

# OPUNTIA

## 387

Middle August 2017

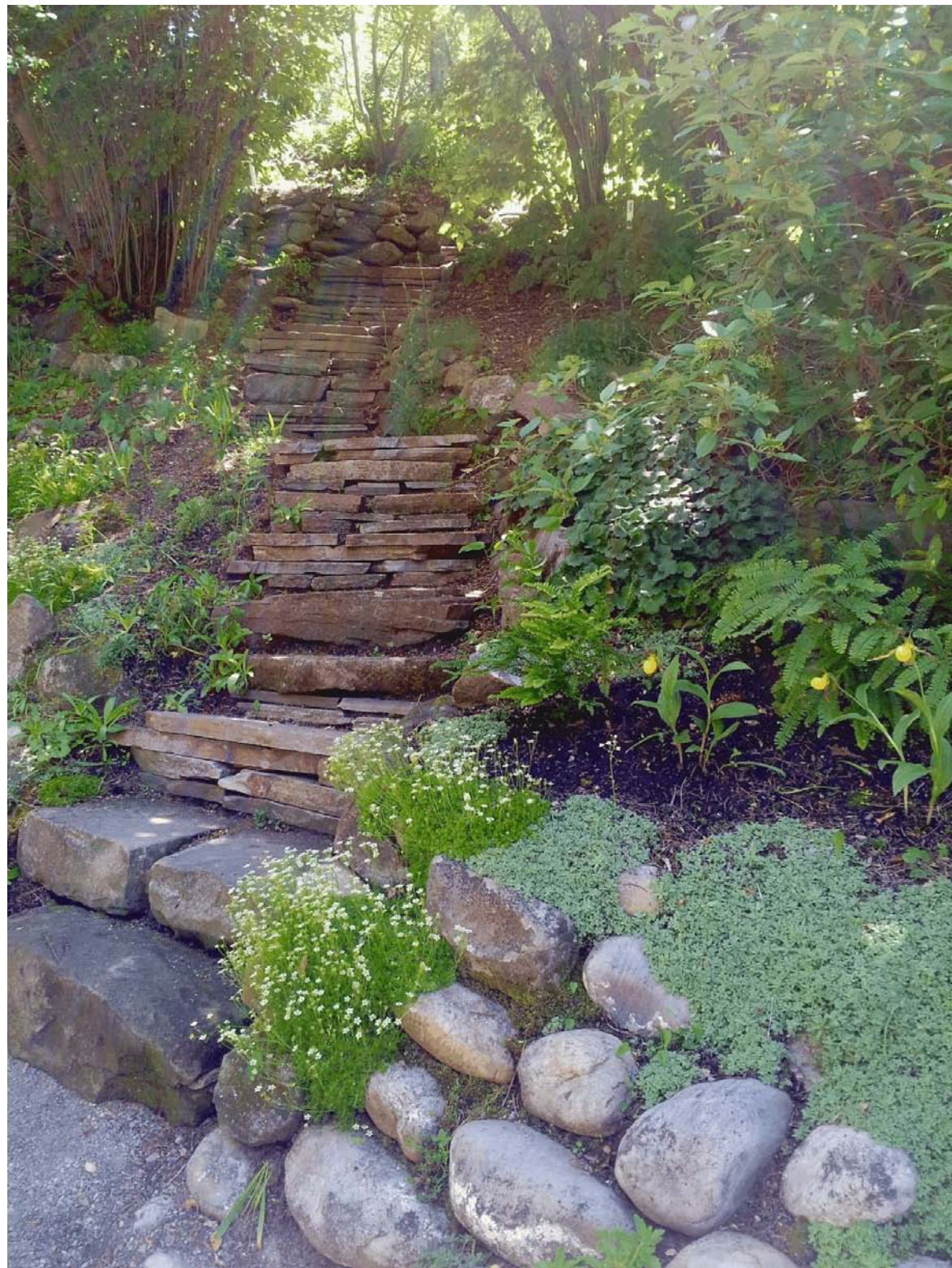
**Opuntia** is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. It is posted on [www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com) and [www.fanac.org](http://www.fanac.org). My e-mail address is: [opuntia57@hotmail.com](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com) When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include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

### YE LONG WALKS OF COOL AND SHADE

photos by Dale Speirs

I worked 31 years for the Calgary Parks Dept., and at one time or another had charge of almost every maintenance district. A favourite park of mine is the Reader Rock Gardens. On Cemetery Hill, just south of the Stampede rodeo grounds, was a steep slope unsuitable for burials. As per the practice of City bureaucrats then and now, any undeveloped land that City Hall didn't want was unloaded onto the Parks Dept., and that is what happened with the north slope of Cemetery Hill in 1913.

William Reader was the newly-appointed Superintendent of Parks, and was given responsibility. As part of his remuneration, a cottage was built at the top of the hill for him and his family. After his death in 1943, the rock gardens were named in his honour. The cottage became a restaurant, as none of the subsequent superintendents wanted to live there. They didn't like citizens knocking on the door at all hours, asking to use the washroom or wanting advice on how to rid their tomatoes of whitefly.





Below, the big tree next to the cottage is a Colorado blue spruce. This was the very first specimen ever grown in Calgary, introduced by Reader in the days when it was a rare and exotic species. Today it is one of the most common spruces grown in Alberta. There must be tens of thousands in Calgary alone. They do very well in our dry climate.



Above right: You can't have a cottage without a gazebo.  
I think it's a federal law.

Below right: Oriental poppies and blue delphiniums.



*Cypripedium calceolus* orchids, native to woodlands in Alberta.



*Lewisia cotyledon*, an alpine plant of the Rocky Mountains.





*Jovibarba arachnoides*. The species name refers to the webbing of the plant.





## WHEN WORDS COLLIDE 2017

by Dale Speirs

[Reports of previous WWC conventions appeared in OPUNTIA's #71, 253, 266, 282, 318, and 350.]

Calgary's annual readercon When Words Collide went this year on the weekend of August 11 to 13 at the Delta Calgary South Hotel. Membership was capped at 750 to keep it a convention and not a mob like the comic cons, and sold out in June. The hotel straddles a major street with a third-story pedestrian overpass, function rooms on one side in the basement and on the other side on the ground floor. As a result, it was easier to walk outside and cross at street level, instead of navigating a 3-D puzzle.

As I did with my previous convention reports, the seminars and events I attended are arranged by theme rather than in chronological order. The blurb in the programme book is italicized before my report of each item. Experienced con-goers know that panelists often gang aft agley from the announced topic.

### New World Aborning.

#### "World Building: The Lazy Bastard Way"

Fonda Lee

*World building can feel like an overwhelming process. How do you create and convey a fictional world that is richly imagined and utterly convincing, without losing you or your reader in minutiae or spending two years working on maps and genealogy charts? Science fiction and fantasy author Fonda Lee (ZEROBOXER, EXO) will tell you how to go about world building in a way that's intuitive and efficient (and not actually lazy).*

World building is required for all types of fiction, but there is no single correct way. Readers relate best to similar situations with everyday details they recognize even if the surroundings are different. Specific details can describe the background without infodumps, such as 'stealthcopter' versus 'helicopter'. The entire world doesn't need to be developed at once, just the key areas the characters move through.

Not everything has to be explained as long as the world is consistent. In westerns, cowboys don't stop to explain how a revolver works. *"As you know, Tex, a revolver has a cylinder containing six bullets. Each time a revolver is fired, the cylinder rotates."* *"That's right, Cactus Pete. The bullets are loaded*

*into the cylinder by hand. They contain gunpowder at the base of the shell, which propels the bullet forward at high speed."*

Each character has a different view of the world, just as each of us do, which means the world has to be described in different terms for the same setting. The world building process doesn't need to be completed before writing the story. Additional details can be added and mistakes corrected as you go along. Don't put in too many details, as this may constrict future writing.



Check the language used by the characters and make certain they are not speaking words or phrases that would never be used in their world. Medieval characters often have modern expressions put in their mouths. Nothing dates faster than slang.

“Building An Aquatic World”

T.K. Boomer

*World building is hard enough if your characters walk around on solid ground, but what if they swim?*

Boomer has published a novel set in the oceans and is currently working on further such stories. He started off by noting that if you write near-future SF, then it is an endless race to keep up with science fact, so his novel was set in a far future when aquatic aliens arrived. Almost all aliens in SF are terrestrial, and Boomer wanted to be different. Since Earth is three-quarters water, he devised aliens who had no interest in humans or anything else on land.

His experience was that the rules of an aquatic world should be established in advance, rather than making them up as he went along. This results in greater consistency. It avoids the problem of having to go back and rewrite sections to conform to later changes or additions.

Technology will be a major difference, not only in degree but in kind. Many manufacturing processes won’t work underwater. Some underwater technology will have to be taken for granted as part of a willing suspension of disbelief, in the same way that space opera allows for faster-than-light travel.

Boomer was talking about genuinely aquatic civilizations, not just humans living in pressurized bubbles. An audience member who had been a submariner in the Royal Canadian Navy said that one of the biggest problems he and other recruits had was learning to think in three dimensions. Humans are used to moving in two dimensions.

Another difficulty is in expressing emotions underwater, which is why you can’t read a fish’s face. Flaring gills can be used to express fear or anger, sounds can be made from inflatable bladders, and the skin can be used for colour displays. This requires more explanation to the readers while at the same time trying to avoid infodumps.

**The Only Good Publisher ...**

“Beyond Traditional And Self-Publishing”

E. D. Morin, Susan Calder, Mark Leslie, Sheri-D Wilson

*You’ve heard of self-publishing and traditional publishing, both large and small press, and building a career that hybridizes all of the above. What about author*

*collectives and other collaborative models that don't fit these molds? What about new contracts that provide authors with more entrepreneurial options? Panelists discuss the cutting edge of publishing.*



A new style of publishing discussed here was collaborative publishing, whereby a group of authors produce and market anthology books collectively. E.D. Morin said her collaborative allows authors with different skills to get a book out. The main problem with publishing a book is marketing it. A group of authors publicizing the same book can do more than a single person. The Internet made author collectives possible because they can connect easier and don’t have to be from the same geographical area.

Susan Calder said her contract with a publisher is author-centric, not for specific books but whatever she wants. She has to do a lot of the work, but the publisher mostly deals with distribution, which they can do better because they have contacts with bookstores and libraries.

Mark Leslie said he preferred self-publishing for his books because he writes for narrow demographics that big city publishers can’t handle. He uses social media to post proposed book covers and get reader opinions on which is best for the book. This involvement increases the likelihood of readers buying the book. Leslie mentioned an author collective that sorts incoming stories into themes, which sell better than random-story anthologies.

Sheri Wilson said that the majority of writers today want to be read, not necessarily to make money, so they use non-traditional means on the Internet to spread their work.

“The Publishers Panel: Short Fiction”

Mark Leslie, Axel Howerton, Susan Pieters, Diane Walton

*Publishers and editors discuss industry trends, their working relationship with authors, the impact of ePublishing on their business, and other questions raised from the audience.*

Susan Pieters said most authors submitting stories to publishers genuinely don’t realize how bad their stories are. Authors should never deprecate themselves online or in person because editors can smell fear (laughter from the audience). Watch what you write online about others. Editors search their own names just like everyone else.

Axel Howerton said the advantage of short story writing is faster cycling time. One can circulate ten stories to publishers in the time it takes to write a novel. The long term royalties are better for short stories if they are reprinted, because they keep flowing in, whereas most novels never earn out their advance.

Diane Walton, of ON SPEC magazine, said a sale to a reputable magazine helps build the beginning writer’s reputation, and gets a foot in the door of other publishers. She gets about 500 manuscripts per month. She doesn’t see any trends in science fiction, but writers rehash the standard tropes over and over again, thinking they are the first to have thought of them.

Mark Leslie says it is important to know an editor’s likes and dislikes, but in many cases one doesn’t have to guess. All the panelists said they each get hundreds of zombie stories per month. Howerton rejects them on sight without even reading them. Leslie said don’t mention a story was previously self-published. He himself self-publishes but won’t take them from others.

“The Year Of Publishing Women”

Halli Lilburn

*Some startling statistics reveal that female authors are at a great disadvantage in North America. The entertainment industry in general has neglected to recognize the talent and credibility of women. This is reflected in literature when awards are won by men at a ratio of 3 or 4 to 1.*

*What can we do as authors, editors, publishers and librarians to help support female writers? I propose the Year of Publishing Women 2018. The challenge first started in England and has spread across the globe. This initiative will give*

*women a chance to be heard and recognized for their contribution to the literary community.*

All the other panels I attended had full houses, and about one-third to half of those audiences were women. This one had a dozen women and one man. I felt like Daniel in a den of lionesses. But where was the rest of the pride?

The international challenge in 2018 to publishers is that 50% to 100% of their books that year should be written by female authors. YOPW proposes that only books by women be reviewed, blogged, awarded prizes, and given window display space. Over to you, Hugo Award administrators. That ought to get the puppies whining. This reminds me of the Art Strike of 1990 to 1993 (see OPUNTIA’s #7 and 8).

Halli Lilburn researched a number of interesting statistics. Lists of most influential books were examined and only 22% were by women. 56.8% of published authors are female. 75% of librarians are female but 35% of the books in libraries are by females.

Catherine Nichols sent 50 identical copies of her manuscript novel to agents under her own name and got back two replies. She sent 50 copies to other agents under a male name and got back 17 offers.

“Live Action Slush: Science Fiction Edition”

Timothy Gwyn (reader), Hayden Trenholm, Rissa Johnson, Rita Bozi, Rick Overwater

*Bring the 1st page of your manuscript to be anonymously read aloud and receive comments from our editors.*

“Live Action Slush: High Fantasy Edition”

J. Y. T. Kennedy (reader), David B. Coe, Susan Forest, Ella Beaumont, Michelle Heumann

*Bring the 1st page of your manuscript to be anonymously read aloud and receive comments from our editors.*

There were a number of Live Action Slush events, one for each genre. I attended only the above two but there were others for mysteries, historical fiction, romances, and so forth. Each event had four editors or publishers and someone to read aloud the submitted first pages. Writers submitted their first



page to the reader just before the panel started, and had the choice of being anonymous.

When an editor heard something disagreeable, he or she raised a hand, and if three hands went up then the reading stopped. Sort of like a gong show but polite since we are Canadians. The editors then commented on the page, sometimes constructive criticism if the page failed, and compliments if the entire page was read without a hand being raised, which was about half the time.

The most common suggestions from the editors were to tighten up the story and start it faster, and don't put infodumps on the first page. Elle Beaumont commented on one manuscript that she could let one or two things go because they could be easily edited later, but a continuous string of query points was too much. One phrase a writer used, "but it didn't bother her" begged the question of why it was mentioned in the first instance if it didn't matter.

David Coe said using 'obviously' meant that you shouldn't have to explain if it was indeed obvious. Don't tell the reader what happened and then show what happened.



Above: Hayden Trenholm objects at the SF slush panel. His seems to be a minority vote. Panelist Rissa Johnson's newborn son (lower right) had no opinion.

Science Fiction.

“The Politics Of Canadian SF”

Prof. Allan Weiss

*Since its beginnings, Canadian SF has dealt with political themes: relations with the United States and Great Britain, relations within the country between English and French, forms of government, and so on. How have these questions been dealt with in Canadian SF during the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries? What common themes can be found? In this presentation, Allan Weiss looks at both universal and very Canadian political questions in the history of Canadian fantastic literature.*



Allan Weiss talked about early Canadian science fiction dating from 1839. The stories satirized politicians, the rebellions of 1837 and 1847, government



employees, British overloads, and American invasions. It was safer to set the stories on the Moon than run the risk of retaliation by the Family Compact or the Chateau Clique, who were not afraid to use violence to maintain political power. Canada has never had an all-out civil war like the Americans or Spanish, but there have been several regional rebellions that took the army one or two years of fighting each time to suppress (1837, 1847, 1869, 1885).

There were lots of future histories of Canada being caught between the European powers and the USA. Canadian SF declined in the 1930s as Canuck authors wrote for better-paying American pulps instead of the home market. The 1960s and 1970s were dominated by separatist novels (which I have reviewed; see OPUNTIA #71.1A).

**The Moving Finger.**

**“Aging Series Characters”**

S.G. Wong, Susan Calder, Jennifer Estep, Hayden Trenholm

*Do you or don't you? How fast over the course of a series? For example, Kinsey Milhone has aged only six years since she was introduced in the '80s while Janice MacDonald's Randy Craig has aged pretty much year for year since the first book was published in the mid-90s. Does aging the sleuth makes him/her more believable? And what is the optimum age of your protagonist? At one time every single female sleuth, PI or amateur, seemed to be a thirty-something. Has this changed?*



Jennifer Estep said one complication is that the interval between books may not be the same as the time gap in the story. If it takes three years before a sequel is published, the reader may notice the settings and characters haven't changed.

Susan Calder said her publisher wanted her books in contemporary time. She couldn't leave her characters in 2005 because so much has changed in people's behaviour, such as selfies and smartphone apps. Readers like to see a progression as characters mature, and undergo life changes such as marriage and children.

Hayden Trenholm mentioned series where the characters never change, while the world around them does. A good example is the Nero Wolfe series, published by Rex Stout from 1938 until his death in 1975. The characters never aged, but Archie Goodwin went from using a typewriter to a word processor.

S.G. Wong said she didn't like writing older characters or aging them significantly because, as a thirty-something, she doesn't really understand them.

**“Game Theory: Spice Up Your Plot”**

Ron S. Friedman

*Ron S. Friedman, a fiction writer with a degree in Economics, explores game theory scenarios to create creative and genuine conflicts in your story.*

Game theory has three components: players, strategy, and a payoff. One can see how this applies to plotting a story. Negotiation is part of strategy. Game theory uses grids with each player's possible responses on two axis. Where the different responses cross on the grid is where the probability of the best payoff is entered.

If you have trouble writing a story, map out the characters, their responses to a given situation, and the payoff for each situation that will result from each strategy (murdered by pirates or finding your weight in gold). If you want the main protagonist to succeed, then the plot will follow the best strategy. If writing a gloom-and-doom story where everyone dies in the end, then pick the worst strategy.

In real life, the equilibrium is somewhere in between. We often muddle through and take a payoff that is not 100% good but is the best to be expected. Sometimes players end up in a situation where to move from the equilibrium will make matters worse.

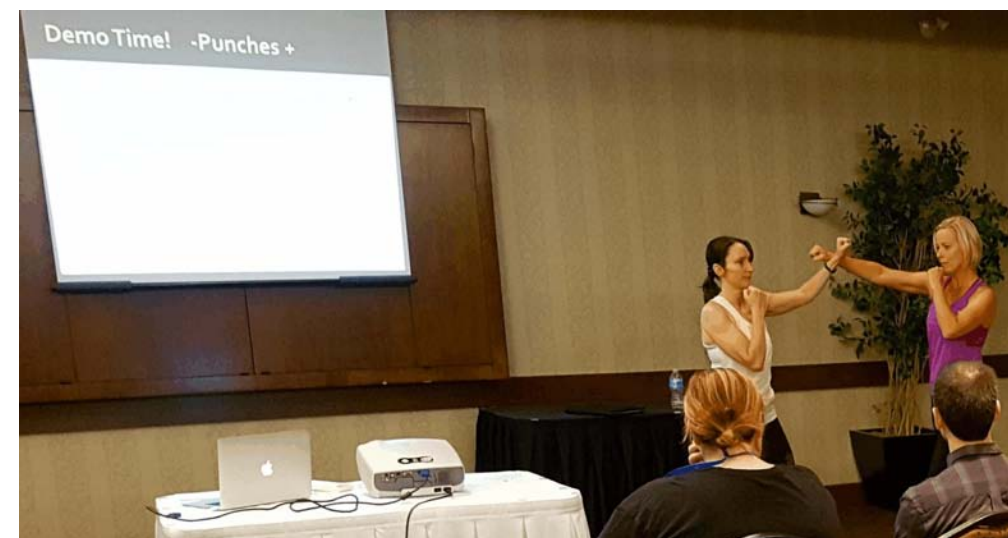


## “Write A Fight Scene Demo”

Sandra Wickham

*Do you want to write great fight scenes but don't know what all the moves are called or what they actually look like? What's a back kick, an arm bar or a haymaker? (and why is it awful in a fight?) Want to see what a flying back punch or a round house kick looks like? Come hang out with author and martial artist Sandra Wickham for a demonstration of fighting terms and techniques, including blocking out some fight moves and even a fight scene you can write in the moment!*

This was a series of fights staged in slow motion so that writers could understand the different types and how to describe them. Fighting methods have three parts: blocking, deflecting, and striking (kicks or punches). All three are equally important in surviving hand-to-hand combat.



Sandra Wickham, a martial arts instructor, said writers need to be realistic about how a fight can proceed. Hollywood movies are the worst offenders, as they show impossible moves that can only be done with wires and hidden springboards. A favourite of movies is the haymaker swing, which in real life is a telegraphed punch that can easily be deflected.

## Science Matters.

### “Astronomy And Rocket Science, Not Just For SF Writers”

Ron S. Friedman

*Improve science literacy and avoid misconceptions in your fiction. Do you write paranormal romance and wonder why we have full moons, eclipses, and seasons? Thrilled about eco thrillers and curious what astronomers say about climate change? Like conspiracy theories and ponder why don't we see stars in the Apollo pictures? What happened when you fire a bullet in orbit? What is the effect of radiation on the human body? Bring your questions and join the discussion.*

Friedman said that general readers or viewers don't know much science and don't care, so if the writer gets it wrong then it doesn't matter. Things the public does know from the mundane world do get noticed if given in error. Nonetheless, a good writer should take responsibility to get the science correct.

A common problem in science fiction is planetary climates, often mis-explained or made uniform over the entire planet. Climate change is the norm throughout Earth's history and is nothing new. There is no single cause for climate change. Our planet has had far more violent climate changes and life survived.

Colour vision on planets with red or blue stars is different, and vegetation will not be green. Dyson spheres and ringworlds were discussed. They are impossible, in the same category as faster-than-light speeds or time travel into the past.

### “Colonizing Space”

Roxanne Barbour, Ron S. Friedman, Louis Zimmerman

*We may soon go to Mars and beyond. Why should humanity care about becoming a space-faring civilization, and how can we do it? A review of Elon Musk, Jeff Brazos and NASA plans.*

Louis Zimmerman said colonizing space can only be done gradually, assuming we have a place to go. We do not have the technology to deal with an extinction level event. For humanity to survive in the long run, we must go out into space.

Our economic system, for better or worse, requires steady growth. Historically it was gained by expanding into new areas, either geographically or



technologically, but no frontiers are left on Earth for settlement. Growth must happen in space.

Roxanne Barbour mentioned that NASA has many grandiose proposals but can't get the funding. An audience member suggested that a priority is to get basic fabrication and machine shop industries up into space, so that spacecraft manufacturing can be done there. Currently the major cost of space travel is getting out of Earth's gravity well.



Zimmerman said the space industry should be well established on the Moon before any attempt at colonizing Mars is done. Mistakes will be made in the early days, so it is best to make them close to Earth.

“Recent Developments In Science”

Prof. Jeroen Stil (University of Calgary)

*Prof. Jeroen Stil discusses recent scientific with the occasional aside to science fiction sometimes getting ahead of science fact, but later being confirmed by it.*

Dr Stil began with SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) and the Drake Equation, which is:

$$N = R * fp * ne * fl * fi * fc * L$$

where:

N = the number of civilizations in our galaxy with which radio-communication might be possible

R\* = the average rate of star formation in our galaxy

fp = the fraction of those stars that have planets

ne = the average number of planets that can potentially support life per star that has planets

fl = the fraction of planets that could support life that actually develop life at some point

fi = the fraction of planets with life that actually go on to develop intelligent life (civilizations)

fc = the fraction of civilizations that develop a technology that releases detectable signs of their existence into space

L = the length of time for which such civilizations release detectable signals into space

Stil said that the value of fp has changed dramatically in the last fifteen years as numerous exoplanets have been discovered, now up to 3,000. This is because telescope technology, particularly space telescopes, has made major strides. Few of the exoplanets are rocky; most are gas giants. However, this is an artifact of technology. As telescopes get better and better, more smaller planets will be found which are just outside the range of detection today. Water is now known to be abundant in space.

Astronomers are doing many broadband scans with radio telescopes, looking for blips and strange patterns. The object KIC 846285 was first thought to be possibly a failing Dyson sphere but is now considered to be either a disrupted planet or a cloud of comets. Fast radio bursts confused SETI searches, but are natural phenomena of unknown origin. They last 5 milliseconds but don't repeat.

“Planets! Planets Everywhere!”

Luis Welbanks (University of Calgary)

*Join PhD student Luis Welbanks as he shares the current scene of exoplanet research. He will share the importance of exoplanet research and the wild diversity of atmospheres, environments and worlds that we are discovering. From worlds like ours to wild planets half covered in lava, half covered in ice.*

Luis Welbanks was a very funny speaker. He started off by saying he is still in therapy over Pluto being demoted from a planet. There are 34 types of planets now known. When planets form from a spinning disk of dust and gases, they migrate back and forth through the stellar system before settling down. Of the thousands of exoplanets found so far, thirty are in the habitable zone.



The biggest excitement is over the TRAPPIST-1 system, about 39 light years away, which has seven planets roughly the size of Earth, most of them within the habitable zone and one just outside the zone. The problem is that they orbit a brown dwarf that keeps burping out giant flares of ionized energy that sterilizes them at occasional intervals.

**Mysteries.**

“The Mystery Of Mysteries”

Susan Calder, Constantine Kaoukakis, Merrilee Robson, Dwayne Clayden  
*What draws mystery readers to the genre? What is the major difference between mysteries and other genre stories? Does this affect readers pleasure in mystery stories?*

Susan Calder said mysteries are a chance to live vicariously through sudden shocks of a kind that most of us will never experience. For Dwayne Clayden, a former police constable, such shocks were commonplace in his job. His interest was in the puzzle aspect, solving the crime. Constantine Kaoukakis said humans evolved with a sense of curiosity. That shows itself in mysteries, where we want to know how a story comes out.

When a question was asked about extreme violence or foul language in a novel, the panelists said they had gotten the occasional remark. However, if the book is properly blurbed or advertised, the readers will know what to expect and will avoid what might bother them.

The discussion as to what the typical mystery reader is like was quickly resolved by agreement among the audience that there is no such thing as a typical mystery reader. An audience member pointed out that other novels such as science fiction and fantasy are often mysteries to be solved.

“Paranormal Mysteries”

Erin Lindsey, Jayne Barnard, S.G. Wong, E.C. Bell  
*What types are there? How does magic, ghost appearance or ESP work in a mystery? How much is too much, i.e. too convenient. What paranormal mysteries have hit the mark? (Each panel member to discuss 2 paranormal mysteries and how they worked. At least one should not be their own work.)*

These range from cozy to hard-boiled. Erin Lindsey said her novels range from having the paranormal front and centre, playing a major part in the plot, to books where it is mostly in the background. It does not have to be emphasized but must make up a logical part of the story, otherwise why bother putting it in.

Jayne Barnard said that like other genres, trying to define paranormal mysteries creates problems. Ghost stories are in a category of their own, while Harry Potter is excused because people point to it and say it is not pure laine.

“Sherlock Lives”

Axel Howerton, Charles Prepolec, Jeff Campbell, Constantine Kaoukakis  
*How the Victorian era’s great detective became today’s biggest cultural phenomena. An examination of Public Domain characters, how to write them, and where to get your stories published.*



Kaoukakis remarked that Sherlock Holmes is a hero that many could strive to be. He is an outsider who doesn’t fit in, which matches a large number of readers then and now. Kaoukakis is a high-school teacher who found that the BBC SHERLOCK series started his students reading the original books. They went from the media variations to the original canon.

Prepolec said pastiches and other uses of Holmes began almost immediately, even while Doyle was still writing them. Holmes was the first literary character to have his own fandom. There were author and actor fandoms prior, but none for a fictional character.



## Writers In Action.

### “Equus”

Rhonda Parrish, Megan Fennell, Leslie VanZwol, Cat McDonald, Margaret Curelas, Chadwick Ginther, Pat Flewwelling, Sandra Wickham, Susan MacGregor

*Whether winged or at home in the water, mechanical or mythological, the equines that gallop through the pages of the Equus anthology span the fantasy spectrum. From steampunk-inspired stories and tales that brush up against horror to straight-up fantasy, one theme connects them all: freedom. Join several contributors (and a couple special guests) as they read short excerpt from their stories.*



Being an old cowhand, I moseyed on over to see this multi-author group reading extracts from their new anthology EQUUS. Normally I avoid author readings because few do the job properly. They read in a monotone, occasionally raising or lowering their voice for emphasis.

This bunch had some good readers who knew how to put expression in their voices. The group dynamic made for a funnier read, as authors picked humorous extracts which warmed up the audience when read one after the other.

### “Writers At The Improv”

Imaginative Fiction Writers of Alberta, 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.*



This is an enjoyable event I seldom miss. It has been running for decades at Calgary conventions, first the Con-Version series, and now WWC. The audience suggests a word, and panelists have one minute to create a sentence. The sentences are read out, the audiences votes, and the cycle repeated to build up a story.

Edward Willett (far right in above photo) won the first round with ‘velociraptor’ as the suggested word. Subsequent suggested words were Puce, effervescence, martini, and magenta.

*The velociraptor raptly watched the velocipede rapidly wobbling down the vellum-covered roadway, licking its lips in anticipation of the veloci-repast it would enjoy when the velocipede crashed.*

*"Puce!" the velociraptor swore (for velociraptors swear using colourful words like that) when the velocipede's velocity suddenly increased; his victim had seen him!*

*Just then, the mysterious liquid in the lake at the end of the vellum-covered roadway began to effervesce.*

*"Martin! Eeee!" screamed the boy on the velocipede, and from the bubbling lake rose a giant bearded head.*



*The velocipede hit the lake, the boy was catapulted into the beard of Martin's giant head, and the velociraptor's dream of turning the scene into a slaughterhouse died with a muttered "Magenta!"*

All rights reserved by IFWA, I'm sure. As you can guess, the event is one of great humour, and the funniest of each batch of sentences is the one that wins.

**Dealer Bourse.**

Books only, as far as the human eye could see, or at least to the far end of the ballroom. Only one bookstore dealer. About half were small-press publishers and the remainder were genre literary societies peddling their own books. I left about \$100 in the room, and you will read the reviews over the next year or so.



On the Sunday of the convention, I stopped by the registration table and bought my 2018 membership for \$45. WWC is always great fun, and I look forward to next year. For more information, visit [www.whenwordscollide.org](http://www.whenwordscollide.org) They have an email notification service you can subscribe to for updates.

**The Parking Lot.**

The convention was a ten-minute drive from my house by car, or an hour if I took the bus. To hell with global warming; I drove. As I walked through the hotel parking lot, I noticed some SFish licence plates on a few cars and took photos. How did we ever get along without smartphones?





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: Milt Stevens  
Simi Valley, California

2017-08-10

In OPUNTIA’s #381 to 384, the pictures of Canada Day and the Calgary Stampede are colorful and make the events look like fun for the people who enjoy that sort of thing. Unfortunately, I’m not one of those people. I hate crowds. It’s not that I’m afraid of terrorists. I figure I’m a quite small target on a fairly large planet. It may be something about the psychic vibrations generated by large numbers of people in a limited amount of space. I just don’t like the feel of it. I have never attended a rock concert or a sporting event. I have to deal with crowds at airports, but I’m having my doubts about doing that.

The Calgary Stampede shows that lots of people like to dress up as cowboys. A style of dress can represent different things in different places. In Los Angeles, there are gay cowboy bars and cowboy, cowboy bars. It’s important to keep those two things sorted out. In the cowboy, cowboy bars, guys (and sometimes gals) dress up as cowboys and go to the bar to get into fights. These bars are different from other bars in that the people who go there limit themselves to busting heads and don’t use guns or knives.

[In Calgary, no one has to dress up like a cowboy to get into a tavern brawl. Street clothes are perfectly acceptable.]

In Simi Valley, we have cowboys but they are of a different sort. There really are ranches to the west of the city. They are horse ranches rather than cattle ranches, but the basic idea seems the same. Since ‘cowboy’ is an extremely elastic term, I presume they are cowboys. I certainly wouldn’t be the one to try referring to them as horseboys.

OPUNTIA 381: Some of your series of articles run on for such a long time that I may forget what I have said about previous installments. That may be the case with your series on fictional Venus. However, I don’t think I’ve mentioned Garrett Smith’s “Between Worlds” which was originally published in 1919 and was reprinted in the July 1949 issue of FANTASTIC NOVELS.

In this novel, Venus is tidally locked with an opaque atmosphere. The Venusians are humanlike, but it is later revealed they are taller and thinner than earthly humans. The Venusians believe they are living on top of a very large mountain that extends up into a region of light and warmth. They are experiencing overpopulation and need a solution. One bright young fellow proposes going down into the darkness to search for another inhabitable mountaintop. In the course of circumnavigating the planet, they come across all sorts of things. After that, they crank up the anti-gravity on their ship and travel to earth during WWI. I think this is a well thought out variation on the traditional Venus.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Swarts, K., et al (2017) **Genomic estimation of complex traits reveals ancient maize adaptation to temperate North America.** SCIENCE 357:512-515

Authors’ abstract: *Maize* [what Canadians and Americans call corn] *as a staple food crop in temperate North America required adaptation to a shorter growing season. On its first introduction in the southwestern United States ~4000 years ago, maize was extensively grown in the lowlands. Cultivation in the temperate uplands did not occur for another 2000 years. Swarts et al. used ancient DNA data from 1900-year-old maize cobs found in a temperate cave in the southwestern United States and mapped the ancient flowering phenotype. The ancient maize samples were marginally adapted to temperate regions as a result of selection on standing variation.*

*By 4000 years ago, people had introduced maize to the southwestern United States; full agriculture was established quickly in the lowland deserts but delayed in the temperate highlands for 2000 years. We test if the earliest upland maize was adapted for early flowering, a characteristic of modern temperate maize. We sequenced fifteen 1900-year-old maize cobs from Turkey Pen Shelter in the temperate Southwest. Indirectly validated genomic models predicted that Turkey Pen maize was marginally adapted with respect to flowering, as well as short, tillering, and segregating for yellow kernel color.*



*Temperate adaptation drove modern population differentiation and was selected in situ from ancient standing variation. Validated prediction of polygenic traits improves our understanding of ancient phenotypes and the dynamics of environmental adaptation.*

Knop, E., et al (2017) **Artificial light at night as a new threat to pollination.** NATURE 548:206-209

Authors’ abstract: *Pollinators are declining worldwide, and this has raised concerns for a parallel decline in the essential pollination service they provide to both crops and wild plants. Anthropogenic drivers linked to this decline include habitat changes, intensive agriculture, pesticides, invasive alien species, spread of pathogens and climate change. Recently, the rapid global increase in artificial light at night has been proposed to be a new threat to terrestrial ecosystems; the consequences of this increase for ecosystem function are mostly unknown.*

*Here we show that artificial light at night disrupts nocturnal pollination networks and has negative consequences for plant reproductive success. In artificially illuminated plant-pollinator communities, nocturnal visits to plants were reduced by 62% compared to dark areas. Notably, this resulted in an overall 13% reduction in fruit set of a focal plant even though the plant also received numerous visits by diurnal pollinators.*

*Furthermore, by merging diurnal and nocturnal pollination sub-networks, we show that the structure of these combined networks tends to facilitate the spread of the negative consequences of disrupted nocturnal pollination to daytime pollinator communities.*

*Our findings demonstrate that artificial light at night is a threat to pollination and that the negative effects of artificial light at night on nocturnal pollination are predicted to propagate to the diurnal community, thereby aggravating the decline of the diurnal community.*

*We provide perspectives on the functioning of plant-pollinator communities, showing that nocturnal pollinators are not redundant to diurnal communities and increasing our understanding of the human-induced decline in pollinators and their ecosystem service.*

Whillans, A.V., et al (2017) **Buying time promotes happiness.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 114:8523-8527

Authors’ abstract: *Around the world, increases in wealth have produced an unintended consequence: a rising sense of time scarcity. We provide evidence that using money to buy time can provide a buffer against this time famine, thereby promoting happiness. Using large, diverse samples from the United States, Canada, Denmark, and The Netherlands (n = 6,271), we show that individuals who spend money on time-saving services report greater life satisfaction.*

*A field experiment provides causal evidence that working adults report greater happiness after spending money on a time-saving purchase than on a material purchase. Together, these results suggest that using money to buy time can protect people from the detrimental effects of time pressure on life satisfaction.*

CANADA 150



I bought this can of pop at the hotel snack bar at When Words Collide, and almost missed the label. These are two views of the same can.