

# OPUNTIA

## 64.3

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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 70 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.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

FROM: Franz Zrilich  
4004 Granger Road  
Medina, Ohio 44256-8602

2007-07-16

[Re: Calgary's water supply from the Rocky Mountain glaciers giving out] A map shows Calgary surrounded by lakes and rivers. Are these potable and plentiful to water the city after the glaciers give out?

[No. The rivers and many of the lakes depend on the mountain glaciers, so they will dwindle once the glaciers have melted away and will only get a fraction of the water from what rain falls in the mountains. The remaining water sources will not be able to handle Calgary and surrounding areas as the population steadily increases. Fortunately it shall not happen during my lifetime, but the next generation will be involved in water rights wars with neighbouring cities, irrigation farmers, and Saskatchewan.]

[As a tangible example, the photo on the next page was taken by me in August 2007 when I was hiking to the Bow Glacier Falls (left of centre in photo) which are the source of the Bow River, the main river flowing through Calgary. Although the Bow River picks up additional water from tributaries along the way, it

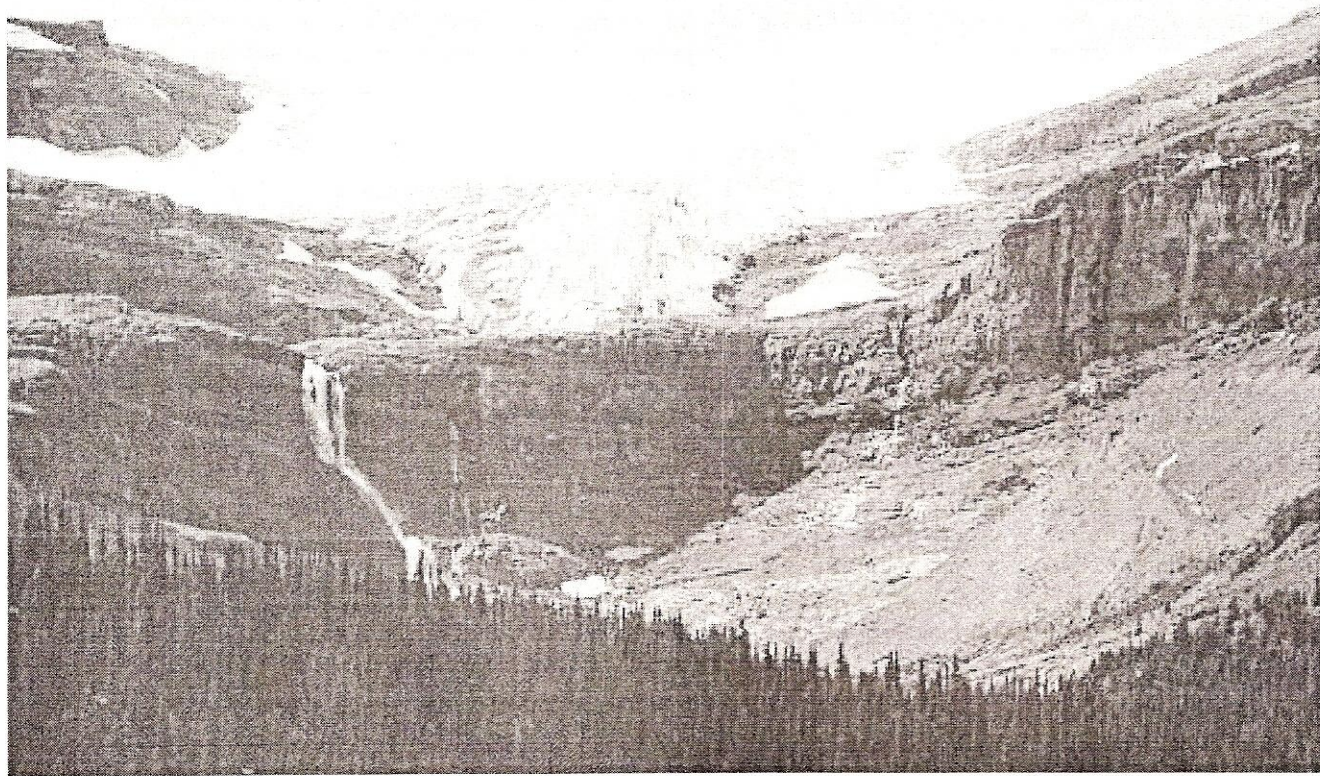
depends on the Bow Glacier (top centre of photo) which used to fill the entire valley as recently as a century ago. The river and its tributaries all trace back to Rocky Mountain glaciers, all of which have noticeably retreated within living memory.] -2-

[Re: Calgary's endless sprawl] If you are lot infilling, that is congestion. If the city is spreading out mindlessly, sprawl. If both, you need to build a new city from scratch between Edmonton and Calgary. Is Edmonton also expanding? It is closer to the oilfields, it seems.

[There already is a city exactly halfway between Calgary and Edmonton, my old hometown of Red Deer. It too is mindlessly sprawling out, and recently passed 100,000 in population. Calgary is the petroleum capital of Canada in the sense of corporation headquarters, while Edmonton is the service centre for the northern half of the province, not to mention being the provincial capital.]

[The highway corridor which runs from Calgary to Red Deer to Edmonton, then angles northeast to the Athabasca Tar Sands, is about 600 km long. It is rapidly being urbanized, and fifty years from now will probably be one long conglomeration like northeastern USA. I won't live to see that, but the beginnings are visible now.]





*Bow  
Glacier  
and its  
Falls.*

*I took  
this view  
with a  
telephoto  
lens from  
the east  
end of  
Bow  
Lake.*

*This is my  
favourite  
hike in the  
Rockies.*

FROM: Brant Kresovich  
Box 404  
Getzville, New York 14068-0404

2007-07-14

[Re: SF writers, almost entirely city dwellers, not comprehending the extent of open space in the world and writing novels about the Earth being overcrowded by humans] For city people in North America, the rural area is what they fly over on their way to another city. They also despise the suburbs and can't imagine why anyone would want to live there. I'm not sure if anybody predicted urban sprawl to what we call in the USA the "outer ring suburbs". Who could have guessed that ordinary commuters would tolerate driving 40 miles to work and back?

[The writer Stephen Leacock once pointed out that if British Columbia was settled to the same population density as Britain, it would have 50 million people. Canada's population today is 30 million, less than California's population. Alberta is approximately the same size as California but has a population of only 3.5 million. So we are not yet standing on each other's toes.]

I believe that writer's block exists and the best way to fight it is to write something every day. Daily writing has a cumulative effect in decreasing procrastination, the hand-maiden of writer's block. People who want a piece of writing to be perfect the first time so they don't have to edit it are probably most liable. To me,

anything I've written is never right, always unclear the first time, and needs editing. Revision is writing, to me.

-4-

[I generally do the first draft in my head, and revise as I type it. If I get stuck or bored, then I use the Asimov method and switch to a different article.]

FROM: Joseph Major  
1409 Christy Avenue  
Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040

2007-07-18

[Re: Anna Russell and her improbable opera plots] An opera is where a man and a woman spend the night together. In the morning she can't recognize him because he's wearing a different cloak so she stabs him, and instead of bleeding, he sings.

[The other version I've heard is that in real life a person who has been stabbed will scream in pain and collapse to the ground. In an opera, a man who has just been stabbed will sing for ten minutes, then do an encore before finally lying down.]

World Fantasy Convention was, I understand, intended to be the professional meeting for those authors who were tired of meeting their fans.



[Re: elderly Guests of Honour keeling over at SF conventions or dying just before the event] Another problem is that not many more of the attendees know who the old phart was in the first place. Any potential GoH the majority of attendees would know would more likely be an actor, or even an animated character. "Our Pro Guest of Honour is Lara Croft". Not Angelina Jolie, but Lara Croft.

[On the plus side, the convention committee wouldn't have to worry about the expense of airplane tickets and a hotel room for Lara.]

**I Also Heard From:** Lloyd Penney, Richie McBee

**FAPA CLEARCUT AWARD** (for most pages published in a mailing) goes to Robert Sabella for 37 pages in FAPA #280 and again to him for 36 pages in FAPA #281. In the latter bundle, Milt Stevens technically had 56 pages, but 54 of those were index pages, so I didn't count them as a zine. For FAPA #282, the winner was Robert Sabella (surprise!) with 42 pages.

## **MAILING COMMENTS ON FAPA #280.**

FAPA #280 received in Calgary on August 21, 2007.

**A Different Drummer #10** Re: your short story being reprinted in anthology without your knowledge because they didn't have your address. At least you did get your money after you wrote them and told them where you were. Many an author has not been treated so well, especially by foreign publishers who calculate that no one is going to start a trans-Atlantic lawsuit just to recover a few hundred dollars in royalties.

**For FAPA** "*Seems like lots of people are trying film making these days ...*" I suspect that not only is the technology easier to use, but also for the first time people can disseminate their films widely via the Internet instead of one showing in a parish hall and nevermore. YouTube in particular has done wonders. Many people are converting old home movies into YouTube videos. I helped out one eastern American who had mysterious footage of his grandparents' trip out west in 1955 but didn't know the localities of their Rocky Mountain stops. I accidentally stumbled across the video on YouTube and was able to identify some of the lakes and mountains for him.

**Ben' Beat #89** *"Why do these young writers win awards and get teaching jobs?"* This is, as the British put it, Muggin's turn. Small-press magazines heavily subsidized by governments churn out poetry and fiction that is never reprinted and exists only to fill out the author's bibliography. Everyone gives awards to each other and hosts academic conferences at junior colleges. At least they are not mugging people in back alleys. Likewise, the Nobel Prize in Literature has nothing to do with merit.

Re: bad Broadway plays. It seems to be that any play or movie with an exclamation mark in its title can be safely passed by.

**The Annex #24** Your account of your distant connection to H.P. Lovecraft was most interesting. To a postal historian like me, the letter and cover relating to HPL got me wondering how many of them are floating around that philatelists would pay good money for.

**Number One #10** Re: nobody reading the signs you have posted at work. We use billboards at some of our park entrances and some people still don't get the idea.

*"I miss drive-ins. They have all closed ... "* Likewise in Alberta. Real estate got to be too expensive in the good locations. They lost customers in the other locations as the young families of the 1950s and 1960s aged, and there was no follow-on boom to take

their place. One drive-in theatre where I grew up in rural Red Deer has now completely reverted to forest, the only sign of its existence being scraps of asphalt and concrete hidden in the leaf litter. Funnily enough, all the land around it was forest during the drive-in's heyday but is now developed as an industrial park.

**Visions Of Paradise #117** Re: greatest SF movies yet made. I vote for 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, which has better production values than SF movies made today. It can still be watched with profit, albeit nowadays with a sense of sadness at how we threw away the future that might have been.

Re: Hollywood actors of Italian descent willing to play stereotypes such as mobsters and boxers. Most actors are not intellectually gifted to begin with, so you can't expect them to be realistic Italian scientists and artists.

Re: your teaching separate math courses in calculus and trigonometry. This struck my interest because Alberta high schools teach math as a unified subject. We learn trigonometry and algebra together, so that students can see how the geometric methods relate to the equation methods. Calculus, of course, is simply a method of calculating areas under curves, so it goes well with geometry.

**Sweet Jane #52** Re: some of us will look pretty sad when viewed from the 22nd Century. Even after a couple of decades this is true, especially for ephemeral things like fashion, hairstyles, and consumer electronics. Did women really wear pillbox hats and beehive hairdos in the 1960s? And why did men think fins on their cars made them look more macho?

Re: electoral college reform in the USA. If I understand correctly, the states have control of both party leader elections and federal elections, which is baffling to those of us who follow the British parliamentary tradition. I can't imagine the federal agency Elections Canada allowing a province to call the shots in a federal election. Not even the Québécois would be that brave. Fortunately we don't have primaries to suffer through; the party leaders are elected once and stay in until they resign or are evicted by their membership.

*"... we're the anomalies these days. We couldn't stop reading if we wanted to."* However, reading has historically always been a minority activity. The real anomaly was the century from about 1850 to 1950 when printing was cheap, mass education became the norm, and there was little competition for reading. So the masses read. Then along came television, and the masses reverted back to the norm of functional illiteracy. The Internet was supposed to encourage reading, but users would rather watch video clips on You Tube or blog than download a good essay.

**Voice Of The Habu V9#3** Re: the ambiguity of the English language. Part of the problem is that modern English as we know it today was still in the process of evolving when the printing press came along and started fossilizing the wrong spellings. Had moveable type not become known until the 1800s, we probably would have had a more consistent spelling.

Re: dealing with those who are dealing with loss. Being the latter, I never know how to respond. My uncle Norman died August 8, 2007, and for the first time I was present at a deathbed. He died hard, gasping for air and in pain despite the morphine. I was his guardian and now am his executor (he never had children). My stock response to those who expressed condolences about Norman was that it was a blessing for him to be released from a miserable bed-ridden existence. I hope I go instantaneously like my father, who was walking out to his car when he fell dead on the sidewalk from a coronary thrombosis.

**The Road Warrior** I enjoyed your report of the hospitality convention you attended, in which you told us how the panels went. Too many zinesters just report a list of people they met or what they had for supper, instead of summarizing the events, seminars they attended and what was learned.



**A Propos De Rien** “... *additional wealth is lost because of inflation?*” It depends on the type of wealth. Over a 30-year term, real estate and 19th-century stamps outpace inflation, while money held as cash or in a bank account will fall behind. Money is not wealth per se; it is a system of measuring it. Prices go up because of increased demand, shortages, or lack of confidence in what tomorrow may bring, not because overall wealth is increasing. The problem is that the vast majority of people confuse money and wealth as being the same thing.

Re: we could produce enough to live on by working fewer hours if we held our greed back. I worked twenty years on a four-day work week, and since 1999 on a three-day week. People who know I inherited oil money in 2002 ask me why I don't buy a big mansion, a luxury car, and take vacations in exotic places on cruise ships. I can't make them understand that you don't own houses and other possessions; they own you. My bungalow is all I need, not a huge executive house with huge heating bills.

**The Devil's Work V3#139** Re: Hugo Awards being controlled by a small number of voters yet nominations should not be made easier for fear of bloc voting. It's even worse for the Prix Aurora Award in Canada, where nominations and votes in some categories can be counted on one hand. A Star Trek clubzine won Best Fanzine for many years because the club members outvoted the rest of Canfandom. The rules finally had to be changed to

move clubzines to the organizational category so that genuine fanzines could win. In the Hugo Awards, a similar problem has arisen whereby ANSIBLE, which chronicles the British publishing industry, not SF fandom, had been winning awards for fan writing and fanzines despite not being eligible for those categories.

**Synapse** “*Unless the company wants to make a new offering of shares, what's the advantage of keeping its share price up?*” Corporate executives are mostly paid in stock options which are set lower than fair market value. The executives exercise them by buying, for example, a \$10 stock for \$5. This is how they make their millions. Some Canadian bank CEOs clear \$15 million a year this way. Hardly worth the trouble of cashing one's regular paycheque.

Re: phonetic spelling helping English secure its place as an international language. English already is the international language and partly so because its spelling, illogical though it may be, is mostly standardized now. The greatest difficulty with phonetics is deciding whose pronunciation to use. Texas? Harvard University? Scotland? South of England? Canadian? Australian? Is a paper shuffler a clerk or a clark? Is an atom bomb a nuk-you-lar or a new-clear device? In speaking of a past tense, do you say you have been or that you have bin?



**Comment-ary Redux** “*Does Calgary also have high living/housing costs relative to the rest of Canada?*” Yes. Only the Vancouver area is more expensive, and their excuse is that they have run out of land, being trapped between the sea and the mountains. In Calgary, a decent bungalow starts at \$400,000 in the distant suburbs out on the prairies, and in the city core will be \$750,000 at least. Actually, few bungalows are being built anymore; almost all of the new houses are two-story because the developers can squeeze more in per hectare and make a bigger profit. Alberta has the highest inflation rate in Canada (about 6%), the lowest unemployment rate (about 3%), and the fastest growing population.

Re: the annual national crossword puzzle tournament. I recently bought a DVD titled WORDPLAY about this, out of interest to compare their fandom to ours. Quite enjoyable, and well recommended; available on-line from Indigo.ca or Amazon.

“... *I want a big house!*” Be careful what you ask for; you may get it. Don’t forget the constant vacuuming, the utility bills, and the endless minor repairs.

“*I suspect that it’s harder to be poor in the country than in the city*” I can’t remember any serious poverty where I grew up in the rural areas of central Alberta. Any farmer who pays more than passing attention to all the literature the Ministry of Agriculture

hands out about farming methods can’t help but at least make a decent income. Grow your own food in big gardens (we cultivated ours with a tractor), and pick saskatoons or wild strawberries from the patch of bush that every farm has. My observation about the farmers who didn’t seem to prosper was that they all spent too much time in the tavern.

“*How does Canada’s health-care system do with mental health?*”

It should be noted that although the basic law for Canada’s system is federal, and the feds subsidize part of it, each province or territory runs its own system, so the coverage varies. The Canada Health Act merely specifies the minimum standard required, while most provinces go beyond that but with no consistency from one province to the next. There is no reciprocity between provinces. If an Albertan has a heart attack while visiting Ontario, Alberta will reimburse him the amount they would have paid for the health services in Alberta, but if Ontario is more expensive, then the Albertan has to pay the difference.

“*Once a species is intelligent enough, there is essentially only one niche to be inhabited, and that is the entire planet.*” This is what the fossil record shows about the genus *Homo*, which until relatively recently had several co-existing species. By 25,000 years ago, *H. sapiens* had eliminated all the others.

## MAILING COMMENTS ON FAPA #281.

FAPA #281 received in Calgary on November 23, 2007.

**STEFFAN-dango #1** Your biography of Bob Tucker (1914-2006) was interesting. You mentioned how the sudden influx of media SF fans destroyed his tradition of the smooth ceremony. It was ever thus when something becomes too popular for its own good. It reminds me of how, in the early days of the World Wide Web, predictions were made that people could communicate with everyone else on the Web via their home pages. Instead, the result was a cacophony of billions of pages. Users can only read a tiny few that agree with them. They might as well be in FAPA, I suppose.

**A Different Drummer #11** Your Confluence 19 convention report was interesting. Re: no one in the dealer room selling old SF magazines or pulps. I would guess this might be because the potential on-site market for pulps is too thin to justify hauling boxes of them to a convention, whereas selling them online would be easier and more profitable. I've noticed at Calgary conventions that dealers are only selling the quick-turnover stuff that can pay the table rental cost.

Re: Someone asking you to autograph a short story of yours in the paperback magazine FAR FRONTIERS. *"I was amazed anyone*

*actually owned a copy."* You needn't be.

-10-

I have the complete run of its predecessor DESTINIES, FAR FRONTIERS, and its successor NEW DESTINIES, as well as the single issue of PROTEUS. The concept of paperback magazines was an interesting one that never caught on. The idea was to sell them on the bookshelves, not at newsagents.

Re; the supposed lack of female SF writers and your remark that *"Perhaps the kind of stories women are submitting for publication is also a problem."* This suggests that one should start up a new digest magazine titled VAMPIRE ROMANCE STORIES. The romance paperback publishers already have specialized lines for SF romance, western romance, and (I am not making this up) NASCAR romance.

**SF Or Fairy Tales?** *"But alas! today we know that the universe in which we live really is very hostile to life."* That depends on what is meant by "life". We now know that microbes can live just about anywhere, in deep bedrock or superheated ocean vents, and can survive exposure to the vacuum of space. It seems probable that microscopic life is a certainty throughout the universe. What is questionable is whether or not sapient life exists elsewhere, and even more doubtful that there are species capable of traveling through deep space. It even seems highly probable that humans are the first species to develop technology in this galaxy.

**Visions Of Paradise #120 and #121** Re: the suburb you talked about where *"the houses are so close together a person could literally stand between two neighbouring homes and touch both of them simultaneously"* That is how all the new suburbs in Calgary are being built, with the result that if one house catches fire, it takes out both its neighbours and several others as well if there is a strong wind blowing. It used to be that the Calgary Fire Dept. only had to scramble one company for a house fire, but now when they get a call for a new neighbourhood they automatically send in three units. The provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs is thinking of changing building codes in Alberta to ban vinyl and cedar sidings and shake roofs for houses built close to each other. There are a lot of 5-story condos being built of particleboard or executive houses with cedar siding and shake roofs. When they catch fire, they burn like Roman candles.

*"I did not discover science fiction through his [Heinlein's] juveniles ..."* I discovered SF through the public library in rural Red Deer, which at that time (early 1960s) had the Big Three (Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein) and a few others like Madeline L'Engle. I read all the Heinlein books but never since again. There was just something too off-putting about the cultures he represented. My step-grandfather, who served in WW2 in the European theatre, once read a Heinlein novel without knowing anything about him, and said that it read like it was written by an Army officer who had never been in combat. (He was close;

Heinlein was in the U.S. Navy and never saw combat.) I have re-read Asimov and Clarke many times.

*"I have serious doubts about mankind when many of the most renowned historical persons are a bunch of mass murderers."* The reason Alexander the Great and Napoleon get such press is because they are more exciting to write about than those who made a real difference to the quality of our life, such as Jethro Tull (the scientist, not the band), who founded modern agriculture as we know it today and improved crop yields immensely. The history of the seed drill will never be made into a major motion picture coming soon near you.

Re: Poul Anderson's writing. I do agree that TAU ZERO is one of the best SF novels yet written. The high concept of a runaway starship with a stuck throttle outliving the universe is one of the best plot ideas in SF.

**Feline Mewsings #30** *"Allergy shots can be very effective."* They weren't for me when I was a farm boy in the 1960s. I was and still am allergic to fur and feather dust. Outside in the fresh air, I could be around livestock and pet them with no problem but as soon as I walked inside a barn my lungs would seize up. Fortunately Dad had a rangeland operation where the herd stayed outside all year round, and the barn was only used for invalid animals or controlled breeding.



Re: comment by Rita Winston that bathrooms must be separated from the kitchen by at least two walls. That has to be a California law because in my house, my brother's house, most of the field depots where I work, and numerous friends' houses, the bathroom and kitchen share a wall. This is commonly done because it enables the utility lines to be clustered in one wall.

*"Many libraries in the US loan out audio books. Are they available that way in Canada?"* Yes, certainly in Alberta libraries, and also music CDs and DVDs. Unfortunately for cheapskates hoping to copy the latest hit songs, the library mostly stocks titles such as "20 Great Polka Tunes" or "The Best of Mel Torme".

Re: you trying to sell your house in California. Nowadays, of course, is a bad time for any American to be selling because of all the foreclosures. When my mother died in 2002 in Red Deer, my brother and I had to unload her house at \$20,000 below market value because we simply could not maintain a vacant house 150 km north of us. Even so, it took six months to sell. It wasn't nice but after the sale it was a burden lifted from our shoulders.

**Edgar's Journal #6** Very nice cutout cover with a butterfly showing through. Re: Poe's poem "The Raven" being taught to 90% of anglophone kids. It is not taught in Alberta that I know about.

*"Do you think personalized stamps will have any effect on stamp collectors?"* They are indeed a popular new field for philatelists. Many of us exchange our stamps, either mint or on cover. Additionally, most stamp shows now order personalized stamps to publicize their show. They are also popular among the general public for wedding announcement stamps, especially when combined with postmarks from places such as Love, Saskatchewan, or Heart's Desire, Newfoundland.

**Lofgeornost #89** I was pleasantly surprised by your mention that my alma mater, the University of Alberta, was using your book on the history of libraries for one of its courses.

Re: Lee Gold's comment that the Getty museum collection was mostly mediocre art. One probable reason is that their endowment is so great and they have so much money slopping around that they buy art just for the sake of buying.

**Theatricality** You wrote about amateur dramatic societies that have more theatrics behind the scene than in front of the stage curtain. It's nice to know that not only SF fans have trouble with group dynamics.

**Trial And Air #17** As always, spectacular colour illustrations and subject matter. Tom Godwin's "The Cold Equations" is a story that no Hollywood studio would do without insisting on a

happy ending, instead of dumping the child stowaway overboard the spaceship because her mass would cause the death of everyone else. Too politically incorrect.

**FAPA Memberships** Useful data for future reference.

## **MAILING COMMENTS ON FAPA #282.**

FAPA #282 received in Calgary on February 20, 2008.

**FAPAlament #7807** “*Why did you use **Opuntia** for your zine title?*” When I was a university student I published some papers on the two species of *Opuntia* in Alberta. I still have plants of both of them growing in my garden. It is as good a title as any other I could think of when I began this zine in March 1991.

**Ben’s Beat #91** Your story of the travels of your first-edition Lovecraft got me to wondering how it is that some authors such as he still survive, much to the annoyance of literary critics, while wunderkinds and bestseller authors famous in their day are now forgotten. The critical factor seems to be someone to champion the author in the early days post-mortem until posterity catches up. August Derleth, much maligned and often rightly so, kept the Lovecraft flame alive when it didn’t pay to do so, just as Shakespeare’s fame today would have been stillborn had not an

admirer of his collected and published the plays. Bestsellers seem to die out because they are too much of their time, a virtue when first published but deadly dull to posterity who miss all the in-jokes. This is why cyberpunk soon died out, because it was too much of the early personal computer era. Miskatonic University, however, could easily exist today in some obscure backwater town. You paid \$5 for the book in 1943; what would that equate to in today’s currency? \$50?

**Claims Department** Re: the Simpsons movie being publicized by turning sample 7-Elevens into Kwik-E-Marts. They did that to one store in Calgary, cultural imperialism at its finest. I have never watched an episode of the show, but I did try a can of Buzz Cola from the 7-Eleven qua Kwik-E-Mart. It was the worst cola I have ever tasted, even worse than RC Cola. I don’t think I’ll buy the DVD of the movie. Fortunately I don’t eat doughnuts, so the pink icing was not difficult to resist.

**Alphabet Soup #57** Re: galactic empires. If humans had faster-than-light space travel, this would help empires maintain their ability to project power. Not that it is necessary, since the British built their empire despite it taking months to reach the borders. Conversely, rapid communication would make it more difficult to stop rebellions and heresy, so the empires would more likely be constitutional monarchies where the monarch reigns but does not rule.

**Number One #12** Re: retail sales in stores. As a university student I once worked in a Woolco garden centre, where I was a valued employee because I was a horticulture student and the only one who knew what he was talking about. We didn't have service contracts in those days, at least not for plants. Recently Circuit City was in the news for being in financial trouble because the management decided to lay off all the senior clerks and use cheaper staff who only got wages and no commissions. As a result, CC income plummeted because no one was pushing service contracts, where the real money is. The junior staff couldn't be bothered because it was too much work for no gain, and the nominally more expensive staff who got commissions were gone.

**Adventures On Earth #13** Re: recycling compact fluorescent light bulbs. The problem will not be in educating people to do so. Unlike newspapers or pop bottles, which accumulate fast enough that people can fill a blue box a week, compact fluorescents will only burn out at a slow rate for the average user. Few people are going to make a special trip to a recycling depot for one bulb or bother having a burned-out bulb cluttering up the place, so they will simply toss it in the general garbage.

Re: why is "number" abbreviated "nr", "no", or "#", and do any of these come from some field of science. I don't think science has anything to do with it. "nr" is the English contraction, and "no" is the European contraction from "numero" in the Romance

languages. As to where "#" came from, I don't know.

Re: fanzine fans putting off newbies because they didn't respond to requests that didn't include "The Usual". My observation is that anytime I took pity and sent copies of my zine for free, that would be the last I ever heard from them. After having this happen too many times, I simply ignore begging letters. At SF conventions, I would get into conversations with enthusiastic fans, give them a copy of my zine, and explain "The Usual". Again, that would be the last I heard. I stopped putting copies on the freebie table because in all the years I did so, I never had one contact who could be traced to that.

**Visions Of Paradise #124** You say that you don't want to teach for many more years yet you like some aspects of the job. Does your union allow job sharing? This would enable you to teach the parts of the job you like, and let someone else handle the rest. In the Parks Dept. where I work, job sharing is popular with young parents, who can thus spend more time at home with the kids.

**Lofgeornost #90** *"I find myself distressingly unattracted to some stories that I feel I ought to enjoy"* If you are a paid critic for the TLS or lecture in literature at a university, then this is a serious point. But if you read SF as a hobby, as indeed we all do in FAPA, then you are under no obligation to suffer through novels



that hold no interest for you. SF is supposed to be fun, not an endless slog through Volume 6 in the Quest For The Sacred Knickknack of Qwerty trilogy.

*"I hold no regrets about my lack of interest in the stories of Stanislaw Lem."* The problem with non-anglophone authors read in translation, such as Lem, is that you can never be certain if the author or the translator is to blame. I suspect that when the Trekkies translated Shakespeare back into the original Klingon, they produced a very pedestrian reading of his texts.

**Edgar's Journal #7** Re: Edgar Allan Poe's love life. One can understand why he was so morbid, given that no one he knew seemed to make it past her 40s without dying of tuberculosis. It does make one appreciate our modern health care system. I also wonder if the humidity of the places he lived had a lot to do with it. There was a tradition in both the Canadian prairies and the American Great Plains and Southwest that many settlers came out here for their health. The low humidity and constant dry air seemed to allow tuberculosis patients a longer lifespan.

While looking at your raven cut-out paper dolls, it occurred to me that I seldom see ravens in Calgary. Magpies are extremely abundant; you can't walk one block without seeing or hearing one, but ravens are scarce despite occupying the same ecological niche as scavengers. Magpies seem to outcompete their bigger cousins.

**Comment-ary #3** *"So don't count on decent food in every con suite."* I don't even count on it in just one con suite. One problem is what I call the locust fans, who are the economically-marginal fans. They rely on the 24-hour video room for their sleeping space, and vacuum up the food in the con suite in lieu of getting their own meals. The strange thing is that I never see them at any of the panels or events. Groups who recognize them ban them from room parties. Why they bother attending is beyond me.

*"Use of plural pronouns that point to single but nongendered singular nouns has come into common usage ... "* I've always wondered why English lost or never had singular neuters for humans (instead we have to use him/her or them as a singular) and livestock (what is the singular of cattle?). I remember as a farm boy listening to the occasional discussion about the latter. In a herd of cattle, there is only one bull and the rest are cows or steers. But there is no word to indicate a single individual of a herd of cattle without regard to gender. What makes it stranger is that we have very specialized words to describe virgin cows (heifer), orphan calves (dogie), unbranded cattle (maverick), castrated young males (steer), and draft cattle (ox). The same sort of weirdness shows up with sheep (what is a single nongender sheep?). And, off this topic, why do shepherds look after flocks instead of herds of sheep?

**Synapse** Re: American dictionaries defining “Canuck” as a derogatory term for francophone Canadians (not “Canadian French”, which implies an emigrant). Not so in Canada, where every hockey league from the NHL on down has a team named the Canucks. There is no connection of the term here to Québécois; it is a common nickname just as the Americans are referred to as Yankees (and have a baseball team so named).

Re: the fictional town of Dog River, Saskatchewan, being too small to support a two-person police force. In western Canada, the provincial governments pay for RCMP services in rural or remote areas who don’t have the tax base to support themselves. Every Canadian will immediately recognize the two actors as wearing uniforms with very close resemblance to the RCMP, but they did not give the **Corner Gas** producers permission to portray Mounties, so there are differences. And before anyone asks, scarlet serge is a dress uniform, worn only for ceremonial occasions. Mounties on routine patrol look much like any other police force in Canada. The first four seasons of this comedy are available on DVD; highly recommended and available on-line through the usual dealers. Starting with the third season, if you look closely at the closing credits, you will see my cousin Joan Speirs listed among the production staff. She lives in Regina, where the interior sets are filmed, and, incidently, is the national headquarters of the RCMP. We’re all very proud of her.

“What does NOPALEA signify?”

It’s the Spanish translation of Opuntia. Opuntia is the Latin translation of Nopalea.

