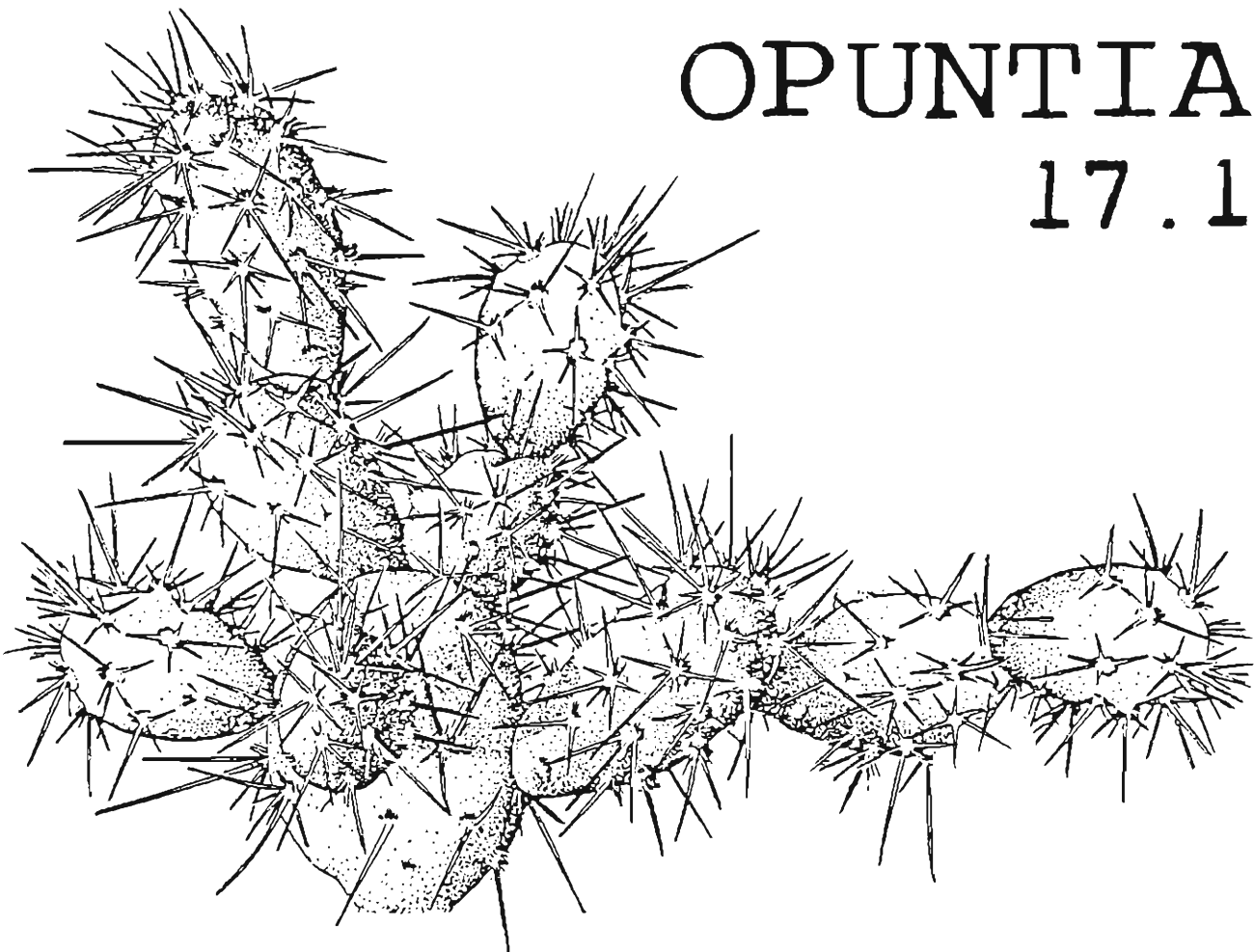


OPUNTIA

17.1



OPUNTIA #17.1

February 1994

ZINE REVIEWS

ISSN 1183-2703

OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2E7. It is available for \$2 cash, letter of comment, or trade for your zine.

EDITORIAL: The road not taken is always one that fascinates me. I got to thinking about this the other day as I typed up the 100th installment I have done of "Paper Patter", a review column I took over in 1985 in CALQUARIUM, the monthly bulletin of the Calgary Aquarium Society. The column began in 1964, and chronicles the trades we get from other aquarium clubs in exchange for our bulletin. I review the best and take them all to club meetings for members to browse through. All the exchanges are club-zines; the idea of an aquarium perzine is unheard of. If I didn't already have my hands full with OPUNTIA and CALGARY PHILATELIST, I would start up an aquarium perzine to see what the reaction would be. But why would SF have so many perzines? It can't be because only SFers are individualists; most stamp collectors refuse to join a philatelic society and carry on as loners, but they do not put out perzines. (The USPS records 20,000,000 stamp collectors in the USA but the American Philatelic Society only has 57,000 members. Canada Post says 2,000,000 up here, but only 5,000 are in the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada.)

THE USUAL

You will see the term 'The Usual' throughout the following zine reviews. This means that the zine can be had for \$2 cash for a sample copy, in trade for your zine, or for a contribution such as artwork, letter of comment, or an article.

BCSFAZINE #247 (Pre-arranged trade or \$24 per year from West Coast SF Assoc., Box 48478, Vancouver, British Columbia, V7X 1A2) A monthly clubzine with lots of sparkle and exuberance. R. Graeme Cameron does a sort of Halliwell's Film Guide to bad SF movies, in this case "Fire Maidens of Outer Space". An interview with a gent from a robotics company on the practical difficulties of the space station, followed by a Sidney Trim review of the Amerika rocket.

WARP #26 (The Usual from Montreal SF&F Assoc., Box 1186, Place du Parc, Montreal, Québec H2W 2P4) Another clubzine, with a strong emphasis on cons and media SF. A good one to get if you go Trekking or hunting for red dwarfs.

ZX #3 (The Usual from Andrew Murdoch, 2563 Heron Street, Victoria, British Columbia V8R 5Z9) A perzine, stapled at the top like OPUNTIA but 8½ by 11 DTP layout. Mostly locs.

PROBE #93 (The Usual from SF South Africa, Box 781401, Sandton 2146, South Africa) A fictionzine with various locs and film and book reviews. But the main portion is short stories. It looks as if a RSA type of SF story is in the early stages of evolution, not just the primitive type where the story is set with RSA placenames that could just as easily be Scottish or Ukrainian, but rather a philosophical background or point of view that means the story could only have been written in RSA. In this issue, for example, a Bloemfontein shoppgirl goes off on a quest as a result of a discovery that Tolkien had been writing about real little men, not fictional hobbits. (Tolkien was born in Bloemfontein.) Other stories in this zine vary in quality. I've mentioned in other places my belief that fiction in zines is often no worse than that in prozines, and sometimes better.

THINGUMYBOB #8 and #9 (The Usual from Chuck Connor, Sil-dan House, Chediston Road, Wissett near Halesworth, Suffolk IP19 0NF, England) Issue #8 is the all-male issue, and #9 is the all-female. Connor is trying this because " ... I felt that it was about time some people started making an appearance in these pages, people rarely seen in general issue fanzines, people who may be just used to working and writing in apas, people on the edges of fandom ... " An interesting experiment to be sure; I don't remember seeing most of the authors' names before and the writing is of a different variety. Overall the womenfolk seem to have the better issue.

FICTIONS #5 (available with subscription to BCSFAZINE). An annual fictionzine put out by the B.C.S.F.A. Writers' Workshop. For the most part, pretty good reading. There are stories with too many in-jokes that only a Canadian would understand, but humorous jokes for sure. A better percentage of good stories than, say, ANALOG or AMAZING. One story is a reprint out of ON SPEC; it wouldn't hurt ON SPEC to return the favour and reprint a few items to give them a wider circulation.

THE KNARLEY KNEWS #42 (The Usual from Henry and Letha Welch, 1525 - 16 Avenue, Grafton, Wisconsin 53024-2017) I finally found out what the Knarley is, a Hobbit. Elsewhere is the normal stuff of a zine; editorial, reviews, a Worldcon report, and locs. There is the start of a new column "Truly Bad Literature", but be warned that authors will be required to submit their own work, not specially written for this column but published in the past. No sending in Turkey Reading nominations; you must be prepared to embarrass yourself.

TRAP DOOR #13 (The Usual or US\$4 from Robert Lichtman, Box 30, Glen Ellen, California 95442). Sort of a group perzine, with a number of personal articles from various people. Lichtman starts it off with a ConFrancisco report and is followed by various authors on: brain surgery, a collection of anecdotes, what to do about a baby niece

(that I can relate to, ever since my three-year-old niece loudly announced she had to go bathroom and her parents were nowhere about, leaving me to handle the crisis), recovering lost money in Istanbul, and a bit on "you can't go home again". Locs of course.

THYME #94 (The Usual from Alan Stewart, Box 222, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 3005, Australia). An Australasian newszine with lots of locs, some Australia fanhistory photos, and a proposal to have conpanels in the sanitary facilities.

ARTYCHOKE #5 (comes with THYME). An artzine that features a guest artist with each issue and carries on a very good comic strip "Space-Time Buccaneers" that I'd like to see eventually collated into a book.

OSFS STATEMENT #197 (The Usual via OSFS, c/o A.G. Wagner, 251 Nepean Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0B7). This is the clubzine of the Ottawa SF Society. Local news, media reviews, book reviews, etc. etc.. Michael McKenny reviews the 1905 book THE SUNLESS CITY, famous in at least Manitoba history because the city of Flin Flon is named after the hero of this early SF novel. If I remember correctly from my schooldays, some prospectors out looking for the mother lode came across a battered copy of the book lying in the bush country. Let me put this question to my readers: Are there any other places besides Flin Flon, Manitoba, that have been named specifically after SF characters or places?

LAST RESORT #5 (The Usual from Steve George, 642 Ingersoll Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 2J4). A brief four-page reviewzine, covering a variety of zines, mostly SF but a few others from outside the field.

VISIONS OF PARADISE #50 and #51 (The Usual from Robert Sabella, 2 Natalie Drive, Budd Lake, New Jersey 07828) This is a diaryzine of a maths teacher, with events in the life of his family and dealing with a bad boss.

ASTROMANCER QUARTERLY V2#4 (The Usual via Niagara Falls SF Association, Box 500, Bridge Station, Niagara Falls, New York 14305-0500) As far as technical quality goes, this zine is undoubtedly the best printed now in existence and an example to us all. Fine artwork, tints that give new meaning to the word 'subtle', and the funniest editorial masthead I've seen. Locs, Jay Kay Klein photos of cons gone by, and Sheryl Birkhead in a serious and considered look at SF art. A dangerous tendency to meander about in faanhitory, but I should talk, eh? Bad poetry about asparagus has been replaced by bad poetry about the quince. Fortunately Harry Andruschak has muddied the water with a proposal to write "The Haggis Column".

DEROGATORY REFERENCE #76 (The Usual from Arthur Hlavaty, 206 Valentine Street, Yonkers, New York 10704-1814) The most enjoyable part of this issue was a fictitious universe where THE LAST DANGEROUS VISIONS was published when promised in the 1970s, and a critical review blasts it for such improbable stories as an American president being an actor, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the bigoted idea of a plague that affects mainly gays, drug addicts, and Africans.

SPENT BRASS #22 (The Usual from Andrew Hooper and Carol Root, 4228 Francis Avenue N. #103, Seattle, Washington 98103) The impression is that of a newszine, with some reviews of recent fanhistory publishing projects. Quite a readable mix with good illos.

FANALYSIS #13 (A FAPazine, so check first for availability from Ray Schaffer, Box 1014, Kapaa, Hawaii 96755) An interesting miscellany of articles, such as collecting milk caps, which I didn't think were used anymore. RISING SUN is reviewed with regards to Japanese/American relations, PEANUTS as to why Charlie Brown can never kick the football, and Betty Page as a model for Virgil Finlay artwork in the pulps.

RADIO FREE THULCANDRA #33 (The Usual from Marty Helgesen, 11 Lawrence Avenue, Malverne, New York 11565-1406) I classify this zine in what I call the doorstopper group of zines, that is, thick zines with lots of reading, rather than a ten minute skim. This zine takes a theological niche, and discusses SF from a Christian point of view. In this ish, Helgesen starts off with a Worldcon review, with a fascinating account of the SWAT dance team (Strauss Waltz Assault Team), a group of ballroom dancers in Victorian dress cut from camouflage cloth. RFT is mostly a loczine, much like FOSFAX, where all knowledge is found and woe betide anyone making an unsupported theological statement.

CAMEO #1 (Not given but \$2 will probably get you a sample copy from Cameo International, 303 - 102-25 Avenue SW, Calgary, Alberta, T2S 1K9) This is a freebie giveaway at Calgary newsagents and is a colour, coated stock zine heavily into counterculture but just as heavily supported by ads from conventional art galleries and designer clothing stores. An interview with the owner of a Calgary store specializing in condoms, a fashion photo spread, and, immediately following, an article on the working poor. The best feature is a satire by Hudson Mah titled "Priced To Clear", a semifictional tour of places frequented by Calgary white trash. These are devastatingly accurate accounts of places like the Dairy Queen on Edmonton Trail, whose patrons all drive cars with at least one body panel supplied from a junkyard. There is a tour of the North Hill shopping mall, built 25 years ago and stuck in the same time period since. A mall whose major anchor tenants are Sears and a discount supermarket. But the best of this piece is the legendary Crossroads Flea Market, the largest in western Canada, with hundreds of booths selling mostly junk to people who buy used couches on time payments. The author buys a photo album with photos still in it, in his case "Banff Summer 1981" as it was titled, and as he writes, "We marvelled at what appeared to be a whole family of extra-chromosomes tooling around Banff on ten-speeds."

INTERMEDIATE VECTOR BOSONS #38 (The Usual from Harry Andruschak, Box 5309, Torrance, California 90510-5309) A perzine recounting Harry's 1990 vacation. Most of us just go to the coast or the mountains, with a stop along the way to see Aunt Edna at the farm, but Harry went on a 31 day trip across the Sahara. Starting at Tunisia, he was part of a group of ten who went across Africa by a purpose-built truck owned by a British outfit. From there to Algeria, south across the desert to Niger, down through Benin, and finishing at Togo. A fascinating account with advice on such practical matters as going to the toilet in the middle of the desert (take a trowel and walk to a suitable site).

THE FROZEN FROG #8 (The Usual from Benoit Girard, 1016 Guillaume-Boisset, Cap-Rouge, Québec G1Y 1Y9) A friendly sort of perzine. Reviews and locs, an article on masculinist SF, a contributory article by various pubbers on how their zines got their names.

GRADIENT #9 (The Usual from Robert Sabella, 24 Cedar Manor Court, Budd Lake, New Jersey 07828) The previous issue of GRADIENT was a listing of all the various types of SF awards. This issue is an analysis of what all those data mean, as two different authors take a closer look at the distribution and trends evident in all those awards.

CONTRACT V6#1 (The Usual from John Mansfield, 321 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 2B9) A listing of Canadian cons, plus news and gossip about congoing. Includes CUFF and Aurora forms. Altogether a useful reference.

FILE 770 #101 (US\$8 for five issues from Mike Glycer, 5828 Woodman Avenue #2, Van Nuys, California 91401) A newszine with fannish gossip and conreports, heavy on Worldcons. I got this ish on January 27; it contained reports on how the Los Angeles earthquake of January 17 affected local fans and pros. A ten day response time is quite impressive for a fanzine. Also contains bits about conrunning, with the kind of goings-on that could have come from Spencerian fanhistories.

IT GOES ON THE SHELF #11 (The Usual from Ned Brooks, 713 Paul Street, Newport News, Virginia 23605) A reviewzine that covers the unusual stuff, old and new, from other realms of the book world, not just the latest releases found on the bestseller lists. A brief note about words in the dictionary, and it was interesting to find out where the periodical GRANTA got its name from.

ANSIBLE #77 (comes with THYME, see page 3) A newsletter put out by Dave Langford, covering the British SF scene. Humourously written, lots of scandal mongering. Charles Platt announces The Ellison Information Library which promises to spread the truth about Harlan Ellison, in retaliation for him spreading gossip about Platt.

AUSTRALIAN SF NEWS #56 (comes with THYME, see page 3) A listing of books forthcoming in Australia and lots of capsule book reviews.

BT REVIEW #1 (The Usual from Brian Tramel, Box 74, Steele, Missouri 63877) A three-page reviewzine but a useful source of addresses if you are looking for non-SF zines. I foresee one problem with the review of ERG. Terry Jeeves address is given as 56 Red Scar Drive, Scarborough, N. Yorkshire YO12 5RQ, Canada. Since Britain and Canada have similar postcode systems, and there really is a Scarborough in Canada (as well as a North York; both are Toronto suburbs), one can foresee some mail wandering off the wrong way.

THE OLAF ALTERNATIVE #6/OUTHOUSE #10 (The Usual from Ken Cheslin, 10 Coney Green, Stourbridge, West Midland DY8 1LA) Back-to-back zines, OUTHOUSE being the locs to a previous issue of OLAF ALTERNATIVE. Poor layout with badly arranged pages detract somewhat from the contents but still good reading overall. Another Soames and Flotsam adventure, but something new has been added, a Sherry Hornones and Snottapon series that fits into the S & F world. Is there no end to shared worlds?

A ROUND-ROBIN ZINE

There are seemingly an infinite number of variations of zines. Perzine, sercon, apazine, reviewzine, etcetera. I read SCOTS MAGAZINE, Speirs being a Scottish name, and in the April 1985 issue is a story about what could best be described as a round-robin zine. THE SCOTS THISTLE began publishing in Kilmarnock in 1885, originally under the name THE SCOTCH THISTLE. The title was changed after a few years; I presume it was because Scotch is something you drink, not the name of an ethnic group. THE SCOTS THISTLE published for a century, and may still be going as far as I know.

I won't give you an address to write because you'll not get it for The Usual or by subscription. Only one copy of each issue is produced, and it is circulated amongst members only. It is basically an apazine where minac is one copy of your contribution. The editor then bundles everything together in a cover and circulates it. At the back are blank pages to add comments on the articles and artwork. This section is removed afterward by the editor and added to the next issue so that everyone can see the comments. The issues are made up of the original artwork and manuscripts. Members are on the honour system, and if they fail to contribute or delay passing on the issue, they record their fine on a page and pay it by putting in postage stamps in a packet attached to the page.

Everyone writes under a pseudonym. Each member has four votes for each issue. They can assign all four votes to one contribution they especially liked, split it up over several, or not cast any votes whatsoever if they think 'No Award'. At year's end, prizes are awarded in the categories of Prose, Verse, and Art.

This zine operates on the system similar to that used for round-robin letters, which are a packet of letters circulated within a group continuously (barring loss in the mails). Each member adds a letter and takes out his/her

previous letter. Round-robin zines were popular in England a century ago, whence the idea was exported to Scotland. THE SCOTS THISTLE was started by two Kilmarnock women: 'Ailsa Craig' (Mrs. R.G. Robertson) and 'Bog Myrtle' (Mrs. R.J. Paterson). Members meet from time to time at informal social gatherings, but there is no threat of cons displacing zines. They do worry about getting new blood though, the membership ageing in the same way as fanzinedom. A few members have become famous in the outside world, in particular poets Robert Garioch and William Soutar, who wrote under the pseudonyms 'Grommet' and 'Scriblerus' respectively. By and large though, it is an amateur group.

THE OTHER SHARYN MCCRUMB

I picked up a 1985 mystery paperback the other day, by Ron Goulart, called A GRAVEYARD OF MY OWN. Having read most of the humorous SF stories of his, I wasn't aware that he wrote mysteries as well. This one was fair to middling, a occasional flash of humour but mostly a routine whodunit. The hero of the story is a cartoonist who has gone legitimate as a commercial artist and now does book covers instead of illustrating comics. There is a group of cartoonists being bumped off one by one, each death made to look accidental. The hero thus not only has to solve the murders but convince a police detective that they are in fact murders.

In one chapter, Goulart describes a comics con in the deadly accurate style that earned Sharyn McCrumb so many enemies with her descriptions of SFdom. I have never been to a comics con, but have no reason to doubt Goulart's account: "There were roughly two dozen tables around the motel ballroom. Most of them were piled with comic books, boxes of comic books, paperbacks, and assorted magazines. ... Forty or so people, most of them plump young men, were browsing and socializing amid the rows of tables."

[continued next page]

And xenogenic friends of Harlan Ellison abound. Bert, the hero, had quit comics because he was fed up with them, and was now doing better work on book covers. None other than the con chairman has this dialogue with Bert:

"I hope you won't mind my telling you that you're making a bad mistake."

"How so?"

"Quitting Maximus [a comics company]", the chubby young man explained. "That was a dumb move, Mr. Kurrie. THE HUMAN BEAST was, let's face it, your finest hour. It defined the parameters of your talent. Can I be frank with you?"

"Fire away."

"The paperback covers you're trying to do, the few I've seen so far, are pure crap."

Nodding, Bert said, "It's always nice to get the man in the street's view of —"

"Need the money, I suppose? That's why you're attempting to crack the book market."

"Yeah, I have a lot of vices", confided Bert. "Couldn't support them on the Maximus wages."

The autograph session wasn't much better, Bert Kurrie receiving requests to sign paper cups and pizza boxes since "I can't afford to buy any of your comics."

In a 1989 book THE TIJUANA BIBLE, Goulart returns to the theme of comic books, although this time they are simply a McGuffin that everyone is chasing, and could just as easily be stamps or jewels instead of three trunks of rare comics worth \$2,000,000.

A Tijuana Bible is a pornographic parody of a respectable comic book. In this case, the attraction is a map of the Lost Poontang Mine, with three Xs on it indicating the location of the stolen comics. Everybody, including bad guys, has seen this map, and the novel is an extended chase sequence, as all rush to get to the comics hordes first. It would make a good road movie.

Some time ago I bought a copy of Don H. DeBrandt's 1992 novel THE QUICKSILVER SCREEN (Del Ray paperback, ISBN 0-345-37341-3) and put it in my stack of Things To Be Read Real Soon Now. (Along with Capek's R.U.R., ORBIT 21, some mystery magazines from 1992, and a fifteen-year run of BEDSIDE GUARDIAN.) I finally got around to it, and it was a fairly good read. Basically a cyberpunk novel that starts with street gangs, goes to an Australian colony of S&M lovers, and ends up with corporate warfare. The imagery of the book is excellent and would make this novel a nightmare to convert to a movie. Computer FX are nowhere near the stage where they can faithfully translate to film the scenes that the reader can imagine in his/her own mind. This is incidentally the reason why I pity mediafans, who cannot imagine for themselves a scene, only able to see what some Hollywood producer was able to do. Get-a-lifers who must dress up as a Trekkie can only dress up as what they have been shown. But everyone reads a book in a different frame of mind and imagines it in a different way.

DeBrandt's basic premise is Infinite Range Television, a process that allows monitoring any number of alternative universes. Virge, the hero, is a top-class man who can monitor large numbers of screens looking into other universes. He, and everyone else, is searching for ideas that can be used in this world, preferably patentable ideas. The novel certainly starts off with a snappy opening: "In the corridors of an I-blind buried two hundred feet below an island forest, an alarm cycled. It had been doing so ever since Scanning Chamber One had gone rogue."

The only major flaw, at least to my eyes, was Virge having had his abilities enhanced by being injected with acetylcholinesterase inhibitor, which enabled him to assimilate data faster and easier. To most people

this chemical is mumbo-jumbo, but anyone who works in the medical field, or, in my case, pest control, will recognize it at once.

The nervous system consists of nerve cells lined up in a row. Transmission of impulses along the system is done electrically along the cells. But between each cell is a gap that must be bridged by the impulse. When the electrical impulse hits the end of the nerve cell, it triggers the release of a chemical called acetylcholine (ACH). The ACH crosses the gap to the next cell and on contact sets off an electrical impulse, which travels down that cell to repeat the process at the next gap. The ACH must be removed by an enzyme called acetylcholinesterase, otherwise it will continue to cause the nerve cell to fire off electrical impulses. Pest control operators study about this process because many groups of insecticides, such as organophosphates or carbamates, act as cholinesterase inhibitors. Insects and humans have the same type of nervous system. These pesticides prevent ACH from being neutralized, causing the nerve cells to fire blindly and continuously. A mild dose causes convulsions and spasms, a larger dose causes organs to begin contracting at random (thus nausea in humans because the stomach muscles contract and expand at random), and a lethal dose disrupts the beat of the heart and the brainwave patterns. I cannot believe that a cholinesterase inhibitor would be used to improve intellectual ability; it would have the opposite effect. It would have been better to give the enhancer a made-up name. No sense in getting too specific, for such only allows nitpickers to annoy the author. Since this chemical is an important plot item, this is more than just a minor detail.

Setting that aside, we move on to the IRTV. It does have major effects on humanity. Coups become more frequent as IRTV watchers saw they succeeded in a different universe, so why not here? The candle effect of IRTV is a nightmare for everyone, and that even though IRTV is believed to be a one-way process. Our universe can receive

but not transmit. Or so it is believed. When the possibility arises of being able to transmit, things start to happen. Virge is not only on the run since it appears to others that he is at the heart of the matter, but he begins to have trouble separating his reality from the IRTV possibilities. He can never be sure if he sees the truth or just another dream within a dream. The ending I like. For years, I've been fed up with stories in which the hero is the centre of the universe; this is why I don't read very much fantasy, because I can't take yet another humble village lad who turns out to be the rightful heir to the throne. Virge, however, turns out to not be the rightful heir.

DeBrandt certainly knows how to enliven his novel and bring in details to catch a reader's interest. One alternative universe on IRTV: "The monitor was showing clips from a cult riot in Scotland, retrocelts in animal skins and tartans battling neodruids wearing plastic body armor and blue facemasks."

"No, Virge thought. Reality was much stranger."

Indeed. Virge has an artist friend who wired a optic nerve into a computer. "Like redesigning reality, see? I mean, if I program in silver for blue, jagged edges for soft curves, and variable intensity in light sources, a sunny day with a few clouds becomes a chrome sky filled with craggy white boulders lit by strobelight ..."

Another item mentioned throughout is interactive video tactile art, where feeling a sculpture generates images before one's eyes. This one even seems plausible for today's technology; perhaps it's been done and I just haven't heard about it. Sleeches are gene engineered leeches that inject drugs; an addict can stick one on and stay high for a week.

A recommended book.

SCHOOL DAYS

I never cease to be amazed at what I find in the Co-op Book Exchange. I hit the jackpot recently with a long run of 1950s and 1960s detective pulps, and with them some issues of THE RAMPANT. This was and may still be the magazine of Kent College, Canterbury, a boys residential school in England. The issues at hand are from 1924 to 1929. The name 'Souter' is handwritten on some copies, and indeed the name is found inside in the reports of the 'houses'. The boys belonged to either the Red, Blue, or White house, the three constantly competing for various awards and in field hockey, cricket, and football. Souter is shown in a team photograph in a 1929 issue; I guess he is about 12 or 13. This puts him in his late 70s if he is still alive today. I suspect that he is either dead or in a nursing home if his personal effects are showing up in the Book Exchange. Judging by his standings in the lists of sports activities and scholastic marks, he was mediocre in the truest sense of the word; almost invariably he is in the middle of the standings. He belonged to Red House and the photograph shows him on the cricket team.

THE RAMPANT is a typeset digest-sized magazine. It was distributed to the boys with intent that it should be taken home to the parents. Lots of chatty reports about school activities and standings. The boys contributed stories and poems, almost always bad parodies. The last issue, dated December 1929, contains a parody of a stock market report about school uniforms, etc.: "There has been a liquidation of wine gums and a stiffening up of quaker oats.". Every issue contains a lament about rain. From incidental mentions, I gather that Kent College was on top of a hill, but their playing fields were constantly under water and the basement flooded every so often. Games were cancelled frequently. This had the advantage of allowing the school to blame its defeats by other schools as a result of not being able to get in sufficient practice.

In 1924, jazz was still daring stuff. A school dance is condemned as follows: "... when music is produced by a concatenation of symbols, any one of which in itself would be displeasing to the ear, then we have that music which is the characteristic art of the modern savage. Some people call it 'jazz' for want of a better name, but it seems unfair to give such a terrifying appellation to the primitive music produced by the Johnny Jones' orchestra." Notwithstanding the editor's fulminations, Johnny Jones did a few more school dances, and seems to have been popular with the boys. After a year or so, the editor quietly dropped his campaign and learned to live with all that jazz.

The April 1925 RAMPANT discusses the new craze for cross-word puzzles, and runs one that uses the names of masters and students of Kent College. Souter has kindly filled in the puzzle, so I can tell you that #1 Across: 'Nostrum Caput' is 'Brownscombe', the Headmaster.

Epidemics were a constant problem; we tend to forget this in our day of vaccines. Kent College was on more than one occasion disrupted by disease; mumps were so bad in late 1925 as to nearly close the school.

In the late 1920s, Kent College began expanding and repairing its buildings. The boys who attended morning services at Blean, where the church had a hole in its roof, heard Vicar Lees remark that "Some people have complained of a draught which comes either from the roof, the pulpit, or the choir.". The RAMPANT editor archly remarks that "If any doubts exist as to the precise origin of the alleged draught, it is pretty certain that K.C. boys who attend morning service at Blean are well outside the boundary of suspicion, for they open not their mouths to sing.".

[continued next page]

There are regular reports about the Kent College (Canterbury) Old Boys' Club, which met at intervals for cricket matches with the School and banquets. One item of business was changing the school colours, but the greater concern was renaming the club itself. In late 1926, the proposal was made for Old Boys to become Old Kentonians. Somewhere along the way this mutated into the Old Canterburyian Club. Most of the Old Boys lived in England; if they did travel, it was invariably to India where they were bank clerks and that sort.

READ IT YOURSELF, WILYA?

I mentioned hitting a jackpot of 1950s and 1960s detective magazines. It will be a while before I get through them all, but I wanted to mention a fact article appearing in the August 1965 issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE. This zine ran frequent reports of murder and mayhem in the olden times. The report at hand is by Rabbi Y.N. ibn Aharon on "Death in Ancient Greece", and is about the origin of the idea of murder by poisoning, an idea that isn't as old as you might expect. The rabbi quotes from sources he has studied in the original Greek. But in a list of references at the end of the article is the footnote as follows.

"I have omitted all line citations to Greek authors; most modern editions don't have them, and classical scholars don't need them. If the non-classicist is forced to read the whole play to find my references, so much the better. His time could not be better spent."

VISNYK

The trident symbol is found around the world in many cultures and times, but today is generally associated either with the Greco-Roman god Poseidon/Neptune or as the emblem of Ukraine. I had always assumed that the latter had

something to do with the Trinity of Christianity. But recently I read a fascinating book by John Semeniuk of the title THE RIDDLE OF THE TRIDENT (US\$9.95 in North America, US\$9.50 overseas, from Roman Semeniuk, Box 070452, Brooklyn, New York 11207). John Semeniuk quite naturally starts off discussing the Ukrainian useage of the trident. All scholars agree that the trident as we know it today was established in medieval Ukraine (9th to 13th centuries) in what I was taught to call Kievan Rus but which Semeniuk refers to as Ruce. (An example of the difficulty in uniformly converting from the Cyrillic to Roman alphabets.) From Ruce, scholars work back in time to establish the origin of the trident. Semeniuk makes a quick side trip into attempts by Russians to downgrade the significance of the trident by claiming it was merely a heraldic symbolic of one princely family, a downgrading that took on extra importance during the Soviet regime. The Russians also appropriated the name of Ruce (Rus) but that is another story.

Semeniuk emphasizes one important aspect of the history of the trident, that it was commonly interchangeable as a symbol with the bident, a two-pronged fork. Tridentes have been elaborated and ornamented over time. The origin appears to have been in the Black Sea area long before Christianity. From there, the trident symbol was adopted in Greece, went north to Europe, and over to India. Semeniuk knocks off alternative explanations of the origin of tridents, many of which fail because they neglect to explain why bidents were equivalent and why crescent moons were often associated with them. It was surprising to learn that the trident/bident was part of thundergod cults. From there, we get into an extended discussion of the Greek connection (they had colonies around the Black Sea). Semeniuk ultimately concludes that the trident is derived from a distant past of bull worship. The bident is the point of origin, a stylized head of a horned bull. The cultures of lands in the Black Sea area depended on cattle and measured their wealth in them. The bull was the symbol of power.

BIG POCKETS

In a loc dated 1993-9-12, Buck Coulson commented to me as follows: "... what big pockets you Canadians have in your suits. I just finished reading CAMPBELL'S KINGDOM, by Hammond Innes, which takes place in Calgary and parts west, and at one point our hero sticks a Luger in his hip pocket. Now, my Luger is 8½ inches from back of action to muzzle, 5½ inches from butt to top of action, and 1½ inches across the width of the action. And butt-heavy, so you'd have to pretty well get the whole thing inside the pocket or have it fall out. I can't put it in any of my hip pockets, even on jeans, so the Canadian pocket must be much larger. Must be very convenient for carrying hand axes, box lunches, etc."

Not having read this book, I went to the library and did a quick skim through it. As it turned out, the chap who put a Luger in his pocket was an Englishman, so it must be those blighters who have the big pockets, not the Canucks. CAMPBELL'S KINGDOM was published by Collins (London) in 1952 and was originally serialized in SATURDAY EVENING POST under the title of "Nothing to Lose". The library doesn't have this periodical so I can't compare the two versions. In the author's foreword, he thanks a number of Albertans for their hospitality during his three month stay, so Innes did do a bit of on-the-ground research. In going through the novel, I found that Innes got the physical description of Calgary and points west correct, but goofed up on abstracts. He refers to the Provincial Parliament; it is called the Legislative Assembly. A building is heated by an electric fire. I am guessing that this is what we would refer to as a space heater, but in any event Calgary buildings then and now are centrally heated by natural gas. The most jarring remark is made by an oilman who says "I've got to be in Edmonton by tea time.", when he actually would have said "... by supper time.". There are a fair number who take tea in Alberta, but the term 'tea time' is not heard.

The novel begins with Bruce Campbell Wetheral going through an emotional crisis, which we later learn is caused by being diagnosed with cancer. He is visited by a solicitor acting for Donald McCrae & Acheson, a law firm in Calgary, regarding his grandfather's will. Grandfather Stuart Campbell emigrated to Alberta in 1926, set up an oil company, and spent his life trying to find oil in the British Columbian part of the Rocky Mountains. An obituary of him is quoted, ostensibly from a newspaper called the CALGARY TRIBUNE. No such paper, but later in the novel Innes mentions the CALGARY HERALD, which does exist. The solicitor tries to stampede Wetheral into selling the inherited land for a hydroelectric project. Wetheral, however, makes up his mind to leave England and go west.

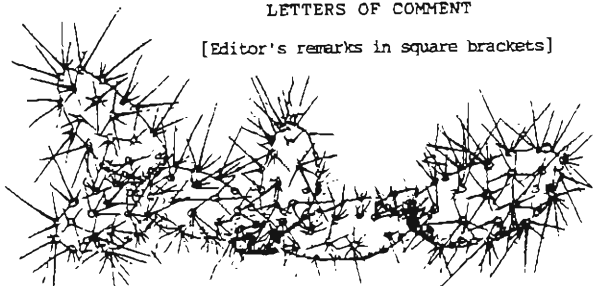
He arrives in Calgary, and stays at the Palliser Hotel, then as now the most prestigious hotel in town, a palatial railway-owned hostelry. He visits the office of DMSA who put more pressure on to sell, but Wetheral smells a rat. He travels out to see his inheritance, but on the way suffers altitude sickness because of anaemia from his cancer. (As an aside, visiting sports teams have a poor record against Calgary teams if they are from eastern North America because the city is one kilometre above sea level and has very dry air.)

Wetheral discovers why there was so much pressure on him; the bad guys had assumed he would sell and had started work on the dam without waiting for the papers. An oil well is drilled but is flooded by the dam. All ends okay though, as the dam bursts due to the lowest bidder having supplied the concrete. Wetheral's cancer goes into spontaneous remission, he gets the girl, and everybody is happy save the bad guys.

The story is a routine mystery, and I wouldn't suggest you spend much time trying to locate a copy. But it is of mild interest to Cowtowners.

LETTERS OF COMMENT

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Andrew Murdoch 1993-10-5
 2563 Heron Street
 Victoria, British Columbia V8R 5Z9

Now that the Cold War is over, it's interesting to see relics of it like that nuclear war survival plan for Calgary you mentioned. Personally I can't see why Calgary would be nuked. Is there some military or government significance that I am unaware of, or is it just a convenient mass of potential civilian casualties? You reminded me of how much danger we in Victoria were, holding this coast's major naval base. Since Calgary is on the prairie you were able to run in virtually any direction. Victoria is crowded into the southern tip of Vancouver Island, so the only way to run is north or steal a boat.

[Calgary was and is a target because it is the headquarters of the Canadian petroleum industry and because it is a garrison town, the base of numerous regular and militia regiments. This city straddles the contact between the Rocky Mountains and the prairie. One would have a choice between going north towards additional bombs hitting the radar base south of Red Deer, east or south on the tree-

less prairie where there would be no protection from the blast or fallout, or going west on a narrow mountain highway and sitting in huge traffic jams. This is why Calgary authorities eventually abandoned any serious attempt to prepare for atomic warfare; there is simply no place to hide.]

FROM: Buck Coulson 1993-9-9
 2677W-500N
 Hartford City, Indiana 47348

Things looked serious in the 1960s. The Coulson house was picked as a place to make for by fans in Indianapolis, Columbus (Ohio), and a few in Chicago. It was mostly treated as a joke; "If the bombs fall, you'll be seeing us", but some fans were adding up who had which specialties and thus who would be most valuable. The advantage of our house was that it was in the country, well distant from military targets. Everyone would settle in and we'd live off the land and my theoretical knowledge of farming. Besides which, I had a good supply of weapons and ammo to discourage non-fan refugees. Some alternate history for you: I stuck in a mention of a group of survivors in northern Indiana in my 'after-the-Bomb' book, but didn't go into details.

FROM: Harry Andruschak 1993-9-9
 Box 5309
 Torrance, California 90510-5309

Ah yes, atomic war. Living here in Los Angeles, one of the biggest jokes would be about evacuating the population. We get tieups every day just from daily commuters. Trying to jam the population on a mass exodus to the few passes in the mountains around L.A. is a joke. To kill everyone, just a few bombs on the roads out of town would seal everyone in. Then knock out the water

[continued next page]

pipelines and it would be all over. You wouldn't even need to use any hydrogen bombs; low-yield fission bombs would do quite nicely. I suppose the Russians targeted Los Angeles with a few megatonners. The Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, where I used to work, would be an obvious target with its communication lines and networks.

FROM: Harry Warner Jr.
423 Summit Avenue
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

1993-9-27

Hagerstown and immediate vicinity were in almost as dangerous a situation as Calgary in the years when nuclear conflict with Russia seemed possible. We are only 70 miles from Washington and much closer to what is unofficially called the Underground Pentagon, an under-a-mountain facility where national leaders would try to take shelter in case of attack, about 20 miles away. Camp David is about the same distance, and there are several key military facilities within a 30 mile radius. If the millions living in the Washington and Baltimore areas decided to evacuate before the bombs fell, most of them would have headed westward to the wilderness areas of Pennsylvania and West Virginia. This would have resulted in hopeless traffic blockages on highways running through this county. There are persistent rumours that West Virginia authorities intended to blow up the bridges between their state and Maryland over the Potomac River to keep mobs from entering West Virginia.

FROM: Mark R. Harris
3712 North Broadway #190
Chicago, Illinois 60613

1993-10-17

The whole zine world is interesting, and it is definitely worth time and energy to explore the vastness of it as fully as possible, like the starship USS Enterprise scoot-

ing about the universe. I was lucky enough to meet Pete of DISHWASHER when he passed through Chicago a few months ago. Interestingly enough, in light of your speculation that few wrestling fans read jazz reviews, Evan Ginzburg, editor of WRESTLING THEN AND NOW, is a fan of both and wrote about this in Jack Thompson's SWELLSVILLE #12: "Is jazz and rasslin' really such a strange combo?"

FROM: Alexander Vasilkovsky
poste restante, General P.O.
252001, Kiev-1, Ukraine

1993-10-19

Ukrainian money, karbovantsi, are just paper. Apart from 10,000 and 20,000 krb notes introduced this summer the 50,000 krb note was introduced in late August and increased inflation rate. 100,000 krb note may follow by the end of October. With 50% per month inflation, we may have 1,000,000 krb note as the Christmas gift from the government. Its clumsy economic policy only worsens the situation, especially in August and September. Only the Moscow riot slowed somewhat the fast sinking of karbovanets. The average exchange rate as of today is US\$1 = 21,000 krb. This year Ukraine may win the second place in world inflation race. The first undoubtedly has been already won by Yugoslavia or what has remained of it. When they introduced new dinar, it was approximately equal to one Soviet rouble. When Ukraine introduced karbovanets, it was precisely equal to Soviet rouble. Russian rouble is Soviet rouble renamed. Today US\$1 = 1,200 roubles = 21,000 karbovantsi = 100,000,000 dinar.

To keep CHERNOBYLIZATION alive in these circumstances was unthinkable without sponsorship. And we managed to get one, from RIA-PRESS publishing corporation for which I work full-time and Boris Sidyuk part-time. Without their financial support CH. #6 could not be possible.

FROM: Paula Johanson 1993-11-15
 1594 Mortimer Street
 Victoria, British Columbia V8P 3A6

My new address is above. I've got my mail forwarding from the farm [in Legal, Alberta] but Canada's Post Awful doesn't always let my correspondents know the new address. I expect I'll have to pay up for the rest of the year and then some to be getting all my mail. Manuscripts coming back from editors travel very slowly, a year's response time is not uncommon.

And people wonder why book publishers don't make stacks of money! It's tabloids that make money among newspapers, True Thrilling Pandering Stories that make money among magazines, and Instant Books On Sensational Crimes that make money on drugstore book racks. At least part of it has gotta be the ability to market the currently popular material (flavour of the month). I have noticed a response time to manuscript submissions of mere days to three weeks from these publishers. Like all editors, they have to turn down a bunch of submissions, and these guys do it fast. Mainstream publishers take much longer for many reasons, one of which is the effort to produce quality product. By the time a book is in the stores, the flavour of the month is different. This leads to books that were really great when written and which the editor really believed would sell, but which are returned from bookstores that can't sell them like a litre of milk or a loaf of bread.

I've just heard that my first book NO PARENT IS AN ISLAND will be published in April 1994 by Hummingbird Press. Not SF but it is SF friendly.

FROM: Rodney Leighton 1993-10-18
 R.R. 3
 Pugwash, Nova Scotia BOK ILO

A bit of a note on your comments re: mailing and Customs.

It should be noted that nothing happens to the recipient if Canada Customs happen to confiscate an item. They just send out a notice that such-and-such is illegal to import into Canada. You have the option of appealing, which will do you little good. The easiest and safest method of getting questionable zines across the border is to use plain brown envelopes.

FROM: Ned Brooks 1993-9-10
 713 Paul Street
 Newport News, Virginia 23605

I have seen several books based on the media treatment of either the Crucifixion or the Second Coming. THE LATE J.C. by Duane Schmidt (WH Books, Des Moines, Iowa 1972) is done entirely in the form of newspaper clipping excerpts. Here, as in the Jackman book, Jesus has the surname Davidson. He is born in a travel trailer in Iowa in 1930 and grows up to be a hippie radical who is shot and stabbed to death on the steps of the Superior Court building in New York. The newspaper clippings are assembled by a researcher in 2025.

FROM: Joseph Nicholas 1993-10-1
 5A Frinton Road, Stamford Hill
 London N15 6NH, England

You may be interested to know that THE DAVIDSON AFFAIR is the first of a loose trilogy about the events, the other two of which are SLINGSHOT and THE BURNING MEN.

SLINGSHOT focuses on the attempt by Barabbas and his Jewish Zealots to foment an insurrection in Jerusalem to coincide with Davidson's entry into the city, when he will be proclaimed king of the Jews and become the figurehead of a nationwide revolt. The Zealots have assault rifles and captured armoured personnel carriers, and easily overpower the Jerusalem garrison, whose ted-

[continued next page]

ious guard duties have made them fat and lazy. But Davidson refuses to accept the role mapped out for him by Barabbas, and withdraws from the city after one speech outside the Temple. The Zealots lose heart and decide to call off their revolt to await better circumstances. Several are killed or captured by crack Roman troops brought in from outside the city; among the captured is Barabbas. His followers attempt to get him released in exchange for a kidnapped Roman general, but the kidnapping is bungled and the general dies. The last chance to free Barabbas, therefore, is on the eve of his execution, when Pilate offers clemency to a prisoner of the crowd's choice. Because the Zealots have infiltrated the crowd, and feel, naturally enough, that they've been let down by Davidson, the crowd calls for Barabbas. Barabbas goes free, and Davidson goes to his execution between two of the Zealot guerillas in a grubby basement. The novel follows the familiar lines of the thriller format, and although it lacks the depth of THE DAVIDSON AFFAIR, it has some good points to make about the choices people make, or don't make, at key moments.

THE BURNING MEN is much less successful than either of the others. It again features Cassius Tennel, again pursuing the rumour's of Davidson's resurrection and attempting to make contact with his disciples, the 'burning men' who talk in tongues and appear and disappear from market-places throughout Galilee. As before, all he has to go on are reports of their sighting by others; he never meets them himself. Which is, I think, where the novel starts to run out of steam, not only repeating elements of THE DAVIDSON AFFAIR but failing to add anything new to them. It peters out, rather than concludes.

One thing which is particularly interesting about THE DAVIDSON AFFAIR is Jackman's view of the future of television, which I think was remarkably prescient for its time. In Britain, in 1966, we had precisely two TV channels, both of which started up in the late afternoon for

the children's programmes, and closed down between 23h00 and midnight, when all good parents were supposed to be tucking themselves up in bed. An argument in 1966 that television would become a parade of unenlightening trivia rather than, as it was seen at the time, an educative window on the world, was very unusual.

FROM: Joseph Major
4701 Taylor Boulevard #8
Louisville, Kentucky 40215-2343

1993-9-13

The issue of other realms of zinedom makes me think of Nikki Lynch's editorial in MIMOSA #14 on the zine scene. The Lynches were interviewed for a WASHINGTON POST article on 'The Zine Scene'. When the article came out it featured many of the same zines as you have been mentioning, but not the Lynches. It seemed they were too old, settled, and serious to be considered in the same breath as the young, hip (or to use the proper term, 'phat'), with-it crowd doing zines to be discussed in the article. Ever think you would live to see the day when SF fanzine editor/publishers were considered to be too old, serious, and mature?

[In a word, yes. But actually I prefer to keep a low profile mass-mediawise since I would not be prepared to handle a sudden influx of requests/locs/trades increasing my print run substantially. About a year or so ago I had been solicited to appear on CBC Calgary radio but declined because I would have been with mediafans, UFO nuts, and psychics. It reminded me of the famous actor who refused to appear on the cover of PEOPLE magazine because "I'm not a recovering alcoholic or drug addict, was never abused as a child, refuse to be photographed in a hot tub or lounging on a bed, in short, I am not a typical PEOPLE subject.]

[continued next page]

[Joseph included a copy of an article from Marty Helgesen in RADIO FREE THULCANDRA #23 which discussed THE DAVIDSON AFFAIR, the two books mentioned in the previous loc by Joseph Nicholas, and a final sequel (1982) called THE DAVIDSON FILE which was simply a rehash of the first book. It appears that Jackman had a one-book idea that was stretched into four.]

FROM: Brian Earl Brown 1993-11-1
11675 Beaconsfield
Detroit, Michigan 48224

I'd not heard of ALPHABET CITY before you reviewed that magazine in OPUNTIA #12.1, and its discussion of nationalist movements around the world. They mention the possibility of trouble between English-speaking Americans and Hispanics. Certainly that's going to be true. I've heard stories of people who cancelled their vacations in Florida when they realized that everyone around them was speaking Spanish. In California, they're blaming the state's economic woes on the wetback problem. But a much bigger problem than that, I think, is the growing problem of self-segregation of whites and blacks in the USA.

I don't think that 'historians, philologists, and ethnographers' are the ones responsible for the rebirth of nationalism. Much springs from the decline of imperialism and the embarrassment with it that has allowed repressed minorities to aspire to political power and redress of ancient blood feuds. This trend of nationalism can be linked to the cult of victimization. Convincing people they are oppressed by another group and need a leader to fight that oppression is a sure step to political power.

Calling Sharyn McCrumb the Salman Rushdie of fandom has a certain amount of truth to it. A lot of people feel she has insulted fandom and want nothing to do with her. I have refused to buy her ZOMBIES OF THE GENE POOL, at least

as a new book, for just that reason. I will not contribute a cent to her career. On the other hand I did pick up a couple of her mysteries used, which profits her nothing. I read one, THE WINDSOR KNOT, which was mostly about a wedding in a screwball southern family. Most of the characters were treated sympathetically, in marked contrast to BIMBOS where few were. There is, however, a hardheaded quality, a flavour of utilitarianism, to many of the main character's decisions. She's getting married in order to wangle an invitation to meet the Queen, she picks a certain aunt to plan the wedding because she's good at it, etc.. People are used because they are useful. Affection for its own sake seems missing. And that's with the characters she likes. Apparently among those she has no especial feel for she gets rather snitty.

[I have most of McCrumb's novels. The mysteries are mostly part of a series about one character who is obviously McCrumb's alter ego. As with the SF books, I find the most fascinating part of them is how one can psychoanalyse McCrumb, because she puts so much of her beliefs into the characters. She is from Virginia, thus the sympathetic treatment of southerners, and her intolerance towards SFers, tartan tamfoolery, and other things outside her ken is quite obvious.]

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Robert Sabella, 24 Cedar Manor Court,
Budd Lake, New Jersey 07828

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Chester Cuthbert, Jess Hilliard, Ben Schilling, Lloyd Penney, Ken Cheslin, David Drew, Henry Welch, David Barry, John Thiel