

OPUNTIA

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National Garlic Day 2015

Opuntia is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. My e-mail address is: opuntia57@hotmail.com When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

COWTOWN COSTUMING

2015-04-17

photos by Dale Speirs

The Calgary Comic Con was on the weekend of April 16 to 19, bringing 100,000 media fans to Cowtown. It's big enough to take over most of the Stampede grounds. The City of Calgary, the Tourist and Convention Bureau, and the Chamber of Commerce pay a lot of attention to it. To the suits, they may be geeks but their money is just as good as anyone else's.

I have no interest in comic cons, especially paying hundreds of dollars and standing in line for hours hoping to see a panel. Evidently though, this is great fun for the mob. They do have one free event, a parade on the Friday morning of the event through downtown Calgary. It starts from the Eau Claire district on the south bank of the Bow River and crosses the downtown core to the Olympic Plaza, where the costumes are then judged.





I have no idea what shows these costumes are from and don't want to know. It wasn't until after I took the photo at left and was processing it later at home that I noticed the two Calgary Flames fans in the background watching the parade from the other side of the street. The Flames made it into the first round of the Stanley Cup, and half of Calgarians are wearing team jerseys. Media fans aren't the only cosplayers in town. And wait until the Calgary Stampede rodeo in July, when a million Calgarians dress western even if they don't know the difference between a steer and a bull.



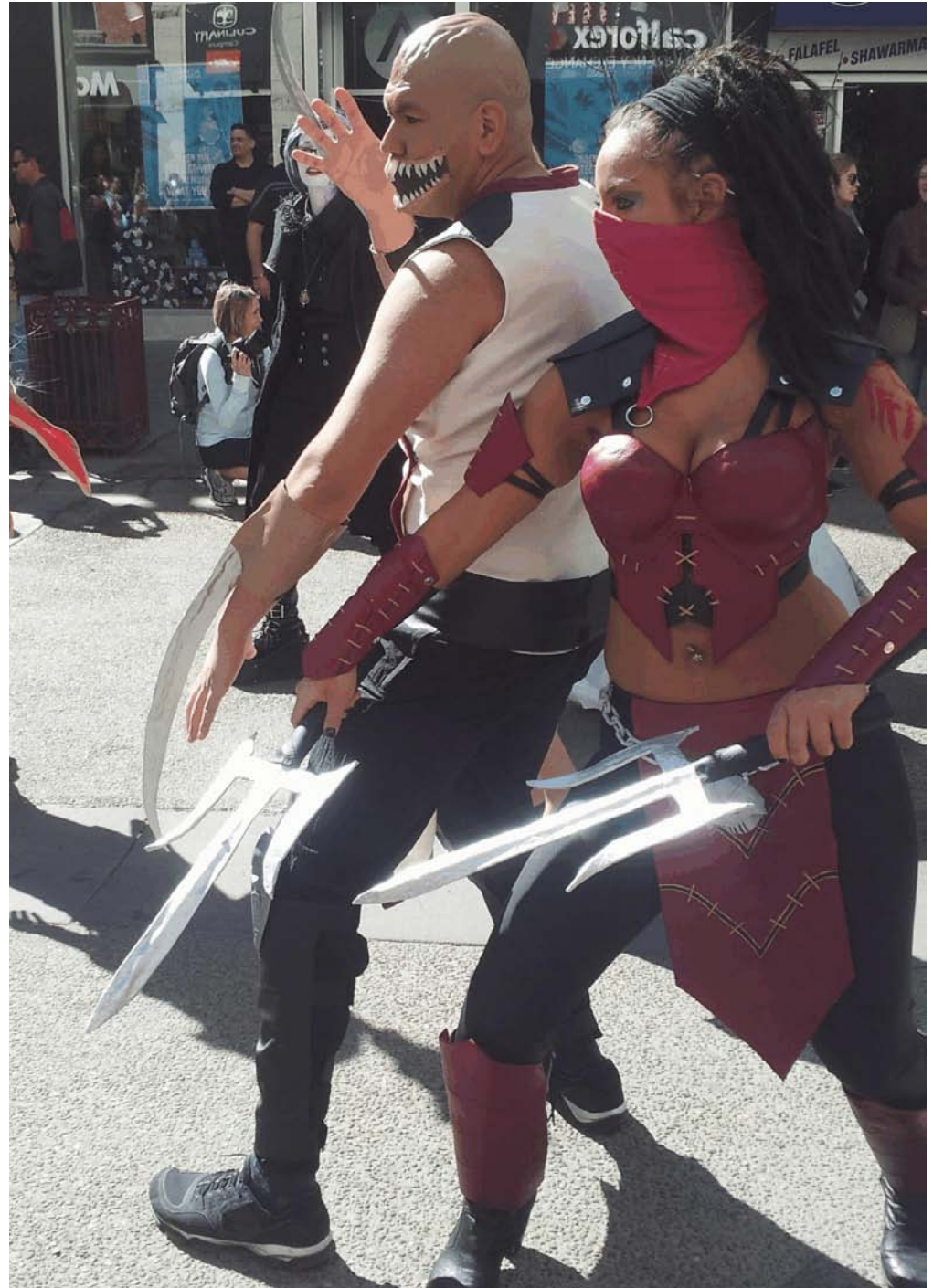


Some cheesecake for both male and female readers of this zine.





At left, a couple of celebrity actresses among many in the parade. One of them was yakking on her cellphone. On the far side of the street are some more Flames fans in costume.



A group of visiting Yorkshiremen, no doubt.





My favourite photo of the parade. The commissioners are always on the job.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor’s remarks in square brackets. Please include your name and town when sending a comment. Email to opuntia57@hotmail.com]

FROM: Joseph Nicholas
London, England

2015-04-14

I read your review of Niall Ferguson's collection of alternative history essays in OPUNTIA #303, and wasn't surprised to see that Ferguson himself (rather than any of his contributors) discusses whether or not Britain (and the British Empire) should have intervened in the First World War. As you may or may not be aware, Ferguson is a revisionist conservative historian who has for some years been pursuing an argument that Britain should have stood aside in 1914, thus failing to live up to the treaties into which it had entered with France and Russia. In his view, it had no real stake in the outcome of a continental European conflict. That would have determined who ruled the European continent, but would (he claims) have left Britain free to rule the seas, as before. Thus he uses a counterfactual non-intervention to smuggle in another of his revisionist claims, that the British Empire was a uniquely civilising force, and should indeed have continued (to use Winston Churchill's words) for another thousand years.

But of course the British Empire was anything but a uniquely civilising force. Episodes such as the 1857 Indian Mutiny, the Opium Wars, the Irish Famine of 1845-1852, the Indian famine of the 1940s, the response to the post-WW2 Mau Mau uprising, the list goes on and on, demonstrate that it was, as were all colonial empires, a means to appropriate by force the raw materials and other resources of the peoples it conquered. Additionally, his arguments for British neutrality ignore his own rubric, as you quote from the introduction to his collection, that alternative historians should entertain only those alternatives which can be shown to have been actually considered at the time, avoiding hindsight and modern behaviour. The British politicians of the time were extremely concerned about the rise of German militarism, and indeed had been since the Prussian victories over France in 1870-1871. Ferguson's pretense that a neutral faction in the British political establishment (a few did wish to avoid war with Germany *if possible*, but would sit on their hands if the majority decided otherwise) could have prevented British involvement in Europe, in the face of widespread demand from the general public for Germany to be

confronted (for example, the Dreadnought Crisis of 1909: We want eight and we won't wait) has no basis in actuality.

Last year, around the anniversary of the outbreak the First World War, Ferguson engaged in a television debate on these points with another conservative historian, Max Hastings. There was no studio vote afterwards, but the general consensus was that Hastings had the better of it. He could show not just what happened and why, but explain on the basis of the historical evidence why the British political establishment of 1914 felt it necessary to despatch the British Expeditionary Force, undersized and underequipped though it was, although that itself was not realised until after its first defeats. Ferguson, by contrast, could only argue if perhaps that, then possibly this, which as a means of proving a counterfactual is wholly inadequate.

I Also Heard From: William Kobb, Ken B, Miller

WORLD WIDE PARTY ON JUNE 21

Founded by Benoit Girard (Quebec) and Franz Miklis (Austria) in 1994, the World Wide Party is held on June 21 every year. 2015 will be the 21nd year of the WWP.

At 21h00 local time on June 21, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of the Papernet around the world. It is important to have it exactly at 21h00 your time. The idea is to get a wave of fellowship circling the planet. Rescheduling it to a club meeting or more convenient time negates the idea of a wave of celebration by SF fans and zinesters circling the globe. At 21h00, face to the east and salute those who have already celebrated. Then face north, then south, and toast those in your time zone who are celebrating as you do. Finally, face west and raise a glass to those who will celebrate WWP in the next hour.

Raise a glass, publish a one-shot, have a party, or do a mail art project for the WWP. Let me know how you celebrated the day.

ZINE LISTINGS

[I only list zines from the Papernet. If the zine is posted on www.efanzines.com or www.fanac.org, then I don't mention it since you can read them directly.]

[The Usual means \$5 cash (\$6 overseas) or trade for your zine. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas (the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount) or mint USA stamps (which are not valid for postage outside USA). US\$ banknotes are still acceptable around the world.]

CHRISTIAN NEW AGE QUARTERLY V21#4 (US\$5 from Catherine Groves, Box 276, Clifton, New Jersey 07015-0276) Commentary on the difference between using "you" and "we" when discussing differences, and lots of letters of comment. There is an article on how the way a family practices its Christianity can reflect unfavourably on the religion itself, even though the latter is not to blame.

BANANA WINGS #58 (The Usual from Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7ES, England) Extensive fannish and SFish musings, and lots of letters of comments. Always a good read.

CLICKETY CLICK (Posted at www.efanzines.com) These are the newsletters of the Eastercon 2015 science fiction convention held in England. Normally I don't review ezines because you can read them yourself just as easily, but something here caught my eye. Issue #1, page 1, had an informative note about the hotel food which stunned me. Hamburgers, hot dogs, and sandwiches were selling at a uniform price of £5 each. The current exchange rate is C\$ 1.85 to the pound sterling, which means C\$9.25 for a burger or sandwich. Granted that hotel food everywhere is more expensive, but even so that is a breathtaking price. There was a complicated system of vouchers and tokens to pay for the food. The average in Calgary for a hamburger or sandwich is about \$4.

Mind you, Eastercon is not a record. I was hiking in the Rocky Mountains last year in Yoho National Park, British Columbia. The only settlement in the park is the village of Field, on the south bank of the Kicking Horse River. There are a few restaurants in Field catering to European and Asian visitors who don't mind paying \$23 for a hamburger plate with fries. It was the cheapest I saw. I later drove over to Emerald Lake, about fifteen minutes away on the far side of the valley, where a fast-food joint had burgers-only for \$7. That is why I bring a picnic lunch when I go hiking.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Batygina, K., and G. Laughlin (2015) **Jupiter's decisive role in the inner Solar System's early evolution.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 112:4214-4217

Authors' abstract: *"The Solar System is an unusual member of the galactic planetary census in that it lacks planets that reside in close proximity to the Sun. In this work, we propose that the primordial nebula-driven process responsible for retention of Jupiter and Saturn at large orbital radii and sculpting Mars' low mass is also responsible for clearing out the Solar System's innermost region. ... The statistics of extrasolar planetary systems indicate that the default mode of planet formation generates planets with orbital periods shorter than 100 days and masses substantially exceeding that of the Earth. When viewed in this context, the Solar System is unusual. Here, we present simulations which show that a popular formation scenario for Jupiter and Saturn, in which Jupiter migrates inward from a > 5 astronomical units (AU) to a ~ 1.5 AU before reversing direction, can explain the low overall mass of the Solar System's terrestrial planets, as well as the absence of planets with a < 0.4 AU. Jupiter's inward migration entrained s greater than or equal to 10-100 km planetesimals into low-order mean motion resonances, shepherding and exciting their orbits. The resulting collisional cascade generated a planetesimal disk that, evolving under gas drag, would have driven any preexisting short-period planets into the Sun. In this scenario, the Solar System's terrestrial planets formed from gas-starved mass-depleted debris that remained after the primary period of dynamical evolution."*

Speirs: During the early formation of the Solar System, there was a lot of migration of planets, particularly Jupiter, which swept out the inner system of gases and prevented the formation of a planet where the asteroid belt is. The Solar System has historically been considered an average system, but as we learn more about other planetary systems, it is becoming clear that our system is anomalous. I've mentioned before that I believe Fermi's Paradox is based on the false assumption that we are a young species and there must be older alien sapient races. This evidence suggests to me that Earth is an anomaly and we may be the elder sapient species in the galaxy.