



**Opuntia** is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. It is posted on [www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com) and [www.fanac.org](http://www.fanac.org). My e-mail address is: [opuntia57@hotmail.com](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com) When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

**EDITORIAL**

by Dale Speirs

350 issues of OPUNTIA since March 1991. That’s not too many.

**COWTOWN MAIL ARTISTS MEET RYOSUKE COHEN**

photos by Dale Speirs

Back before I was forced off the Papernet in 2014 by massive postage rate increases, I wasn’t just in zinedom but also corresponded with mail artists. One of them was Ryosuke Cohen, of Ashiya, Japan. He travels a lot and arrived in Calgary this summer. He was a guest of Theo Nelson, who arranged an open house on August 9, which I had the pleasure of attending. A steady stream of visitors came and went through the day to meet Cohen. One of the other visitors I crossed paths with was Ross Pringle, with whom I’ve exchanged zines. Strangely, even though Pringle, Nelson, and myself have all lived in Calgary for years, we never met face-to-face until that day.

Besides mail art, Cohen also specializes in silhouette art, and he sketched each of us in turn. It happened that in 2001 he had sent me a poster with his silhouette, which had ever since been on the top shelf in my library. I brought it along and photographed him holding it. A good time was had by all.



*Above: Ryosuke Cohen and his self-portrait from fifteen years ago.*



*At left: Theo Nelson.*



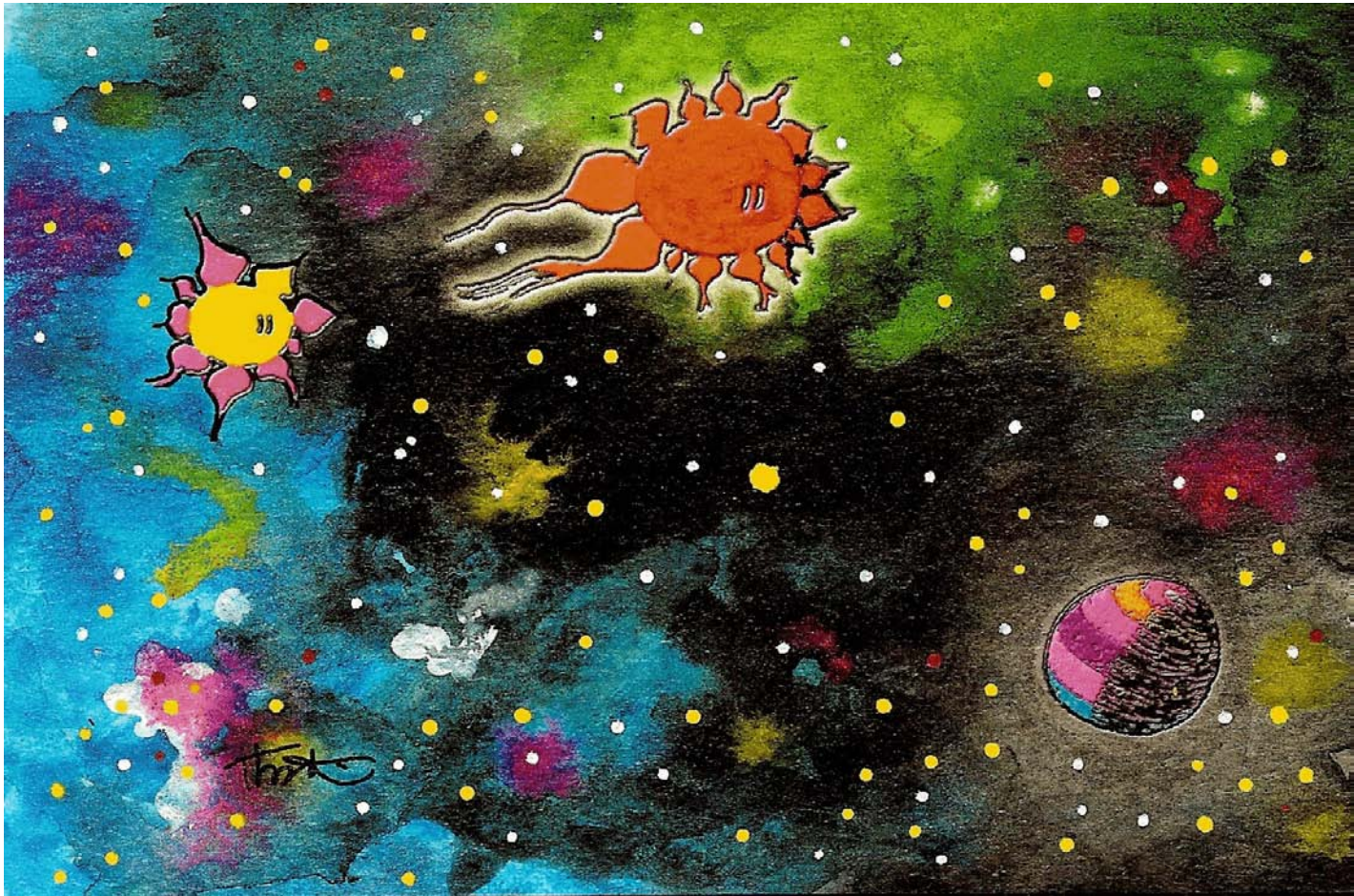
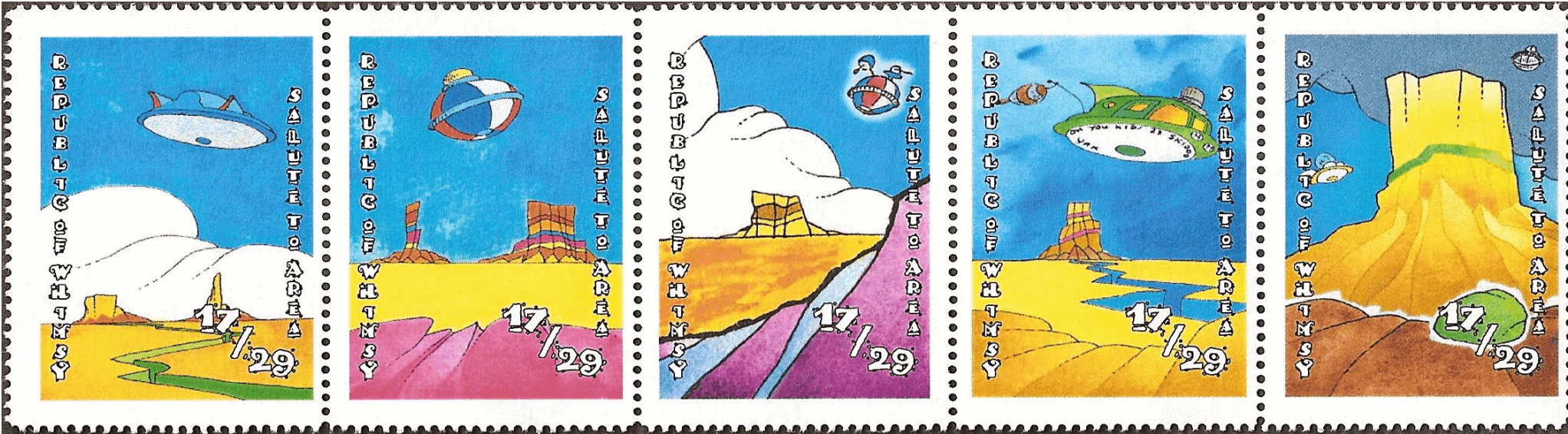
In the Nelson backyard, Cohen sketches Ross Pringle.

The woman standing next to Nelson is Calgary artist Georgie Stone.





Some of Theo Nelson's artistamps, and a 2005 postcard (not to the same scale).





**WHEN WORDS COLLIDE 2016**  
by Dale Speirs

[Reports of previous WWC conventions appeared in OPUNTIA's #71, 253, 266, 282, and 318.]

Calgary's sixth annual readercon was held August 12 to 14, 2016, at the Delta South Hotel on Southland Drive SE straddling Bonaventure Drive. The two halves of the hotel are connected by a third-floor walkway across the road, which makes for convoluted travel if it is raining and you don't want to go outside. Normally it is faster to walk across at street level. The topographical layout of the hotel interior would puzzle M.C. Escher, but he's dead, so it was the hotel guests who had to figure out the geometry. Other than that, the hotel was a good site, and there were some nearby restaurants for those who chose to dine out.



The membership was capped at 750 and sold out a month before. The convention covers the genres of SF, fantasy, horror, westerns, romance, and mysteries. WWC is very strong on genre seminars, writer workshops, and editor/publisher meet-and-greets for wanna-be authors clutching their precious

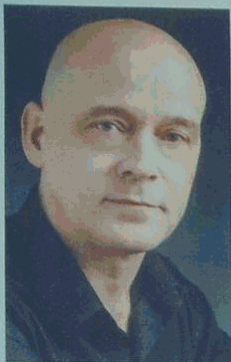
manuscripts. The dealer bourse was books only. Almost all of the tables were taken by small-press publishers, and the rest by book dealers.



My reports on the seminars I attended are further below, sorted by theme, not in chronological order. The programme book blurb for each seminar is in *italics*, followed by my comments.

On the next page are some posters I saw in the hotel corridor.





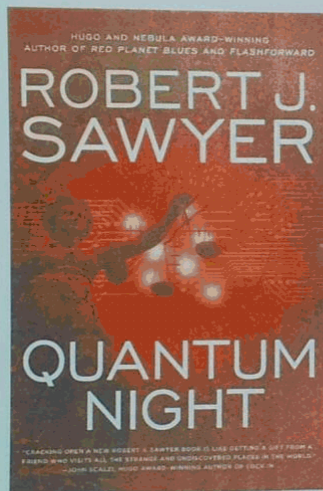
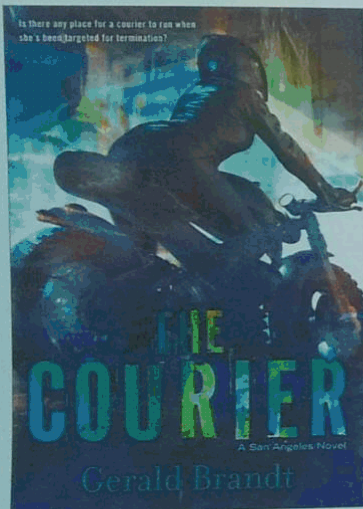
← Make this man  
as happy  
as this man →



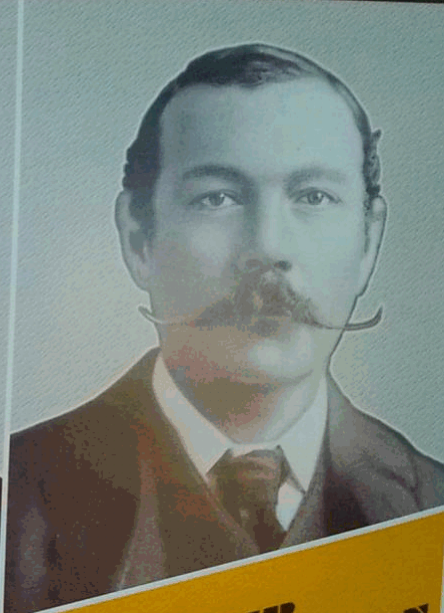
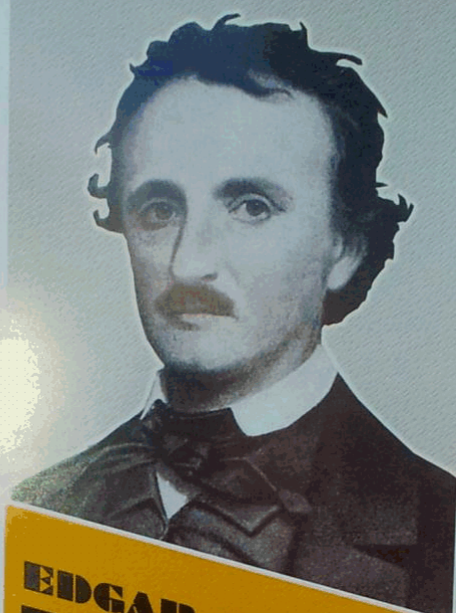
BY COMING  
TO THE

## Science Fiction Book Social

Saturday 4:00 in Fireside Room



## MYSTERY, CRIME AND DARK FANTASY



EDGAR ALLAN  
**POE**

VS

SIR  
ARTHUR CONAN  
**DOYLE**



nEvermore! Tales of Murder, Mystery and the Macabre is an homage to the great American writer, the incomparable Edgar Allan Poe, and a must-have for every fan of his work.

Compiled by multi-award winning editors, Nancy Kilpatrick and Caro Soles, nEvermore! Tales of Murder, Mystery and the Macabre presents a tantalizing selection of imaginative stories by New York Times bestselling and prize-winning authors.

Featuring works by: Margaret Atwood; David Morrell; Kelley Armstrong; Richard Christian Matheson; Tanith Lee; William F. Nolan (with Jason Brock & Sunil Brock); Nancy Holder; Christopher Rice; Chelsea Quinn Yarbro; Michael Jecks; Lisa Morton; J. Madison Davis; Barbara Fradkin; Colleen Anderson; Robert Bose; Jane Petersen Burfield; Rick Chiantaretto; Robert Lopresti; David McDonald; Loren Rhoads; Thomas S. Roche; and Carol Weekes & Michael Kelly.

This anthology consists of 22 original tales that blend supernatural and mystery elements in unique reimaginings of Edgar Allan Poe's exquisite stories. Plus a bonus essay, "Edgar Allan Poe, Genre Crosser", by Uwe Sommerlad.

EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing ISBN: 978-1-77053-085-0



Brilliant, belligerent and bearded in equal measure, incapable of suffering fools, or journalists, gladly, the greatest scientific mind of his generation - Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Professor George Edward Challenger returns in ten all-new tales of scientific adventure and wonder. He is the discoverer of *The Lost World*, the prophet of *The Poison Belt*, the destroyer of *The Disintegration Machine*! Who can deliver mankind from the shackles of ignorance? Who else but that great self-proclaimed champion of science: Professor Challenger!

Featuring works by: Guy Adams & James Goss; Lawrence C. Connolly; Mark Morris; Josh Reynolds; John Takis; Simon Kurt Unsworth; Stephen Volk; Wendy N. Wagner; Andrew J. Wilson; Christopher Roden; and J. R. Campbell.

This original anthology sees Challenger and his stalwart companions including the reporter Malone, big game hunter Lord John Roxton and skeptical colleague Professor Summerlee, witness the ravages of time, narrowly eluding a dinosaur's bite, and plunge deep into the mysteries hidden within the Earth. Strap yourself in for the chills, thrills, and challenges in this exciting new anthology of new worlds and lost places with literature's foremost scientific adventurer.

EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing ISBN: 978-1-77053-052-2

◆ ◆ ◆ IN STOCK AND ON THE SHELF ◆ ◆ ◆



**Mystery.**

*“Kill Randy: A Practical Application Of Murder Methods.”*  
panelists Axel Howerton, Paula Johanson, Dwayne Clayden

[The Chairman of WWC 2016 was Randy McCharles.]

*Are you a mystery writer? Do your murderers commit crimes you create? How would you like to create a real-life murder scenario and put it to (fake) use? Panel members will present a plan to murder our illustrious leader, Randy McCharles. The audience will vote on the best one, and that writer will then attempt to carry out the plan over the course of the weekend.*

McCharles is an experienced con runner of long standing, as well as a published author. I’ve seen him around many Calgary conventions and know that he is a genial man, very much so if he consented to be a target for these panelists. Howerton reminded the audience that non-disclosure was implied since they didn’t want McCharles to know what method would be used against him. The plans had to be realistic, with no silliness or elaborate methods. This was one of the first panels of the convention, and gave the culprits ample time to make the hit.



*The dastardly cads who would kill poor McCharles. From left to right are Clayden, Johanson, and Howerton.*

Howerton’s plan was to buy McCharles a few beers and get him tipsy. The hotel is the atrium style, with several floors of rooms circling a central area with a restaurant and swimming pool. Howerton would take McCharles up to the top floor, take him out on the balcony to admire the view, and then assist him over the railing. There are no security cameras aimed at the room balconies for privacy reasons, but the bar has them, and that would prove the victim was under the influence.

Johanson had a similar method. First she would get a half-bottle of bourbon into McCharles, accidentally spill some on his clothes so that he would reek of booze, and then take him across to the other half of the hotel at street level. Anyone walking this way had to wait at a busy intersection for the lights, where there were lots of cars turning at the curb. The rest was obvious. As a car goes by, push and/or trip him under the vehicle, and tearfully tell the constable it must have been the booze.

Clayden is a Calgary paramedic who knows things about drugs, prescription or back alley. He said that poisoners should use either a medication that the victim was taking, so that it would be declared an accidental overdose, or a natural substance that the body secretes as part of normal metabolism, so it wouldn’t stand out on the toxicology tests. He advised people against using recreational drugs or chemicals such as arsenic, which stand out like neon lights at the autopsy. He mentioned two drugs that could be used, which are found in the body but as overdoses would kill our beloved convention chairman. (For obvious reasons, I will not record what those two substances are; both are relatively easy to come by.)

Clayden recommended injection by a fine needle into the buttocks, which would be only a pinprick. The best time to do it would be during the hourly changeover of seminars when the hotel corridors were crowded with people coming and going. McCharles would feel a split-second pinprick before he collapsed from an apparent heart attack.

The beauty of this was that McCharles, although in apparent good health, was obviously under stress running the convention and is middle-aged, about the right time to have his first heart attack. Clayden said half of all first-time heart attacks are fatal and occur without any previous attacks or signs. Even better, since Clayden is a paramedic, he could pretend to administer first-aid until the ambulance arrived, and keep away anyone else who might actually revive McCharles.

*Portrait of a hunted man: McCharles puts on a brave face at WWC 2016 after learning that three assassins were after him.*



Police investigate all fatal incidents. In a situation where there is no violence, just a stressed-out, middle-aged man suddenly clutching his heart in front of witnesses and then dropping dead, then they leave it to the Medical Examiner to decide. Because Clayden would be using a natural substance found in the body, the test results wouldn't indicate anything untoward.

The panel had a slight change in plans. Instead of the audience voting, all three panelists would go after him and the first one to succeed would win. They had to make physical contact with him using a simulation of their method. Howerton would buy McCharles a beer and then tag him. Since the victim, like the vast majority of con-goers, constantly crossed back and forth between the two halves of the hotel at street level, Johanson would tag him at the street corner. Clayden, always prepared, brought along some red stickers, and would slap one on McCharles's butt to signify an injection.

The winner would be announced via the WWC Twitter feed. I'm not on Twitter or other social media such as Facebook, so this left me out. However, I met up with McCharles on the Sunday of the convention and he told me who murdered him. Place your bets down and then go to the end of this convention report to find out who the perpetrator was.

*"Elementary, My Dear Canada"*  
*presented by Constantine Kaoukakis*

*Many associate Sherlock Holmes with England, but his influence is widespread. In particular, he has and continues to influence Canada. From Sherlock Holmes societies to forensic science, the Great Detective has had a great impact on the True North Strong and Free.*

This was a very well prepared and presented talk by Kaoukakis. He started off by noting that there are four references to Canada in the canon, in the stories BRUCE PARTINGTON PLANS, BLACK PETER, COPPER BEECHES, and HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES. Doyle visited Canada several times. In 1894, while touring the USA, he made a brief detour to Toronto. In 1914, he paid an extended visit to Jasper National Park in the mountains of Alberta, and then went through Edmonton and Winnipeg. He made a cross-Canada tour in 1923 from Vancouver to Montreal to promote his belief in spiritualism.



The 1944 movie THE SCARLET CLAW brought Holmes and Watson to Quebec. Canadian actor Christopher Plummer was Holmes in several 1970s movies. The present-day television series MURDOCH MYSTERIES is based on a Canadian police investigator of Victorian-era Toronto who used Sherlockian methods. The 1997-2000 television series SHIRLEY HOLMES, which I never even heard tell of before, was about a grand-niece of Holmes living in Canada.

There are nine active Sherlockian societies across Canada, stretching from Vancouver to Halifax, including a scion club in Calgary.

*“In Miss Marple’s Footsteps”*

*panelists Hayden Trenholm, Mahrie Reid, Constantine Kaoukakis, and Jude Pitman*

*From Jessica Fletcher to Miss Marple to Rumpole of the Bailey, senior sleuths have a style all their own. Our panel discusses some of their favourite older and wiser crime solvers.*

Trenholm said that most of the older detective stories are too unrealistic for today’s world. Amateur detectives would not get a conviction in court, and police would not allow them to contaminate evidence.

Kaoukakis asked the men in the audience whether they preferred male or female detectives. All but one, myself included, didn’t care. The odd man out preferred masculine detective fiction.

*“Writing From The Shadows: Exploring Noir And Hardboiled”*

*presented by Axel Howerton*

*... an exploration of the tropes and stylistic elements of the disparate crime subgenres of Noir and Hardboiled, tracing the history from Gothic and Romance fiction to the neo-Noir of today. What are the differences and how can you infuse your own fiction, of any genre or style, with the flavours of darkness and redemption.*

Noir began as film and then migrated to literature. It is not a genre in itself but rather a variety of subgenres with main genres. Today it is mostly associated

with mystery fiction. Hardboiled detective fiction is not the same thing. Noir has corrupt and irredeemable characters who will take the long fall to a nasty end. Hardboiled fiction is in the same corrupt world, but the detective is fighting back and trying to clean up his own little corner.

Film noir is a visual style of movie, not translatable to literary fiction. It is not about the plot, but about how the protagonist is slowly corrupted and can’t escape.

## **Science Fiction.**

*“Jewish Science Fiction And Fantasy”*

*presented by Allan Weiss*

*While Jewish authors have played a prominent role in the history of science fiction and fantasy, they do not often employ Jewish characters, themes, and imagery in their work. Nevertheless, some authors like Phyllis Gotlieb, Harlan Ellison, Isaac Asimov, Jack Dann, and Michael Chabon have employed elements of Jewish culture in their short stories and novels, dealing with themes familiar to readers of Jewish-American and Jewish-Canadian authors while using the tropes of fantastic literature.*

Weiss began by reviewing past efforts at Jewish SF, such as WANDERING STARS, STRANGE KADDISH, and THE STARS OF DAVID. He himself has published SF but doesn’t use Jewish themes explicitly in his work. He does use the Jewish world view and ethics in his novels.

One theme in Jewish SF is the fear of assimilation in a universe of robots and clones. Tikkun Olam, the repair of the world, is another concept that is applied in SF, to build a better universe.



*“Live Action Slush: Science Fiction Edition”*

*Claire McCague (reader), judges Patrick Swenson, Hayden Trenholm, Julie Czerneda, Robert Runte*

*Bring the first page of your manuscript to be anonymously read aloud and receive comments from our editors.*

There were several editions of Live Action Slush, one for each genre. I only went to the SF version. Next year I'll pick a different genre. A popular event, with a good turnout.

The procedure was that McCague would read a page aloud. When two of the judges raised their hands, the reading stopped and the criticism began. The judges were all professional editors. Not all the pages got the gong. The judges let about one-third go through, and those writers were asked to stand up and take a bow.



*Left to right: McCague, Swenson, Trenholm, Czerneda, Runte*

Judges' comments included the following:

The setting of the story was not made clear at the beginning; there was action but no context.

Infodumps should not be on the first page.

Repetition and re-description of the same idea or setting several times in the first few paragraphs of the page.

Don't use dialogue to describe places or things. Runte gave a sample of bad dialogue: *"I'm leaving this room, which is in the Delta South Hotel in the city*

*of Calgary, located in southern Alberta."* Nobody talks like that.

If the story is science fiction, there should at least be a hint of that on the first page. This is why so many alternative histories mention an airship floating by or a steam-powered robot.

*“Is There A Place For Optimistic Science Fiction?”*

*panelists Allan Weiss, Michael Martineck, Donna McMahon, Graham Darling, and Nina Munteanu*

*In a recent interview, SF author Lynda Williams suggested that “SF is mainstream now”, and that a sordid fascination in much dark SF prevails with self-interested cynicism. Some suggest that the prevalent zombie-ism, doomsaying, and hero slaying the Other-Gone-Awry is giving way to more co-operative stories of hope and collaboration. If more optimistic SF is being written, who's reading it and why? What are the driving components of optimistic SF that define it and distinguish it from other SF with character arcs? Because of this, is optimistic SF more similar to other genres than to its own?*

Munteanu started off by saying she was optimistic that this was going to be a good panel (laughter from the audience). Darling said the most obvious example of optimistic SF is Star Trek. It presupposes that while there will be troubles along the way and battles with Klingons, the human race will survive and expand out into a wonderful future.

McMahon felt there is no point in writing SF where everyone fails. Martineck said that “What If” fiction might be pessimistic but at the same time suggests there could be a better future if only we would take a different and better route.

*“Writers At The Improv”*

*presented by Imaginative Fiction Writers Of Alberta, with Edward Willett*

*Attend this hilarious panel where teams of writers use audience suggestions to create a speculative fiction story. The results can, and have, been out of this world.*

I always enjoy the good humour of this event. Audience members suggest a word, and the six contestants have one minute to write a sentence using the



word. The results are read aloud and the audience votes on its favourite, which then becomes part of the story. The process is repeated until a short-short is built up. The photo shows the earnest authors in the throes of composition.

This year's deathless prose is as follows. Underlined words are the ones suggested by the audience.

*The dragon stampede wouldn't have been so bad if the griffins hadn't chosen the same moment to dive-bomb the zombie mermaids. "I hate it when that happens!" complained Bob, dodging the laser beams shooting from the amethyst eyes of a zombie mermaid, and slipping in dragon manure while he ran.*

*Scenting the dragons, the cockney werewolves began to 'owl'. Deep into the manure into which he had fallen, Bob felt the palpitations of the sentient fewmet worms whose dreams had summoned all these strange creatures to this place and understood the horrible truth; they were pissed.*

[The word "fewmet" was challenged by the audience, but Ed Willett successfully defended it. It is an English term for feces of a hunted animal, by which the prey is tracked. Try and work that one into your next conversation! And why would Willett happen to know it?]

*The mermaids were disgusted when Bob shook himself off, splattering them with not only with dragon poop but fewmet worms as well. Now they were pissed off. The dragons cared not about how pissed they were. "Mermaids make fine fish tacos", they growled as they made fewmet worm salsa.*

*Little did the dragons know that to mermaids, fewmet worm salsa was as sensual a dish as one could make. The zombie mermaids leapt at the dragons, the griffins slashed at the cockney werewolves, and in the middle of it all, Bob was simply canoeing. "Man", said Bob, paddling away through the feasting fewmet worms, "This is almost as disgusting as tacos as McDonald's."*

*Bob took to the shore. Using the canoe, mermaid bones, and fewmet worm salsa, he constructed a rudimentary catapult. He filled the catapult with the laser-shooting amethyst eyes that fell from the dragon mouths. Ready to destroy all beasts that stood before him, Bob looked at the frilly piece of fabric in his hands. "Worst wedding ever", he said, and fired the amethysts into the sky.*



*The IFWA contestants hard at work.*

**Canfandom Matters.**

*"Canadian Science Fiction And Fantasy Association Annual General Meeting"  
Clint Budd in the chair and Clifford Samuels assisting*

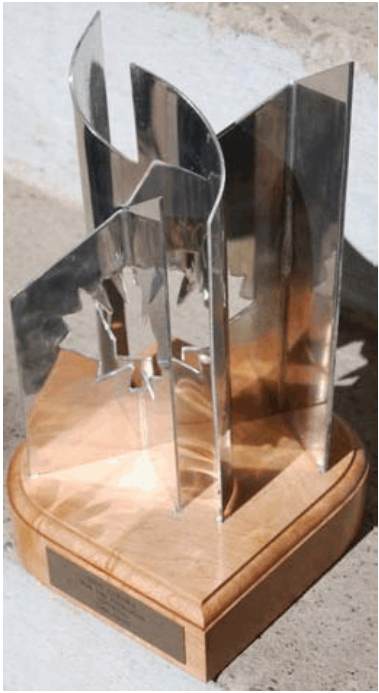
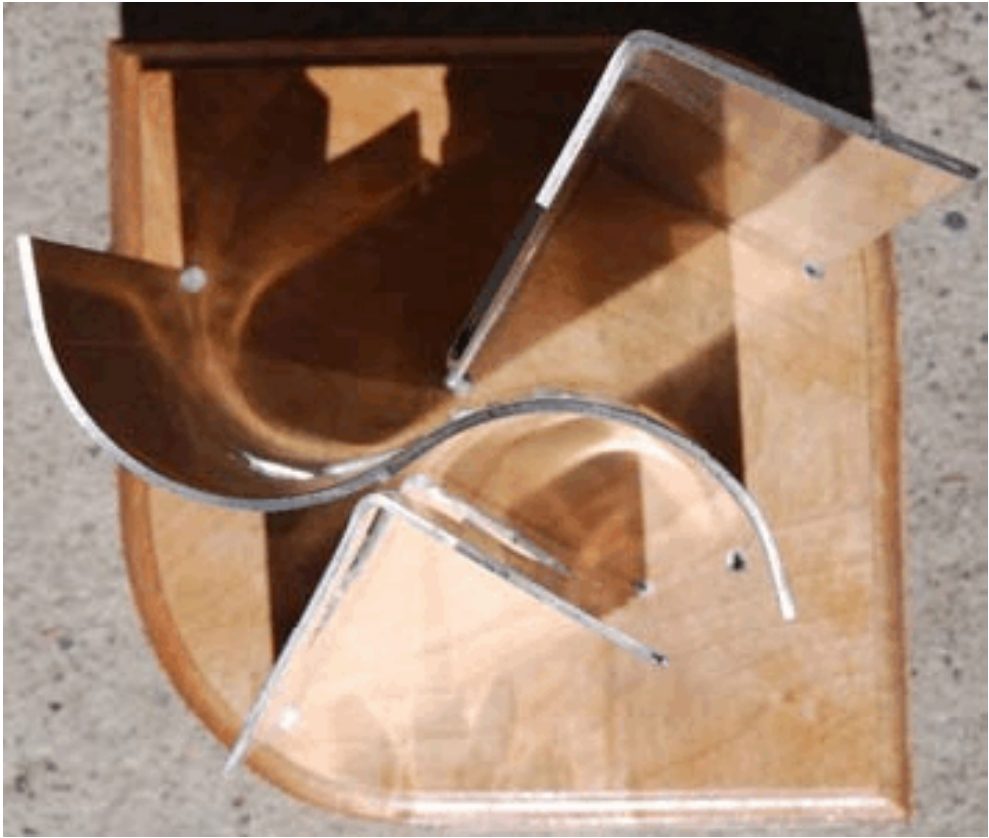
The AGM was held Sunday morning and mostly dealt with fine-tuning Aurora Awards procedures. Budd is the current President of the CSFFA (pronounced "sis-fah"), and Samuels is in charge of the Auroras. The group has about 320 members. The financial report stated that the organization was in good order. The main problem last year was dealing with recent changes to federal non-profit laws, which forced CSFFA to do extra paperwork. Budd ran the gauntlet of the federal bureaucrats to develop a workaround.

The Aurora Awards are the Canadian equivalent of the Hugos, given for anglophone SF fiction and fan activities. One problem that has afflicted the Fan Auroras in the past was that entries for specialized categories such as filking or poetry fluctuated from one year to the next, so the Fan Related category



subsumed them in years with insufficient nominations. A motion was passed at this meeting that professional writers will be allowed to compete in Fan categories for unpaid non-fiction writing in zines or blogs.

The AGM was held on the Sunday morning of WWC. A couple of days previous, I met Samuels at the Registration Desk and as we talked, he mentioned that the shape of the Aurora Award trophy was going to change. For decades it has been a metal sculpture that looks like an aurora borealis from the side with maple leaves punched through them, and from above formed the letters SF. The photos show what the trophy looked like. The example shown is the one I won in 2005.





The problem was that fresh trophies were becoming incredibly expensive to manufacture. They are limited-run items, and have to be fabricated and assembled by hand in a machine shop. The Awards Committee had no choice but to find a cheaper style. They settled on one with curved green glass on a base, with appropriate etching on the glass. With fewer parts and easier assembly, the new style will, I think, look just as nice on the mantelpiece. Samuels posed with the new glass trophy.



In the same room, and immediately following the CSFFA AGM, a panel was then held to explain the new Decade award of the Auroras.

*“Best Of The Decade: A Very Special Aurora Award For 2017”  
panelists Clint Budd and Clifford Samuels*

*Once per decade, a new Aurora Award will be given out. In 2017, you will be voting on a book or sequence of books that came out between 2001 and 2010. What books have stood the test of time and are still memorable? Join the discussion of what you think should be nominated next year.*

The Best Of Decade Award will be a juried award, not fan-voted like the other Auroras. A list is being prepared which will be sent out to all interested parties. Fans can vote for five nominees, and an 8-person jury will select another five. No write-in votes will be allowed; nominees must be from the long list provided. The jury alone will then vote on the short list. Samuels, as head of the Aurora committee, will cast the deciding vote in case of a tie.

The physical trophy will be different than the regular Auroras, probably larger and taller. Series and trilogies will be considered as single entities so as not to split the votes for an author. The Decade Aurora will be awarded at Halcon, next year’s Convention in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

WWC 2016 was also the Convention. The 2016 Aurora Awards were handed out Saturday night. The results are as follow.

Best English Novel:

A DAUGHTER OF NO NATION by A.M. Dellamonica, Tor Books

Best English YA Novel:

AN INHERITANCE OF ASHES by Leah Bobet, Scholastic Canada/Clarion Books

Best English Short Fiction:

“Waters of Versailles” by Kelly Robson, Tor.com

Best English Poem/Song:

“Origami Crane / Light Defying Spaceship” by Naru Dames Sundar, LIMINALITY, Issue 5 Autumn



Best English Graphic Novel:  
THE LADY PARANORMA by Vincent Marccone, ChiZine Publications

Best English Related Work:  
SECOND CONTACTS edited by Michael Rimar & Hayden Trenholm, Bundoran Press

Best Visual Presentation:  
ORPHAN BLACK, Season 3, John Fawcett and Graeme Manson, Temple Street Productions

Best Artist:  
Erik Mohr, covers for ChiZine Publications

Best Fan Publication:  
SPECULATING CANADA edited by Derek Newman- Stille

Best Fan Organizational:  
Randy McCharles, Chair, When Words Collide, Calgary

Best Fan Related Work:  
Derek Newman-Stille, SPECULATING, Canada on Trent Radio 92.7 FM



*On display in the dealer bourse was the CSFFA perpetual trophy for its Hall of Fame.*







## **Fantasy And Horror.**

### *“Horror For People Who Don’t Like Horror”*

*panelists Lou Sytsma, Kai Kiriyaama, Ryan McFadden, Sandra Kasturi, and Linda DeMeulemeester*

*So many horror media items, books, comics, and films rely on jumpscares and gore to get the horror point across. But what about the people who love the genre but prefer to avoid excessive gore? Can you write a scary book without leaning on the tropes of blood and guts?*

There were five panelists but the ebb and flow of conversation was well balanced with all contributing instead of one or two dominating and the rest remaining silent. The advantage of written horror is that there are no worries about SFX budgets; an author can put in any number of scene changes and monsters.

DeMeulemeester said she writes kids horror, which sounds wrong (laughter from the audience). With teenagers, it’s different (more laughter).

Kasturi said the best horror is implied, not written out with the gory details. She felt that horror should gradually build up to a climax. If there is too much gore and splatter in the middle of the book, it dissipates the final shock.

Sytsma felt the best horror is psychological. Daytime horror can be more frightening because it takes place in normal surroundings instead of a spooky manor house.

### *“Hells And Underworlds”*

*panelists Dianne Astle, Swati Chavda, Graham Darling, and Jennifer Kennedy*

*Many types of underworlds feature prominently in religion, folklore, horror, and fantasy. Our panel discusses the varied roles of hells and netherworlds in world mythology and how authors from Dante to Valente have explored and exploited these concepts in fiction.*

Darling started off with a brief summary of the history of hells and underworlds, which are not synonymous. An underworld is the next life, while a hell is punishment. The earliest written reference to an underworld is from the



Gilgamesh saga. Hell wasn't invented until the Pharisees of the early Judeo-Christian era. The modern version of Hell was standardized by Dante.

Hell is made by the sins and guilt of sinners. Chavda, from India, said that reincarnation was a cyclic hell but gave the individual a chance to redeem themselves each time the wheel turned. Since Dante, Hell has been a favourite topic for fantasy writers. The standard format is a Grand Tour, followed by purging of sins and redemption. Both Hell and underworlds are good for long odysseys, especially ten-volume trilogies.

During the Victorian era, a popular form of the underworld was a trip down through caves and empty lava tubes to the centre of Earth. Hollow Earths are a variation on this theme.

**Historical Fiction.**

*“Writing Canadian Historical Fiction”*

*panelists Wayne Arthurson, Joan Donaldson-Yarmey, Paula Johanson, and Faye Reineberg Holt*

*How to research and write a Canadian historical. Does Canada have a history and is it exciting enough to write about?*

This was more about western Canadian historical fiction. Holt, who writes it at the children and young adult level, said she found too many Canucks who didn't think our history was exciting. She writes books based on the characters rather than a recitation of events. She likes reading original letters by pioneers which gives their perception of events, which may not be the same as received history.

Johanson agreed that history is people, not infodumps about a culture. One should resist the common mistake of writers of trying to cram in every bit of research they did for the book. If nothing else, save some for the sequel.

Donaldson-Yarmey said the dialogue of historical characters has to be what they used, not modern terms or cadences. Until the 1970s, Canadians referred to Eskimos and Indians, not Inuit and aboriginals. Some publishers don't allow “Indian” to be used by an historical character, even though “aboriginal” or “indigenous” were never used back then. Other politically correct publishers count the number of female characters in a book and insist they must be equal to the number of men.



*A good time was evidently had by all. Left to right: Arthurson, Johanson, Donaldson-Yarmey, and Holt*

Holt pointed out that it wasn't just the big cities that had immigrant cultures. In the rural town of Brooks, Alberta, a two-hour drive east of Calgary on the Trans-Canada Highway, there are large communities of Somalians and Vietnamese because they were brought out in the 1990s to work in the abattoirs. (Brooks is in the centre of the ranching district out on the flatlands, and thus has many packing plants.) Their stories are largely untold, coming out to the endless flatlands and doing jobs that white folk decline to do.

Arthurson said that when he is writing historical fiction, he looks for stories of ordinary people to fill in the background. The heroes had to have someone stable their horse or cook the meals.

*“Gaslights, Clockworks, And Steam”*

*panelists Jeff Campbell, Charles Prepolec, Jayne Barnard, Heather Dickson, and Marty Chan*

*Authors examine the persistent allure of Victorian historical and fantastical tales, from Sherlock Holmes and H.G. Wells through modern steampunk, and argue the balance between historical purity, paranormal, and techno-fantasy.*



Prepolec said gaslight fiction is not synonymous with steampunk. The two forms of historical fiction take their cue from the age of exploration between the middle 1800s to 1920. During that period, the blank spaces on maps were filled in, and European-American technology began rationalizing the world. Steampunk owes a large part of its popularity to its visuals, the brass, iron, and polished wood.

Chan uses Tesla as the most brilliant example of the Victorian engineers. It was an age of discovery and optimism, different from today.

**The Craft Of Writing.**

*“Writing Trilogies”*

*panelists Gerald Brandt, Chadwick Ginther, Ryan McFadden, Samantha Beiko, Barb Galler-Smith, and Susan MacGregor*

*Writing a trilogy is the writing equivalent of running a marathon. What are the pros and cons of embarking on such a creative endeavour? Five writers discuss their experiences, focusing on the challenges and benefits from creative, timely, and business perspectives.*

Brandt said that as a series progresses, the author becomes constrained by the previous books and has to track what went on before instead of plotting carefree. When he writes about giant cities, he had to think about how they got water supplies and hauled out garbage. Even to decide where to locate a city must be based on real-world logic.

MacGregor said her problem wasn’t the beginning or the end of a trilogy but how to get from one end to the other. It is difficult to keep the middle book interesting since it is only setting the stage for the final volume.

The panelists talked about research. Galler-Smith writes about settings two millennia old, where evidence is scanty about how people actually lived day-to-day. She has to rely on archaeological data and make guesses.

*“Writing A Christmas Story”*

*panelists Dan St. Yves, Neil Enock, Jennifer Snow, and Jessica Jackson*

*Ever want to write a holiday-specific story but weren’t sure how? What are the strengths and potential pitfalls of holiday-specific fiction? What timelines are essential to capitalize on the Christmas market?*

Snow said her fate as a writer was determined by her name. Enock works as an extra in movies. Since they spend most of their time standing around the set waiting to be called, he had time to think and came up with a high-tech Christmas story. His novel is DOC CHRISTMAS.

Jackson said almost all Christmas stories are about the buildup to Christmas and the anticipation of the big day. She started her story on the actual day after the presents had been opened, to give it a different feel. The Christmas setting is often used as atmosphere for romance novels. This, however, does not make it into a Christmas story in its own right.

St. Yves is a newspaper columnist who has to come up with Christmas stories every year. After a long time in the business, he has trouble thinking up new ideas about Christmas. Anyone wanting to write seasonal stories should query the editor about the deadlines and meet them. There is little tolerance in time-sensitive publishing such as newspapers and magazines for writers who miss target dates.

**The Business Of Writing.**

*“Ratings, Trigger Warnings, And Language”*

*panelists Jane Ann McLachlan, Angelica Dawson, D.C. Menard, and Melanie Stanford*

*It’s becoming an oft-talked about addition to books: ratings the way films and video games are rated, with content warning for sensitive topics. Is this a reality authors and publishers should embrace. Should indie authors make a point to add trigger warnings into their books?*

McLachlan said the first line of defense in ratings is the classification of the book. If it is labeled “Young Adult” on the cover, the author is under obligation to keep it clean. “dark”, as in “dark fantasy”, is a warning. Stanford said that



for genres such as mystery or science fiction, the blurb should apprise the reader if the content may be upsetting. None of this is censorship, but a matter of playing fair and letting the reader decide.

Dawson writes erotica novels, so she said disclaimers are second nature in that genre. Menard said the warnings are not so much to protect authors as they are to avoid readers becoming angry with an author because they were expecting something different. Ratings are particularly important for library sales, because the librarians and parents must know if a book is suitable for children

*“The Business Side Of Launching A Book”*  
*presented by Margaret Curelas*

*Pre-orders, yes or no? Does this help or ruin your launch day rating? Should authors do a soft launch a bit early to get their ratings up at Amazon so the launch day sales have more impact? Should authors ask their fans to use keywords to find the book rather than provide a direct URL to boost Amazon’s algorithms? These topics and additional tips and tricks for maximizing visibility for a launch are discussed.*

Self-publishing is easier than ever before but self-marketing is still as much work as it ever was. It is not enough to post a book online; you must make it visible, and certainly not by spamming. Margaret Curelas is a publisher who gave advice on book launching.

Amazon.com is the largest distributor of books in history, and has to be the first priority because that is where the general public goes to, not individual publisher Websites. Canadians should not bother with amazon.ca because that will limit the market. Curelas spoke at length about getting good rankings on Amazon. Keyword searches are a minor component of ranking but help customers discover books they didn’t know were out there. Don’t give your customers a direct link to your book. Instead, give them several keywords that you know will produce your book on the first page of results. Don’t use broad keywords by themselves, such as “steampunk”, which will bring up thousands of results but probably not your book.

Curelas was against using pre-orders because if they don’t sell books, and most don’t, Amazon will average in the no-sales into the launch date sales. When committing to sell on Amazon, don’t miss the deadlines because they will

penalize you one year before you can launch another book. Real Soon Now might be a time-honoured tradition in SF fandom, but bookselling is a business and slacking off is not acceptable. No excuses about work or family problems.

Curelas recommends a regular newsletter but don’t announce anything until it is a done deal. Set up an Amazon Author Central account after your second book is published so that potential readers can find your other works. Other social media are a must for advertising yourself and your books, but don’t spam.

## **Would Like To Have Gone To Them Seminars.**

As any convention goer knows, multi-track seminars create the problem of missing some because they were both on at the same time, often at opposite ends of the hotel. Thus, one has to choose. Here are some of the seminars I had to miss but which sounded interesting to me.

*“Common Manuscript Problems”*  
*panelists Robert Runte, Adrienne Kerr, Ella Beaumont, Hayden Trenholm, and Samantha Beiko*

*Editors compare notes on common problems they see in manuscript submissions.*

I actually intended to see this one, but even though I arrived ten minutes early, the ballroom was not only SRO but overflowing out the door. I wasn’t going to stand on my tiptoes out in the hallway trying to hear the panelists. Undoubtedly the most successful seminar of the convention. There are a lot of wanna-be writers out there.

*“Is Indie eBook Publishing A Good Choice For You?”*  
*Indie, or independent, e-publishing has opened the door for writers to bring out their books on their own terms, and often make more income from their writing than going traditional routes. Sharing research conducted on Amazon, Linda Aksomititis will share the numbers on what sells in ebook format and how often it sells. Participants will learn which genres and sub-genres are most popular with buyers and where there’s already a lot of competition. If you’re trying to decide if giving e-books a try are worth it, here’s your opportunity to ask.*

The good news is that anyone can publish on the Internet. The bad news is that anyone can publish on the Internet.



## *“The Concept Of Privacy In Speculative Fiction”*

*panelists Rissa Johnson, Michael Martineck, Donna McMahon, Rick Overwater*

*Speculative stories and novels have explored and challenged the concept of privacy by positing technology, magic, laws, and societal changes that bring shadowed parts of a person’s life or thoughts into the spotlight, or help them stay hidden. Some portray universal openness as the goal (Spider Robinson’s Telempath) while others dread it (Isaac Asimov’s “The Dead Past”). How have depictions of privacy changed over the decades, and how have these depictions influenced the development of privacy-challenging speculative elements such as telepathy and the omnipresent AI?*

The latest twist of invasion of privacy is the Pokemon Go fad, where participants are invading private property in search of critters. In Torrington, Alberta, northeast of Calgary, a woman just launched a class-action lawsuit against Niantic for putting a Pokestop in her backyard.

### **Same Time Next Year.**

This year’s WWC was the best yet. I really enjoyed it. Kudos to whomever thought of the Kill Randy panel; it was inspired.

In 2017, When Words Collide returns to the Delta South hotel for the weekend of August 11 to 13. Details will appear at [www.whenwordscollide.org](http://www.whenwordscollide.org) in the early part of 2017. I already bought a membership at this year’s convention.

### **And The Name Of The Murderer Is ...**

On Sunday, I asked McCharles who killed him. He said Dwayne Clayden got him with a needle at the banquet Saturday night.

## **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](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com)]

FROM: Lloyd Penney  
Etobicoke, ON

2016-08-11

OPUNTIA 347: The Stampede Parade always looks like good fun. I’d like a cowboy hat myself, but I am not sure where around Toronto I could get it. I am sure there’s plenty of places just out of town. I hope Calgary has good relations with the aboriginal groups. Toronto is on the land of the Mississauga nation.

[Re: deep-fried everything at the Stampede rodeo] I am on a diet, and so far, I’ve lost about 15 pounds. After seeing the food pictures, that’s probably down to 12. I admit I am not sure how to deep-fry coffee, but I’d sacrifice a pound or two to find out. Same goes for the barbecue. There’s an annual barbecue competition on Centennial Park in Etobicoke, but it is so expensive and crowded. We haven’t been there in some years, but if we really want good ribs, we’ve got an old pressure cooker that make them fall off the bone.

[I don’t drink coffee, so out of curiosity I checked Google. The technique is to wrap batter around a spoonful of coffee grounds, fry, and then heavily sugar it to help kill the taste. One commentator said it put her off coffee for weeks.]

My previous letter: I do not understand why the CBC can’t bring back radio drama. I was told that they needed to monetize every second of air time, and radio drama was cancelled because there were few listeners. This was some years ago now. I would think that now, it could be presented to the listenership as something new, and inexpensive to make.

[CBC has a French-language station in Alberta that regularly comes dead last in the surveys with zero listeners. (Not an exaggeration.) Since the radio network is commercial-free and they get a lump sum each year to run it, I don’t see why they couldn’t do SF drama to rope in the younger generation, who certainly aren’t tuning in to the wall-to-wall classical music shows.]

OPUNTIA 348: As much as I like the attractions of the city, the attractions of the country are relaxing. Woody areas, any park, and there is one across the

street from us, are places we make time for to relax, and walk through. One of the shows we vended at this year was a bushy area in a residential area, with a historic house at its centre, and a big field with huge trees around the edges. Historic Benares House was both relaxing and profitable that day, and I hope the show will return there next year.

As we are leaving for vacation soon, one place in London we intend to go to is Baker Street. Not only is there the presence of Sherlock Holmes at 221B Baker Street, but there is a big Beatles shop at 235 Baker, and we will be spending some time there, too.

[Re: Vulcan, Alberta, Star Trek gathering] Andrew Robinson was at VulCon this year? I met Robinson at a convention some years ago, and I had the opportunity to complement him on his portrayal of John F. Kennedy in an episode of THE NEW TWILIGHT ZONE. That's the last thing he expected to hear at a media convention, and we had a great chat about being on set with actor Lane Smith, and his experiences there before being hauled by his handlers for a session before a large audience.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Hanson, S.K., et al (2016) **Measurements of extinct fission products in nuclear bomb debris: Determination of the yield of the Trinity nuclear test 70 y later.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:8104–8108

Authors' abstract: *“This paper describes an approach to measuring extinct fission products that would allow for the characterization of a nuclear test at any time. The isotopic composition of molybdenum in five samples of glassy debris from the 1945 Trinity nuclear test has been measured. Nonnatural molybdenum isotopic compositions were observed, reflecting an input from the decay of the short-lived fission products 95Zr and 97Zr. By measuring both the perturbation of the 95Mo/96Mo and 97Mo/96Mo isotopic ratios and the total amount of molybdenum in the Trinity nuclear debris samples, it is possible to calculate the original concentrations of the 95Zr and 97Zr isotopes formed in the nuclear detonation. Together with a determination of the amount of plutonium in the debris, these measurements of extinct fission products allow for new estimates of the efficiency and yield of the historic Trinity test.”*

*“This work demonstrates that fissions in nuclear bomb debris can be determined quantitatively via high-precision mass spectrometric measurements of stable fission product decay daughters. ... This work demonstrates the feasibility of determining plutonium efficiency and device yield in samples many years after the traditionally measured, short-lived fission fragments have decayed below radiometric detection limits. Such technologies could expand the timescale for nuclear inspection and data collection, aiding treaty monitoring and verification endeavors for the foreseeable future.”*

Yan, B., et al (2016) **Sustained deposition of contaminants from the Deepwater Horizon spill.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:E3332–E3340

Authors' abstract: *“Despite numerous publications reporting the accumulation of petroleum hydrocarbons associated with the Deepwater Horizon spill on the seafloor, the mechanisms of their delivery to the seafloor remain unclear. We demonstrate sedimentation of black carbon derived from the in situ burning of surface oil slicks for about 2 months following the cessation of burning while other contaminants from the spill, including bioactive barium derived from drilling mud, continued to sediment for at least 5 months after the well was capped. We also show that the episodic sinking of spill-associated substances was mainly mediated by marine particles, especially diatoms.”*

*“The 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill resulted in  $1.6\text{--}2.6 \times 10^{10}$  grams of petrocarbon accumulation on the seafloor. Data from a deep sediment trap, deployed 7.4 km southwest of the well between August 2010 and October 2011, disclose that the sinking of spill-associated substances, mediated by marine particles, especially phytoplankton, continued at least 5 months following the capping of the well. In August/September 2010, an exceptionally large diatom bloom sedimentation event coincided with elevated sinking rates of oil-derived hydrocarbons, black carbon, and two key components of drilling mud, barium and olefins. Barium remained in the water column for months and even entered pelagic food webs. Both saturated and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon source indicators corroborate a predominant contribution of crude oil to the sinking hydrocarbons. Co-sedimentation with diatoms accumulated contaminants that were dispersed in the water column and transported them downward, where they were concentrated into the upper centimeters of the seafloor, potentially leading to sustained impact on benthic ecosystems.”*