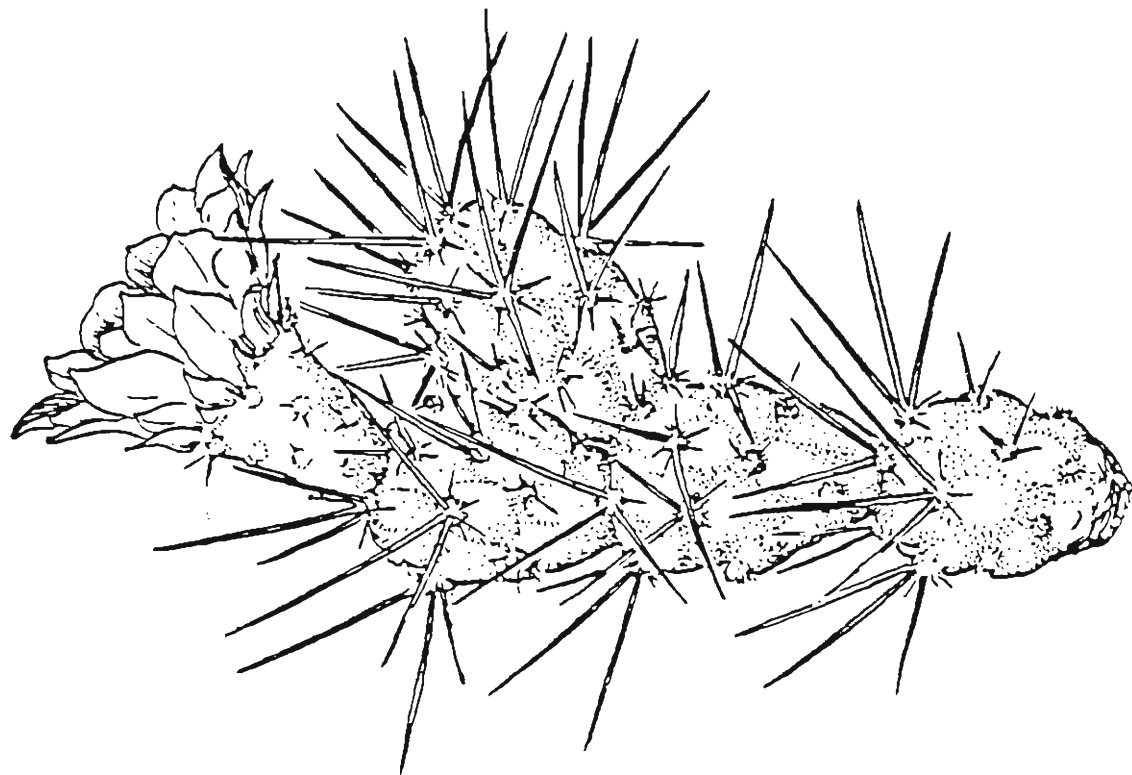


OPUNTIA #3



OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, T2P 2E7. It can be had for \$1 cash per issue, a letter of comment, or zine trade. All back issues (both of them) are still available for \$1 each.

ART CREDIT: Front cover depicts Opuntia fragilis in flower, drawn by Jeanne Russell Janish, from "Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest", 1961. Page 10 shows O. vulgaris, by M. de L'Obel, from "Icones Stirpium", 1591. Not bad for a 400-year-old artist, eh? (He is also the fellow after whom lobellias are named.)

EDITORIAL: For an irregular, OPUNTIA seems to be coming out like clockwork every second month, but I don't want to become overconfident. Beginning with the next issue, I'll be trying to reduce the size of those margins, an artefact of photocopy reduction, by increasing the widths of the columns and thereby fitting in more wordage. Someone was asking about the weird spacing that is sometimes apparent. This is due to the belief in justifying both sides of the column to produce a cleaner look. It will be many years before I can afford a computer, so evening up the edges will continue to be a matter of typing about two-thirds of the way across the column and then suddenly counting spaces or hyphenating. I don't think I am any worse than what I see in a number of computer justified newspapers or magazines. For those

who like all those technical details, the typeface is Smith Corona XL 1500 (elite pitch). The software is Lay-it-out-on-the-desk-and-see-if-it-looks-reasonable. The pagemaking program is Unustic glue stick, 3M Scotch Magic transparent tape, and Richards of Sheffield, England scissors. Memory storage is ??? (okay loccers, so just how many bytes can the human brain store?) and probably a RAM-type memory.

I went up to Edmonton for Con-Text 91 (June 7 - 9), a literary con. It was expected to break even at best, according to what one con member told me, and probably lose money. Attendance was about 300, of whom about a third were non-paying guests. The usual panels, lots of writers and artists, a bookish dealer bourse, a national awards ceremony (the Aurora). However, what really sets Con-Text apart from any other con is that it has a live stage play performed at it, a serious drama written exclusively for it, and definitely the highlight of the entire weekend. The play is performed by professional actors. This year, it was "Folded Space", by Catherine Girczyc.

This issue will be printed and mailed out during the Calgary Stampede, the world's largest rodeo (1,000,000+ visitors), and should reach you during Con-Version (700+ visitors). Con-Version has something for everyone, from literary elites to media barbarians. The local papers send out photographers, of course, and the result is always some Trekkie or SCA knight on the front page. A good visual hook, but part of the reason why I always seem to be apologizing to people when I explain that I read SF.

GRIMBLETON DOWN

by Dale Speirs

In March 1970, a cartoon series began appearing in the British journal New Scientist, drawn by Bill Tidy. The first strip stated that the purpose of Grimbleton Down was secret research into population control, but the place soon blossomed into a full-fledged research establishment, somewhere in the heart of England, carrying on work in biochem warfare, psywar, parapsychology, animal experimentation, and new food sources, just to name the major projects. The director of Grimbleton Down is Treem. If you can imagine John Cleese as a bit shorter and overweight, then you have the image of Treem. Treem is a mandarin who must deal with a staff constantly marching off to the sound of a different drummer, a permanent demonstration outside the gates (mostly animal-rights activists but with a few other causes mixed in), and a suspicious village population who appreciate the jobs created by the establishment but are understandably fearful of the goings-on. For the last twenty two years, Grimbleton Down has been keeping New Scientist readers amused with a sometimes-all-too-true look at life in a research institute.

Grimbleton Down plays off the current news in science, but has a steady set of departments appearing frequently. Taking them in no particular order, they are as follow.

POPULATION CONTROL: They do a bit of the usual lab work here, but the main emphasis is on porno, about which more later. One breakthrough was prolonged gestation, a test rat carrying its young for eighteen months (four years in human terms). A great success, but it could only be done once, as it caused a major biological change. What kind of change? Well, the test rat's name was Jim.

One experiment, which resulted in a flood of volunteers, was the discovery that five pints or more of beer reduces male hormone levels. An unfortunate casualty was the department head, who broke a basic rule by experimenting upon himself and was consequently disabled by alcoholism.

The main thrust of the porno unit (perhaps I should have put that another way) is the production of anti-sex films. The idea is to put people off the idea of sex and thereby contribute to reduced population growth. One star of these films is Rita Laboyle, of the tatty hair, potato blight complexion, and drayhorse figure. Most of the film sequences seem to involve a large group of people grappling each other in the nude. Although occasional successes are obtained, i.e., the audience was sick to its stomach, the effectiveness of Dirty Films Unit is doubtful, and the Unit is in constant danger of being closed down. Matters are not helped by labour difficulties, as the union is demanding improved working conditions, such as new mattresses. On one occasion, Treem suggests that a dispute be submitted to arbitration, whereupon a dimwitted starlet asks him if it leaves any marks.

A short-lived experiment was the rock group designed to help put the young off sex. The band 'Castrati' started out in the Rolling Stones period but was updated when the punks came in.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE: A sneaky lot here, as they are not above applying what they've learned to such things as improved budgets from brainwashed civil servants. Treem is a constant and unwitting victim of Psywar, being manipulated into leaving them be instead of harassing them over bureaucratic details. Treem's despair and sense of futility over what is going on at Grimbleton Down can perhaps be traced to the use of Gloom against him. Gloom is a depressant spray that comes in a convenient spray can. Psywar is not perfect however, as they have been known to be intimidated by the institute librarian over a matter of overdue books.

ENERGY CONSERVATION: Mostly routine stuff here such as methanol/gasohol, windmills, and doors that generate electrical power each time you open them. The solar energy research ran into trouble when it was

discovered that the chief researcher was so into it that he was sacrificing humans on an altar surrounded by banks of solar-cell panels.

NUFOOD: Eternally optimistic but seldom successful is the team that produces new types of food to assuage the hunger of this overpopulated planet. Nufood is by and large bad food, so bad that the department head of Nufood refused to attend an awards banquet when he learned the menu was all Nufood. One variety was named '1857' because that sounded better than 'Indian Mutiny'. In a test trial of another Nufood, it was set out on plates the night before so as to get rid of the flies. Nufood 764 was liked by 99.999% of tasters, was nutritious and easy to digest, and, unfortunately, rotted teeth as no other substance could. Nufood 718 would not be eaten by any living thing, but was an excellent plyboard material, being able to support the weight of six men when processed into sheets. Nufood 181 made the front pages when it was found to be a carcinogen.

Not everything was a failure. Nufood 883, simulated stringmeat substitute gel, passed tests at the Vatican, and was not to be eaten on Fridays. Marketing was a big concern at Nufood section, and included tactics such as requiring a five hour cooking period so that gourmets wouldn't think it was a convenience food.

PARANORMAL RESEARCH: This section of Grimbleton Down made everyone nervous, not just the villagers. Guard dogs find themselves floating in air as they go past Paranormal Block, and female scientists complain of sexual harassment from invisible pinches and fondles. Spoonbending can be a problem when the one doing it is the tea lady. A priest is called in to handle

a poltergeist, not to exorcize it, mind you, but rather to read it the Official Secrets Act. In the village, police are helpless to stop the goings-on but are able to nab Treem for parking on a double yellow pentacle.

BIOCHEM WARFARE: A rather touchy department, prone to misplacing canisters of nerve gas. Compensation had to be paid to a local sheep farmer when his flock was wiped out; it seems a guard dog went wild. Biochem produces nerve gases with names like 'Multicoloured Dream', 'Throbbing Violets' or 'Perfumed Escape'. The pinball machine in a staff lounge scores 1000 for carrot fly, 2500 for Dutch Elm Disease, 5000 for famine, 7500 for plague, and 10000 for anthrax. Not all is gloom and doom, for like any other large place of employment, there is an employee newsletter, with interesting snippets, sports news, establishment gossip, crosswords, and a lost-and-found column which includes an ad concerning two missing canisters of nerve gas. (If found, please notify Dimley of Chemwarfare.) Personality conflicts can arise; no one would work with new staff member Dr. Max Dorrington, a specialist in the use of personal defensive odours in higher mammals.

ANIMAL RESEARCH: A fair bit of work is done with dolphins, training them to place explosives. The explosives are not placed on enemy ships. Rather, Grimbleton Down has hit upon the brilliant idea of blowing up enemy dolphin trainers by getting the animals to put bombs in the trainers' hands. Other Grimbleton research includes the use of whales to test cigarettes, as they can smoke 400 at a time, as long as someone can figure out how to keep the tobacco dry.

Demonstrators are constantly outside the gates of Grimbleton Down, mostly to protest the use of lab

animals in research. The research staff ignore fire alarms but dive out the windows when two long blasts on the siren indicate an impending attack by the ladies of the Dumb Friends League is nigh. Demonstrators also once attempted to get inside the grounds by crashing the fence with a Trojan dog (a pointer from the looks of it).

Grimbleton Down is in the forefront of cloning. They took a female calf embryo and split it in two. One half was frozen, the other half implanted into a cow and became an adult female in due time. The frozen half was then implanted in her so that eventually she gave birth to her twin sister. I laughed at this one, but it may well happen some day with humans.

POLLUTION CONTROL: One good use for particulate matter filtered out of the air has been discovered by Grimbleton Down. Just compress the stuff and make paperweights and desks out of it. Nuclear waste disposal is a subject that gives much trouble to Grimbleton Down. Their drums keep splitting open when dumped into the ocean. A rocket torpedo designed to burrow 20 metres into the clay at ocean bottom instead went up into the atmosphere.

Attempts to clean up River Grimbleton have not been too successful due to lack of co-operation from Gridley Chemicals, Smiggins Plastics, and other factories. An attempt to demonstrate how polluted the river is by developing photographs in the water fails when everything is dissolved away completely.

SECURITY: Head of Security is a chap named Carver. Most of the trouble comes from the basically permanent demonstration in front of the

main gates to Grimbleton Down. Carver's men have infiltrated most of the protest groups, and when Treem is brained by a picket sign it was one of Carver's lot that did it. Carver keeps photos and files of all the demonstrators; the two most suspicious men, present at every protest rally, are about to be arrested when it is just discovered in time that they are St. John's Ambulance. The demonstrators are themselves quite at home, and make toast on the electric fence. Treem does not always respond in the expected fashion. Faced with chanting demonstrators, he forms up a group of security guards and they begin singing "We shall not be moved". Grimbleton Down has its own record label (remember the Castrati?), and a favourite tactic is to drown out demonstrators with a selection of greatest hits from Thundervoive.

Carver manages to put away one protestor by filming him at a rally to show that he was an agent provocateur. The man was faked into the film to produce phony evidence. What caught everyone by surprise was that the original footage also showed a UFO, definitely not faked. One spy within the ranks of Grimbleton Down is caught because he kept on working while all the other scientists were on strike. When a top-secret annex is added to the Parapsychology block, a labourer on the construction job is eliminated by an 'accident' because he was talking about it in the village pub. Security feels he was a spy since the information could not have leaked out any other way because "He'd have to be psychic!".

A number of scientists are members of 'Fans of the Earth', and spray paint the symbol of that group inside Grimbleton Down on laboratory walls. Their sneakiest tactic is to use touch-toxic paint, and thus make it difficult to remove.

Treem is not above trying out a few nasty items against the demonstrators. At Grimbleton Town Hall, he gives a lecture in defence of chemwarfare and in particular the NX 79 gas produced at his establishment. After the lecture, he clears his way through the inevitable demonstrators by spraying them with ... NX 79.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: In short, a disastrous failure. In a friendly match between village folk and Grimbleton Down staff, a cricket game is disputed when it appears that the Parapsychology people are moving the ball in the air by telekinesis. To no avail though, as the Grimbleton Down team are losing. Treem tries to save face by getting an abandoned game due to bad weather. He calls in his Weather Modification people, but unfortunately the villagers spot the iceberg. How bad are public relations? Even the criminals decide not to snatch the payroll for fear of being turned into something mutant.

STAFF: They settle their differences by fist-fights with waldoes. Treem chews out one scientist for writing science fiction under his own name; it turns out they are talking about an expenses account. The head of one department is a ten-year old, in Treem's words, "a precocious, arrogant little brat in need of a sound thrashing".

TREEM: Passed over every year in the Honours List. His club asked him to step down from the wine committee. Demonstrators. Union troubles. Staff problems. The budget. Shed a tear for the bureaucrats like him everywhere. And laugh to read about it in New Scientist.

PLATO'S GUARDIANS

by Leanteri Polvikoski

To set the stage for the newspaper clippings shown here, it must be noted that in Alberta the governing Progressive Conservatives established a holiday on the third Monday in February called Family Day. It is a time, according to Tories, when we all gather in the bosom of our families and celebrate traditional values such as watching TV, eating turkey, and discussing who died or got married since the last family get-together.

At least, that is, those who do not have to work that day. Unionized workers get the day off, but people in McJobs put in a normal work day, with no overtime since Family Day is not a compulsory holiday.

Premier Don Getty's son, by the by, won't be at the Getty family reunion on Family Day. He's currently doing hard time for trafficking in cocaine.

There are no statistics available to tell if wife beatings increased because of the ad shown at right. I feel safe in saying that after this ad was cancelled, wife beating did not decline.

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Pick One...
Pogo
...Get One
twice the

No momma-bashin' 'round here, folks

By Alan Boras

(Herald writer)

EDMONTON — It's okay to gamble in Alberta as long as you listen to your mother.

The Alberta government pulled the plug Wednesday on a television and radio advertising campaign promoting its newest lottery game — Pogo.

Ken Kowalski, minister responsible for lotteries, demanded the ban because the ad's two gambling characters, a pair of country musicians sitting on a porch, ain't listening to their mother.

The musical jingle's lyrics say:

"Momma don't allow no pogo-pickin' 'round here; well, we don't care what momma don't allow; gonna pick that pogo when and how; momma don't allow no pogo pickin' 'round here."

Kowalski said a government-funded ad that encourages people to ignore their mother's

advice doesn't have the Getty government approval.

"I will censor that if people publicly say that they shouldn't listen to their mothers," Kowalski said Wednesday.

The Western Canada Lottery Corporation pulled the two TV ads, which cost \$60,000 to produce. Pogo, which means pick one get one, replaces the old 6-36 game. The new lottery game awarded its first prize Wednesday.

Its four radio advertisements, which follow the same theme, will be reworked, at a cost of \$5,000, until they are acceptable, said Cyndy Bowen, a corporation spokeswoman.

After Kowalski demanded the Alberta ban, Saskatchewan and Manitoba followed suit, killing the entire television campaign, Bowen said.

Ray Martin, New Democrat leader, asked why Kowalski didn't check first before spending the \$60,000 to produce the advertisements.

Pogo ad 'ridiculed' mothers

(Edmonton Journal)

EDMONTON — Ken Kowalski says the Western Canada Lottery Corp., hit the jackpot after he pulled an ad he felt demeaned mothers.

"I think we've probably got a million dollars in free publicity in Pogo thanks to the media in the last several days over this issue," the lotteries minister said.

He estimated his move cost \$30,000 to \$40,000, far less than the \$300,000 cost provided by the lottery corporation.

"Furthermore ... from a cost-recovery point of view we've done very well."

Kowalski said if he finds anything in future that might ridicule motherhood or women, "you're darn right I'll stand up."

The Pogo censorship controversy was literally a three-day wonder, and came and went so fast that if you were out of the province that week then you would have missed it completely. I heard a news item on the car radio while going home from work, and immediately swung by a lottery outlet to grab a copy of the offending ad as a collector's item. The broadcast ad was a jingle that was eminently forgettable, but I regret I never got around to taping it off the radio.

This Pogo business is one of those things where I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. It reminded me of what happened a few years ago, when Premier Getty angrily criticized news photographers for standing behind him at media scrums. When asked why this should bother him, he replied that he resented having his bald spot filmed by cameramen. A province of six million people had been unaware of his bald spot, but needless to say it immediately became the centre of attention. Had he never mentioned it, an entire generation of Albertans would have gone to their graves without knowing or caring about Getty's bald spot.

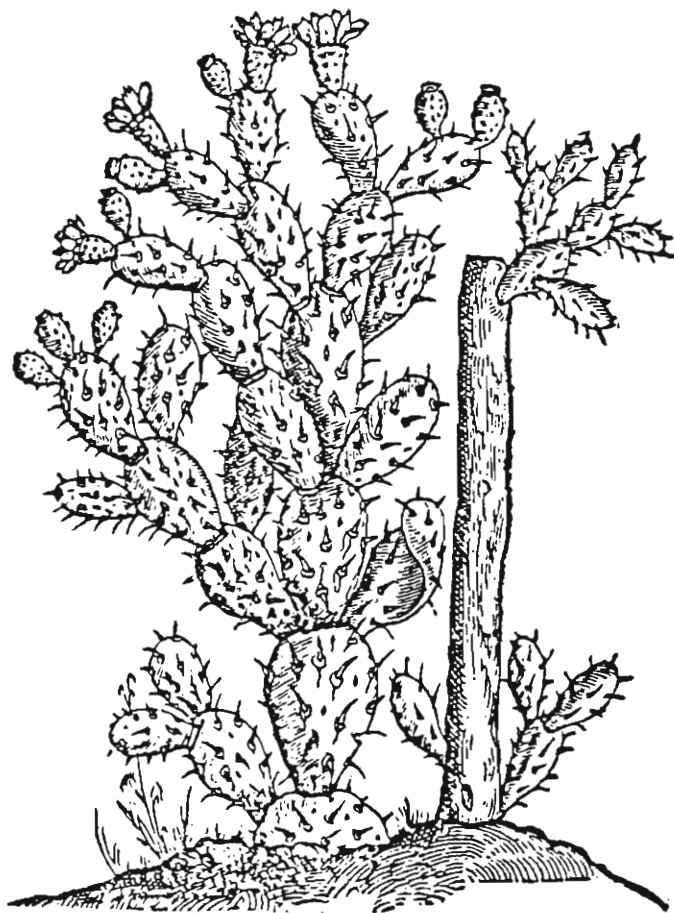
In the same manner, the protests of a cabinet minister who saw something that no one else did has brought ridicule on the government. When the ads first ran, there was no outcry from the general public about the disgraceful attitude of two banjo pickers towards Mum. After the ads were banned, the silence continued to remain. The opposition party did in fact criticize the ban, but only on the grounds that money was wasted, and why didn't the minister catch it ahead of time? It is diffi-

cult to take the high ground on a subject such as this, partly because of the questionable nature of lotteries to begin with, and partly because the subject is too trivial to make a Supreme Court issue out of it. Then too, the government was not censoring others. The lottery corporation is a government entity, so the Tories were in effect censoring themselves. The ads were not pulled because of noisy religious groups or Politically Correct media manipulators.

Harry Golden, in his book "So What Else Is New?", tells the story of how one school library system dealt with censorship. As Golden writes, "As soon as any self-styled patriot makes a complaint about a 'subversive' textbook in the schools, the teachers mail off a questionnaire which includes such questions as: Have you read the book? To what passages does your complaint refer? In what way are the passages offensive? What do you know of the author? Which of his other books have you read? It is a pretty effective system for preserving peace. One thing book-burners don't like to do is read books and answer questions."

In the artistic world, censorship is often used by artists to distract attention from the fact that their work is mediocre. The fuss over the artist who makes dresses out of steaks sewn together overlooks one point about it all, namely that without the fuss, the work would soon be forgotten, and properly placed with houses made from old beer cans and other trivia. What many artists and writers call censorship is perhaps better described as editing. Censorship is an attempt to prevent an idea from becoming known. Editing does not prevent the idea from circulating; one can always publish elsewhere.

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And what of the future? Will censorship become harder or easier with advances in consumer electronics? Much material already circulates unnoticed in today's society that would be banned if it found its way to mass media outlets. Anyone connected to the Mail Art network or zines that are lucky to be reviewed by Factsheet Five will know that articles and art found there are often disgusting, obscene, politically incorrect and otherwise beyond the pale. With electronic underground media such as cassettes and BBSs, it becomes harder to shut them down. Yes, there have been some seizures of computer BESs, but, like illegal drugs, such seizures only account for a small fraction of what is going on. Even to monitor what is going on costs the police a lot of money. As an example, a Calgary Police Service job posting for Electronic Surveillance Interceptor had a rate of pay in 1988 of \$19,703 to \$26,404 per annum. Big Brother simply cannot afford to watch you, and censor every little thing.

But Big Brother doesn't have to. To have your idea widely circulated, you need the attention of the mass media, a thing easier said than done if you are disgusting, obscene, politically incorrect or otherwise beyond the pale. Frank Scully wrote in 1950 about what he called the New Sublimation. "... we the people must either freeze our lips, like a Russian peasant at the sight of a commissar, or give our names, addresses, business connections, and testimony to be screened and filtered by anonymous intelligence officers." In 1950, Scully was thinking of a society fearful of the communist menace, but in our time it is a society fearful of non-conformists who belong to a labour union but support free trade, or who fail to see why fluoridation is linked with the death penalty and prayers in school.

FINIS

LETTERS OF COMMENT

FROM: Alan Stewart 1991-4-19
Box 212, World Trade Centre
Melbourne, Victoria 3005
Australia

I recognized the name OPUNTIA and was wondering why the zine had such a title, but all has been explained. Growing up on a farm in northeastern Victoria, pricklypear was really a novelty encountered occasionally in the bush in the hills near our farm, or seen in the backyards along the Ovens river where immigrant labourers lived. Recently I saw what had to be some very old pricklypear plants which appeared to have almost 'woody' trunks. Though I may be mistaken, as it was a fleeting glimpse from a moving car, and it may have been something else. There is even a Cactoblastus memorial hall here in Australia, to celebrate the control of pricklypear as a major weed; if only something similar could be done to St. John's wort.

Your article on Canadian SF sounds depressingly familiar to the Australian scene. All the newsagents handle UK books, and the direct import shops bring in the US editions, sometimes technically illegally although the UK distributor's stranglehold on the Australian market is slowly being broken down by legislation. Now I think they are allowed to sell US editions if a UK edition is not available within a certain period (six months?). Previously, if a US book wasn't picked up by a UK publisher, it didn't "officially" reach Australia.

We have seen some small publishers try to establish a viable SF range since the 1970s. Norstrilia Press, Void Publications, and Aphelion Publishing have tried, but the market size doesn't

really encourage it. Two SF magazines started uplast year and have survived to their third issues so far. If you want to be a SF writer in Australia, no matter how nice it would be to be a very Australian-voiced one as well, only selling to the US, and perhaps the UK, publishers will put money in the bank.

I can identify with your anger at stories plonked down in a reported "Canada", as similar things happen with Australia. Anne McCaffrey's portrayal of Australians in DRAGONSDAWN is degrading and a mish-mash of inappropriate cliches. Perhaps someone should tell her that while 'Bonzer' may be a dated Australian expression, 'Bonzo' could be a dog food for all I know. For similar reasons I haven't touched WALKABOUT WOMAN.

FROM: Ron Currie 1991-5-31
Box 1088
Calgary, T2P 2K9

I have difficulty commenting on Garth Spencer's fanhistory of Calgary since almost all of it covers events before my time. In his article he states that "Calgary doesn't run to a very large fan community". Is a distinction being made between fans who just go to cons and fans who run them, print zines, backstab, etc.? Con-Version draws numbers comparable to V-Con, which has a population base of close to two million to draw from, plus Seattle/Bellingham just across the border. Calgary has 700,000 potential congoers to draw from. What has always struck Con-Versionites as odd is the fact that a very large percentage of our attendees are local, as compared to other Canadian cons. We

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seem to draw relatively few travelling fans, despite the fact that Edmonton is a few hours drive away, and we are next door to con-starved Saskatchewan and the B.C. interior. Does anyone out there have any guesses as to why that is?

An informed source tells me that Doug Edgington didn't bankroll Con-Version 1 at all, but rather Cliff Samuels and Cris Stroup (now Cris Hall). Katherine Bonham is now Katherine Jepson. Breakness comes from "The Languages of Pao" by Jack Vance, not from Bowness.

And finally, XenoFile is not attempting to provide Canadian newszine coverage, it is providing Canadian newszine coverage! Well okay, so we are attempting to provide coverage, but few people seem willing to play along in this regard, so it's not all my fault.

I've been using opuntiol recently to remove excess earwax, but I'll be damned if I can think of a decent storyline to use this in.

EDITOR REPLIES: What kind of out-of-town advertising does Con-Version do? I don't mean notices to SF clubs, who will probably contribute visitors anyway but rather ads aimed at the neofan or lone wolf. I mention this because ConText 91 had a writeup in the Calgary Herald (June 3), which is unusual for an Edmonton event, but exactly the right place to get those not plugged into the western Canadian network.

I was the one who interjected into Garth's article the Breakness/Bowness relation, so the Vance connection is a surprise. I'd like to know more how that name was chosen.

FROM: Buck Coulson 1991-5-31
2677W-500N
Hartford City, Indiana 47348

"How does the hobby differ in your town?" Is "completely" a good enough answer? Well, we're not in a town but our mail comes to Hartford City, so ... Lessee. Leaving us out, there are two people, both librarians, who have been to conventions, but only one of them is still going, now and then. There's an old WEIRD TALES fan; I guess he may have been to a Midwestcon or two, but not since we've known him. He does apparently have a batch of old WEIRDS and some Arkham House books. There was a young man who made a nuisance of himself hanging around until we discouraged him. His idea of a conversation was for the other person to talk while he listened, which is not mine, especially when he came out uninvited and stayed eight hours. One time was quite enough, though I didn't have to put up with him; Juanita did. We don't see him any more. As far as I know, that is it. The local library has a pretty fair stock of SF books, so there must be readers but we don't know of any other fans.

We've been members of two Indianapolis fan clubs, one each in Muncie, Chicago, and Columbus, Ohio, but that was all back in the 1950s. We still get invitations to the Dorsai Thing but have never gone. The Indiana clubs were very small; at one time there were two rival Indy clubs plus one in Muncie, but there weren't over a dozen fans in all three of them, with a few people like us belonging to all three simultaneously. (I've never lived in any of the cities named, and Juanita was only in Muncie while in college. In Indiana, clubs had to reach for members.) The Indy clubs then have

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no connection to the Indy club now, which puts on Inconjunctions. In 1953 and 1954, I was driving 100 miles to Indianapolis to attend club meetings.

Juanita's and my zine YANDRO began life as EISFA, the clubzine of the Eastern Indiana SF Association (Muncie), but it outlived the club by a good many years. The one Indianapolis club published ISFA and ISFANEWS, and the other one had some very short-lived title; Gene DeWeese and I wrote for all of them. ISFA lasted the longest. Carolyn Doyle, still active in fanzine fandom, was a member during its last years, which must have been 12 or 15 years ago. Richard Lupoff was a member for a time before he moved to New York, started comics fandom and turned pro writer.

I think the amount of "patriotic, flag-waving, American" SF is much exaggerated. In the pulp era, probably not, but I have a professional review column of SF magazines and read everything I can say a good word for in nine or ten American magazines and two British ones. There is much more extrapolating of current USA society into a dismal future (or a dismal alternate world) than there is flag-waving. The number of American magazines I read varies; it's gone as high as twelve but the small ones keep folding. I begin every story but there are some I don't finish. My editor wants to plug the magazines, and he's right in saying that negative reviews don't do that. The good part of the column is that I get to read all the magazines but the bad part is that I have to read all the magazines. But mostly, I don't have to pay for them. The pulps were blatantly pro-American but that era is long over. I review books too, but read a much smaller percentage of them. The ones I read aren't particularly pro-American, but there aren't enough of them (a half-dozen to a dozen a month) to extrapolate from.

We did run one story in YANDRO of a Canadian invasion of Indiana, and the symbolic clash of the Canadian "Winged Beaver" and the Indiana Basketball. Hardly inspirational, though.

EDITOR REPLIES: It is a truism perhaps, that cultural imperialism is not obvious to the ones doing the imperializing. Asimov's "The Stars, Like Dust" assumes that the importance of the US constitution is such that thousands of years from now it will be of galactic importance. Many SF stories use a One World Government much too similar to the US federal system to be a coincidence, an example of this being Star Trek.

FROM: Sheldon Wiebe
2 - 1726 7 Street SW
Calgary, T2T 2W6

1991-6-4

Thanks for the copies of the first two OPUNTIA's. I've enjoyed both issues but must make a correction to the interesting Garth Spencer article on Calgary fanhistory.

I may have attended as many as half-a-dozen regular DEC meetings (in one of which I solicited funds for David E. F.R.E.D. Lamb, the Calgary South riding Rhino candidate in a federal election) but I was in no way, shape, or form connected with the group's first NonCon committee, especially not as treasurer, a position I would kill to avoid.

I did attend two or three concom meetings for ConVersion 1, but dropped out after arriving at Spellbound Books one sunny evening to find no one else present. After waiting for a substantial period of time, I was somewhat put out when Doug

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Edgington arrived to, I think, pick up something, and told me that the meeting had been held elsewhere. I had not been informed, even though the concom had both my work and home phone numbers, so I figured my presence was not particularly wanted and definitely not required. (Hey! I was much younger and much more easily hurt back then!) I am attempting to make up for that by trying to follow Al Brown as Video Guy, for ConVersion 8, and by trying out a Serials Room in connection with Kevin Jepson's consuite stuff.

FROM: Harry Warner Jr. 1991-6-4
423 Summit Avenue
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

Garth Spencer's history of fandom in Calgary is an excellent example of what fandom needs so badly; detailed historical articles on specific aspects of fandom. It is increasingly doubtful that anyone will ever publish again manuscripts seeking to cover everything in a decade, like the books Sam Moskowitz and I turned out, because fandom has grown so large and diverse since the 1950s, and because it's so much more expensive to publish large books doomed to a small number of copies sold. One veteran fan is supposed to be seriously considering a history of the 1960s, but I'll believe it when I see a copy of the resulting book.

Garth's fine article depresses me somewhat for a personal reason. It seems to imply that conventions are the only important form of fanac in recent decades in areas as large as Calgary. I hate to think of fandom going in that direction. However, I'm consoled by the thought that there may have been more local clubs, more small fanzines, more correspondence and visiting among Calgary fans than Garth has tracked down. Logic would

seem to demand it. If cons were all there was, how did news of their existence reach prospective attendees without correspondence, fanzines, and local clubs?

I wonder what specific books or prozine stories Lloyd Penney is thinking about when he writes of "American SF that is terribly Mom 'n apple pie, patriotic, flag-waving American, full of American themes and American triumph at the end". Some of Ray Bradbury's early short stories published a half-century ago might meet some of his descriptive characteristics. Juvenile science fiction has been patriotic in long ago times but hardly today.

I wish I hadn't read those mentions of jumping cacti in the loc section. Now I'll worry constantly that Snoopy's Uncle Spike will get into trouble with a herd of them.

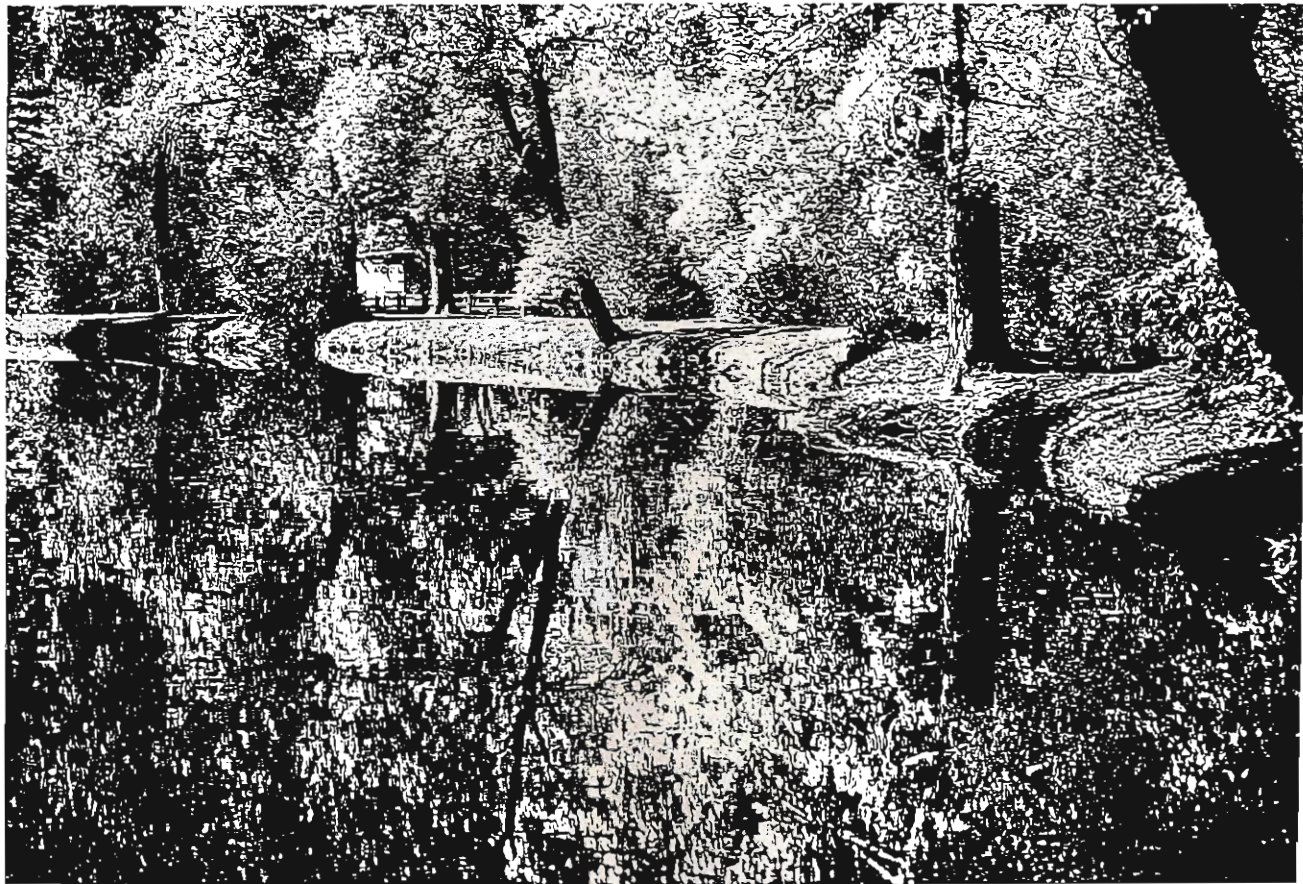
FROM: Paula Johanson 1991-6-24
Box 7 Site 1 RR 1
Legal, Alberta, T0G 1L0

Thanks for OPUNTIA 1 and 2. I loved the poem by Polvikoski. A blackly humorous reminder of the Lutheran minister's poem/statement (when they came for the Social Democrats, I said nothing ...).

Also, it's good to see Garth's fanhistories.

I ALSO HEARD FROM:

Cuyler Brooks, Joseph Nicholas, Harry Andruschak, and Garth Spencer. Mark Manning sent a CoA; he is now residing at 1709 South Holgate, Seattle, WA 98144.



Bowness Park lagoon, looking northwest from my office.

FROM: Dale Speirs
Box 6830
Calgary, Alberta
CANADA, T2P 2E7

WHY YOU GOT THIS ZINE

- ___ Noblesse oblige.
- ___ You contributed (this ish).
- ___ You contributed (next ish).
- ___ We trade.
- ___ We should trade. Interested?
- ___ You sent money. Thanks.
- ___ How about a letter of comment?
- ___ This is the last issue you'll
receive unless you Do Something.

TO: