interested to read that because when I attended the University of Alberta (Edmonton) in the middle 1970s, the influence of fraternities was non-existent. They were basically a low-rent housing service for students, and people only joined them for that reason. I lived in the Delta Epsilon house one summer while working a summer job for the provincial Ministry of Agriculture but was never a member. The house father was an alumnus who kept an eye on the students. He also worked for the Ministry in the same building I did, which is how I came to rent summer quarters from a fraternity.

Recently I came across a paper on the subject which I was going to run in a future issue of OPUNTIA in my "Seen In The Literature" column, but which fits perfectly here.



Grubb, F. (2006) Does going Greek impair undergraduate academic performance?: A case study. AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS AND SOCIOLOGY 65:1085-1110

*"Controlling for SAT scores, college major, gender, and state of residence, university students were more likely to have joined a fraternity or sorority if they had come from in state and had higher verbal SAT scores, but lower math SAT scores, the opposite of what simple uncontrolled averages indicate. Controlling for the same variables, fraternity and sorority members suffered from 1 to 10 percent lower cumulative GPAs than non-Greek students. This negative effect was most pronounced for small fraternities and weakest for sororities."*

Speirs: In other words, if you party too much, your grades will suffer. It's always nice to have these things confirmed scientifically.

**Claims Department #11** Re: Worldcons having Guests of Honour die before or during the convention. Since the concons persist in choosing elderly GoHs who take a dozen pills a day and are in and out of hospital, it is not too surprising when they keel over. How difficult could it be to do triage and pick someone in reasonable health?

**A Propos de Rien** *"But it's difficult to buy a palm computer that isn't also a telephone, GPS, high-fidelity sound system, and lawnmower."* By coincidence, a few days before I read your remark, I was talking to the fellow at work who looks after equipment training and our field equipment such as cellphones. He said that the old cellphones from the late 1990s, one of which I use on the job, are still going strong, while the newer models with all the features that no one uses barely survive a couple of years. I quite agreed with him; my personal cellphone is a 1998 antique that only has speed dial and voice mail as features, which happens to be all that I want from a cellphone. I go three years between new batteries, while flip phones only last a year.

*"Are SUVs involved in most of the accidents you recount because they're dangerous or dangerously driven, or simply because everyone in Calgary drives one?"* All three, actually. SUVs are more likely to be in accidents because of their high centre of gravity, because the drivers don't understand that 4WD is no better than 2WD if you take an icy corner too fast, and because Calgary's rush hour looks like an SUV assembly line. I've had people tell me they need an SUV for grocery shopping and taking the kids to soccer practice, to which I reply that my mother would bring back her weekly shopping plus two kids plus their hockey clobber in a VW Beetle. SUV owners tend to get huffy when you ask them how it was that their parents managed without SUVs.

[Re: my story about the Calgary Stampede cashier accidentally charging my credit card \$712 instead of the \$12 admission] "*The Stampede's computer ought to be smart enough to recognize that \$712 is not a reasonable admission charge.*" Not necessarily, since the Stampede gets many tour bus parties or large family groups where the tour guide or paterfamilias puts it all on one credit card.

"*Pedestrians see your back yard? There are people walking?*" My house is on a corner lot, so people walk by the back yard coming up the side street. As to why I have so many pedestrians in my neighbourhood, it is because the house is a block north of a senior high school and a block south of a curling rink/hockey arena. Much to the indignation of both students and athletes, the parking lots for those places are too small, forcing them to park as much as a block away, and walk that long, lonely distance to their destination. Life is not fair.

**Trial And Air #16** [Re: Anna Russell's death] The recent passing of the grande dame of operatic comedy prompted me to order a couple of her CDs, something I'd been meaning to do for years but kept forgetting. I have had a tape of her routine "How To Enjoy Your Bagpipe", an hilarious instructional. She was a very funny lady. Her 21-minute analysis of Wagner's Ring Cycle is still the definitive work on this opera, notwithstanding it was a comedy act instead of a learned essay.

Her CD **Encore** had some liner notes reprinted from 1958 which caught my eye. Specifically, she was writing about music festivals, which sounded awfully like SF conventions or performance art congresses. "*... no matter where you go, you run into the same artists time after time, which gives one the feeling that the festival participants are playing a gigantic game of tag all over the world. I am going to the Edinburgh Festival this summer and have no doubt but that I will see many of the old familiar faces I saw last in California, Australia, or Africa. I'm sure, if they had a music festival in Tiber or at the North Pole, we would all turn up there in due course and perform the usual programme.*"

Also of interest was her comment (this was in 1958, remember) about a common complaint of SF convention runners today about the passive nature of the younger generation. "*I remember in my youth when people would come to the house after dinner, and everyone would get up and DO something. The ones who were talented were very enjoyable, and the ones who were terrible were hilariously funny, but nobody minded, and we used to have a lot of fun.*"

Russell was at her funniest when she was reciting improbable but actual opera plots, and, when the audience was primed, she would convulse them with her trademark line "I'm not making this up, you know."

Your fanzine facsimiles and commentary are a valuable resource for fanhistorians.

## MAILING COMMENTS ON FAPA #278

FAPA #278 received in Calgary on March 9, 2007.

**The Road Warrior (October 23)** Re: Christian thrillers in which the characters suddenly stop and discuss theology in the middle of the action. SF authors often display a similar fault, the famous "As you know, Professor" infodump. A sign of bad writing in any genre. For some strange reason, one seldom sees this in westerns. Cowboys in the middle of a gunfight do not stop and say: "As you know, Sheriff, the revolver has six chambers that rotate after each shot is fired. The bullet is propelled by hot gases ... ". Or, what might be more important to modern urban readers, an explanation of the difference between a steer and a bull.

**Claims Department #12** Re: your unsuccessful race to be a delegate in the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund and get a trip to a British SF convention, unsuccessful because the convention fell apart. You remark: "*So here I am, at the end of a race designed for Big Name Fans, and still not a BNF.*" You are in fact now a BNF by virtue of your TAFF candidacy and your zine publishing. Don't be so modest.

**King Biscuit Time #49** Re: your remark that you have the only copy of a number of zines in your collection. Would this not be a priority to scan them and put them on the efanzines.com Website?

**Theatralite #3** Your account of stage disasters, such as the show that only ran seven performances and lost \$1 million, makes me wonder why anyone thinks they can stage such elaborate shows and still make money. The special effects should be left to the movies, where if the FX don't work properly the first time, one can re-shoot the scene, but in the stage theatre one has to refund the audience's money. Stage disasters seem to be the result of group think. The producers get swept up into the idea and assume the audience will love it as much as they do. The same sort of thing happens in the business world, where management fall in love with a product that leaves consumers indifferent.

**Generic APA Zine #1** You comment that when your laser printer runs out of toner, it is cheaper to throw it away and buy a new printer. Your economics fail me. It is like saying that when the cost of operating a car (fuel, insurance, maintenance) reaches one-third the purchase price, then it should be discarded. This does not include the trouble and fuss of installing a new printer with new driver software. I have a 1998 Hewlett-Packard laser printer which has only needed one new toner cartridge.

Even in my office, with high-output printers,



we have never had to replace the drums. I am quite simply baffled as to why a printer would be replaced just because the toner cartridge is empty.

You quote A\$600 for a laser printer, which you throw away after it empties the first cartridge, because replacement toner costs A\$135 to A\$180. A comparison of your way versus normality:

<u>Australia</u>	<u>Standard</u>
\$600 (new printer)	\$600 (new printer)
\$600 (new printer)	\$180 (new cartridge)
\$600 (new printer)	\$180 (new cartridge)
\$600 (new printer)	\$180 (new cartridge)
\$600 (new printer)	\$180 (new cartridge)
\$600 (new printer)	\$330 (new drum)
\$600 (new printer)	\$180 (new cartridge)
\$600 (new printer)	\$180 (new cartridge)
\$600 (new printer)	\$180 (new cartridge)
\$600 (new printer)	\$180 (new cartridge)
\$600 (new printer)	\$330 (new drum)

The above supposes that the drum is replaced as you say it must, which I have never seen necessary even in my office, which generates thousands of copies per week. Where are the savings?

Re: replacement of analogue television by digital television. I haven't owned a television set since I went off to university in 1973, and never will now that I own a stand-alone DVD player. My tolerance to television commercials is zero. Much easier to wait for the DVD for well-recommended shows, since, if they are good quality, they will stand the test of time and it won't matter if I watch them a year after everyone else. I have also quit going to movies, since it is cheaper to buy a disk than pay admission. -8-

**A Propos De Rien** *"Your Tories are probably against nuclear power because it would be a competitor to oil. On the other hand, it would allow Alberta to export the oil used for generating."* The majority of Alberta's electricity is from coal-fired plants, with some hydroelectricity. Oil is mostly consumed by motor vehicles or used by the chemical industry as feedstock. It is not used for electrical generation. The Alberta Tories oppose nuclear energy because there is no proper disposal of radioactive wastes. Burial or long-term storage is not considered proper disposal. The rural MLAs hold the balance of power (because Calgary and Edmonton split the remaining vote), and they are sensitive to the issue because farmers don't want to see their land threatened.

**Sweet Jane #50** Re: the SF writer who was upset because a "fan" tracked down his house address and publicly revealed it on the Internet. It makes no difference if a person is a famous novelist or



not; such a thing is stalking. And if you have young daughters, it is an outright threat.

**Visions Of Paradise #111** Re: how time passes faster than one thinks, and your father-in-law's advice that 40 years will seem like the blink of an eye. Too true! I keep thinking it has only been a few years since I graduated university, but it is actually three decades. And who is that grey-bearded fellow staring back at me in the mirror? Tempus fugit.

Re: the strain of your mother's final illness and death. I am currently going through this with my uncle, who never had children and as a result of which I am his guardian. He went in to long-term care in March and is slowly fading away. The day I received this bundle of FAPA, I met with his lawyer to get copies of Uncle Norman's will, power of attorney, and medical directive. Fortunately Norman has never been senile, and has made it clear to everyone that he wants no prolongation of life, so if the hospital calls me with the bad news, I can decide with a clear conscience.

To tie the last two paragraphs together, I never imagined when I was an undergraduate that I would someday be my mother's executor, plus guardian and future executor to her brother Norman. It was just an eye blink ago that my legal concerns were only how to get the best mortgage rate, not getting a clearance certificate from Revenue Canada for my mother's estate. I

imagined my 50s as being a time to relax, not constantly running errands for my elders.

**Lofgeornost #86** Re: your review of Rudyard Kipling's letters, which revealed him to be a racist in later life. H.P. Lovecraft was the opposite, being racist in early life and moderating as he grew older, to the extent of marrying a Jew. This would make an interesting literary project, to compare the two men and their works vis-a-vis their private life. Kipling has pretty much faded away with time. He is only remembered in Alberta because he described the city of Medicine Hat as having "all hell for a basement", a reference to the natural gas deposits underneath it.

**Synapse** " ... *a company is a soulless corporation, and therefore as singular* ... " 'company' and 'corporation' are both collective nouns and therefore plurals.

**Science Fiction Adventure Magazine V2#1** Re: brain size comparisons between species. One thing that I have wondered about is why, with a billion years of evolution, no species has ever evolved a digital brain. Over such a long span of time, evolution demonstrates the most successful mechanisms, which suggests that the analogue brain is more superior than the digital brain when it comes to adapting to changing environments. We know that digital computers are better at number crunching but it appears that artificial intelligence is a dead end

in the digital world. Analogue systems are superior in dealing with fuzzy logic in the real world. As far as brains being expensive in energy consumption, this is only relevant where energy is scarce. As you say, fruit eating omnivores have the best brains. This would seem to demonstrate that sugar is good for you because it makes you smarter.

## **MAILING COMMENTS ON FAPA #279**

FAPA #279 received in Calgary on May 30, 2007.

**A Different Drummer #9** Re: your alternative history of Amerinds going back in time to greet Columbus in 1492 with modern weaponry. Alas, the Basque whalers were already in Newfoundland and Cabot would follow them there a few years later to take official credit for discovering North America. (Columbus never discovered North America; he discovered the Caribbean.) What the time travelers really needed was some method of mass immunizing their ancestors against smallpox and other diseases that the Europeans were about to bring. The Tide of History would have been unstoppable.

If I were leading a group of such time travelers determined to protect the First Nations (as they are legally referred to in Canada) I would arrive several centuries earlier with a ready-made

alphabet for them, some books, and lots of teachers  
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ready to enlighten the locals with technical know-how. This would give the First Nations time to move out of the Stone Age and into the Iron Age. There would also be a need to develop some sort of mass immunization programme against European diseases.

**Generic APA Zine #2** Re: being a greenhouse skeptic. One of the major problems with the whole debate is that the majority of people are fixated on the idea that the Earth will uniformly warm up everywhere. In the scientific literature, the term "climate change" is preferred as being more accurate. The average temperature of the Earth is warming up, but not uniformly everywhere. Some places are actually becoming cooler and wetter. What the scientists are talking about is a return to volatile climatic extremes. This will affect some people more than others. Calgarians are relatively safe because we live a kilometre above sea level. People with beachfront condos along the Gulf Coast are living in a fool's paradise.

As you mention, pricing signals will work best to conserve energy, such as charging more for electricity during peak demand hours. In Canada, every time the price of gas goes up there is all manner of bleating and table-thumping about how something must be done. Yet the only way to get SUVs off the road is to make them too expensive to drive, not by subsidizing hybrid cars.

Alberta (and thus Canada) passed its peak oil production 25 years ago. We now produce half as much conventional oil today in Alberta with twice as many wells as we did in 1978. The Athabasca Tar Sands have a 200-year supply of oil, but the catch is that it must be steamed out and needs a minimum \$40 per barrel oil price to be sustainable. As Matthew Simmons demonstrated decisively in his book *TWILIGHT IN THE DESERT*, the Saudis are running out of oil and can no longer supply swing production.

Alberta gets almost all of its electricity from coal-fired plants. We have little or no untapped hydroelectric potential unless we start dam building in every mountain valley, most of which are in national or provincial parks.

Unfortunately, Canada got sucked into the Kyoto Accord because the left-of-centre were able to bully the federal government, which is a minority government and needs the others to survive. So as you say Eric, life is not as simple as the greenhouse gang proposes.

**Snickersnee (2007 Majuju)** You discuss the naming of calendar quarters by contraction of the month names, suggested by Harry Warner Jr, such as the second quarter of the year being Apmaju. This got me thinking about what the business news would sound like if they used this method instead of First Quarter, Second Quarter, etcetera. "In other news, shares of XYZ Corp. increased

\$2 as the Apmaju earnings report exceeded analyst's expectations. Meanwhile, the computer manufacturer Banana said it would be restating its Ocnodoc 2006 results due to an accounting error."

Re: your trouble with programming automatic irrigation systems. Don't feel bad; my Parks Dept. has thousands of hectares under central computer and distributed network irrigation, but only about three people who really know how to work the handhelds. The computer, by the way, can't tell the difference between a scheduled sprinkler zone and a line break, which is why my job as the Parks Trouble Calls Supervisor is still secure.

Regarding the changes in SF, such as novels versus short stories, I think the only concern here is whether or not you want a bestseller. Thanks to Amazon and Abebooks, it is much easier for small presses to sell their books. Calgary author Dave Duncan has been doing print-on-demand sales for years. The long tail of Internet retailing is a boon to authors who would have otherwise dropped off to oblivion. Unfortunately it is also a boon to other authors who should drop off to oblivion.

That the style of SF stories has changed doesn't mean the older books are suddenly less readable or stop selling. Whenever I feel gloomy about the future of SF, I remember the kid I saw on the Calgary LRT a couple of years ago, hockey gear tucked under his feet, and immersed in an Isaac Asimov novel. -11-



**Claims Department #13** Re: your troubles in getting a short film made. If nothing else, it will look good on your resume, as the planning and carrying out of movie making requires organizational and interpersonal skills that can be translated to a job. Convention running is much the same.

Video and movie making are so complicated and expensive that they demonstrate why television never killed the print media. A book that sells 20,000 copies will pay its way. A book that sells a million copies is considered a runaway bestseller. If the latest Hollywood movie only sold a million tickets, it would wipe out the careers of dozens of studio executives.

**King Biscuit Time #50** Re: the mad rush to replace incandescent light bulbs with fluorescents. I have been slowly replacing the bulbs in my house, not because of any concern over energy conservation but because my house has high ceilings, and fluorescents last much longer. To change a bulb requires standing tip-toe on a chair, not the safest activity there is. What bothers me is that the environmentalists don't seem to have thought through the consequences when people start chucking out the fluorescents years from now as they burn out. Realistically, few people are going to bother taking a single bulb or two to a recycling centre; it will be much easier just to trash it in the general garbage. In a way, this all seems science fictional, the hurry to adopt new technologies without considering the end results.

**Sweet Jane #51**

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Re: you watching lots of DVDs. I have never owned a television set but recently bought a laptop DVD player, so I am now catching up on a lot of SF and comedy shows. Usually I don't view more than the first two or three seasons of a show because after that the show runs out of things to say or do. As I type this I am currently going through the first season of BABYLON 5. One notices things when viewing en masse, such as people living 250 years from now in deep space using the Imperial system of measurements. Several episodes have assaults or murders taking place in corridors or storage units of the space station, which Security has great difficulty solving because the art of closed-circuit cameras has apparently been forgotten.

One general rule about media SF is that aliens can basically be divided into three groups: humanoids, energy beings, and exoskeleton species. And yes, there are some miscellaneous species that don't fit these categories. And also yes, humanoid aliens are popular because they are cheaper and easier to create on a stage set. Taking it at face value, one could argue that if evolution has produced so many humanoid species, it proves that this is the most efficient type of sentient. Although it is possible that beings of pure energy evolved from material beings, it seems more likely that they would evolve directly from semi-stable clusters or flows of energy. Exoskeleton species are rarer as sentients but not uncommon.



Re: writing x number of pages per day and writer's block. OPUNTIA is the least of my writing. I do a tremendous amount of philatelic writing and at any given moment have about two or three articles in publication. I've never had overall writer's block as I use the Asimov method of having a dozen items on the go and switching from one to another when blocked or just plain bored.

**Visions Of Paradise #114** Re: a western tanager making its way into your backyard, an eastern record for New Jersey.. Not many people can claim their back yard is a tourist attraction!

“ ... sometimes it seems as if everybody needs my advice or involvement for everything that happens.” You should feel flattered if your co-workers look to you as the Go-To Man. It indicates that they have confidence in your judgement and ability.

**Visions Of Paradise #115** Re: Terry Jeeves article about gadgets that never caught on. The gun that fired rocket-propelled bullets was, I heard long ago, too expensive to use because the bullets cost a fortune. After a firefight, you'd have to take out a loan to re-arm. Digital watches are still around but all types of watches are failing in the market because people know they can get the time off their cellphone or PDA. I haven't worn a watch since I bought my cellphone in 1998. And for the same reason, many building owners are removing their wall clocks, as it saves good money not to have to maintain them or reset them all the time.

**Ride The Lightning** Re: hybrids and other small cars being vulnerable to trucks and other big vehicles on the highway. The idea is that these small cars would only be driven in cities, where fuel economy is harder to obtain. People would have a second, bigger car (or rent one) for long-distance highway driving. Fuel economy is better on the highway because the car is in steady motion, as opposed to constant stop-and-go city traffic, which is what really kills fuel economy.

Re: your comment to Arthur Hlavaty: “*I liked the quote about Heinlein and Robinson’s VARIABLE STAR, “I hope the hippie messed up the fascist’s book.”*” I’ve read Heinlein once but have never been enthused enough to re-read him as I did Asimov. His works remind me of what we refer to up here in Canada as the Honourary Colonel mindset. Canadian militias (= U.S. National Guard or Reserves) are often commanded by an Hon. Col., usually a prominent local businessman or retired soldier who never saw combat. They tend to make speeches about war, secure in the knowledge that they themselves will never have to carry a backpack along the front lines of Afghanistan or the Balkans. Robinson complained for years, while living in Nova Scotia, that no one would take him seriously as a Canadian writer, despite the fact that he was an American citizen writing for American markets. Since he moved to British Columbia, he took out Canadian citizenship, but he will always be a minor and forgettable writer, not to mention a Heinlein sycophant. **-13-**

Re: your comments to me about my articles on petroleum in which you express worry about the future of energy supplies. We will never be short of energy anytime in the next 500 years. The problem is that we are rapidly running out of cheap energy, so our children and grandchildren will pay much more of their disposable income for fuel and heat, with less to spend on other things.

**A Propos De Rien** “ ... *different species do not evolve independently; cheetahs and gazelles, or humans and dogs come to mind. Or even humans and wheat.*” Co-evolution of species is commonplace, and predators and herbivores engage in an arms race with their prey. The cheetah/gazelle example is correct, but dogs and wheat did not co-evolve with humans. They were deliberately domesticated and their development consciously shaped millennia ago. Our distant ancestors of 10,000 years ago knew how to line breed; the oldest written source of applied genetics is the Biblical tale of Joseph and the spotted goats.

**Voice Of The Habu V9#2** Re: high-tech employers complaining that they can't get good help while simultaneously laying off staff or cutting benefits. One of the greatest problems with Alberta's current economic boom is the lack of qualified staff. When the last oil boom collapsed in 1982, petroleum workers and construction tradesmen were laid off by the tens of thousands. For the next decade, no one was hiring. Fathers told their sons and daughters to stay away from petroleum or construction, and as a

result, an entire generation of workers in those two categories is missing. In my job at work I deal with many contractors, and I know quite a few people in the petroleum business. I almost never see any of them in their late 30s or 40s; they are all older Boomers like I am or the youngest generation just recently graduated from university or trade school. Calgary SF author Dave Duncan was a petroleum geologist who started writing novels because he couldn't get work after the last boom collapsed.

**Alphabet Soup #54** I had not heard that some of Ray Bradbury's books are out of print but it doesn't surprise me. Like many of the old fantasy classics, they have become badly dated. This is not so much because they were set on a Mars we now know has no credibility, but because they were overly mawkish and sentimental. It isn't just Bradbury. Other books could use a minor re-write to eliminate references to starship pilots calculating orbits with slide rules or computers spooling out tape. Novels about Venusian jungles could be fixed by changing the name of the planet. Many novels, of course, are completely hopeless, and should be given a decent burial out behind the barn.

Re: World Fantasy and World Horror conventions doing poor publicity. I suspect part of it is because they don't want thousands of fans in the first place. I attend high-end philatelic conventions where the cut-off is 100 or 200 people.

**Lofgeornost #87** Re: architects designing unusable buildings. It has been suggested that architects should be required to live or work in the buildings they design for a year. I see the same thing daily with new suburbs in Calgary where 20,000 people in a new suburb have no services within walking distance. Then Calgarians complain about ever-worsening traffic problems.

You mentioned searching [www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org) to see which libraries have copies of your books. The next time I was at the university I tried this out with my own name. Since I have been depositing copies of all my works with the National Library of Canada, I wasn't surprised to see them all listed there. What did surprise me was that OPUNTIA is deposited in the Minneapolis Public Library and Bowling Green State University (Ohio). Probably sent there by some zinester I traded with.

I was also startled to find out that my alma mater, the University of Alberta (Edmonton), has a copy of my exciting 1992 book THE HISTORY OF THE CALGARY PHILATELIC SOCIETY. I did not send them a copy, so they must have got it from a local stamp collector. This book, sadly gone out of print, had sold well over, ahem, 100 copies. This made it a veritable bestseller amongst the philatelic fraternity in Alberta, a notoriously miserly bunch of tightwads if one ever saw any. The book covered the history of the CPS from its founding in 1922 to 1992. I doubt I shall live long enough to do the sequel for the next 70 years.

**The Road Warrior** “... *Chattacon's computerized registration system had crashed that afternoon and was just getting back up to speed. Rather than switch to a manual system, they let everyone wait until they could restore the system. We had not pre-registered, so we had to wait in line for two hours and 40 minutes, and some people waited for more than three. Even pre-registered members had to stand in line for an hour, because the convention does not print badges in advance.*” I trust that at the post-convention bitch session everyone brought sufficient quantities of tar, feathers, and rope to deal with the registration committee. (I assume there would be a suitable streetlight or tree outside the hotel for the hangings.) Did they give an excuse why pre-registered badges were not printed in advance?

Re: James Bond fans dressed in formal wear. This, along with Men In Black fandom, has done much to elevate the look of SF conventions. Too many fans show up looking and smelling like they just finished unloading a semi-trailer at the packing plant.

**Comment-Ary** Re: old houses in Palo Alto being called ‘scrapers’, and razed to make way for new homes. “*Some streets in Palo Alto are a weird mishmash of small, rundown, crappy homes next to brand-new mansions.*” Calgary is exactly the same way, except we call them ‘teardowns’. I used to joke that I would have the last bungalow in my neighbourhood, but it's not such a joke anymore. All the bungalows across the



street from me are now gone, each being replaced by two 2-story infills. I've stopped doing any maintenance on my house other than what is essential, since the next person who buys my house is going to replace it with either two infills or three townhouses. Realtors have been leaving letters in my mailbox that say they have contractors interested in buying my house for redevelopment. I have no doubt they are telling the truth since my house is on a corner double-wide lot, and anyone who drives by can immediately see the potential.

The cost of housing is so high now that most bungalows are not demolished but moved out by house movers. These bungalows are in demand in rural areas, where it costs more to build and takes longer because of the difficulty of getting tradesmen to drive out into the boonies to do a job.

**Science Fiction Adventure Magazine (2007 May)** Re: places such as the Bahamas or Dogger Banks that once were large islands before melting ice sheets submerged them. In Canada, underwater archaeologists are finding aboriginal sites out on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland or the inland passages of British Columbia. The Arabian Gulf was fertile farmland before it was flooded and might be one of the sources of the Biblical flood myth.

**I Heard From:** Chester Cuthbert, Sheryl Birkhead, Lloyd Penney, A. Langley Searles, Franz Zrilich

Calgary will host the World Fantasy Convention on the weekend of October 31 to November 2, 2008, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in the downtown core. Attending membership is C\$115 or US\$100 until September 30, 2007. Cheque, money order, Visa, or Mastercard accepted (credit card charges will appear as Sentry Box on your monthly statement). The mailing address is World Fantasy 2008, c/o The Sentry Box, 1835 - 10 Avenue SW, Calgary, Alberta, T3C 0K2. The Sentry Box, by the way, is Calgary's oldest SF and gaming store.

