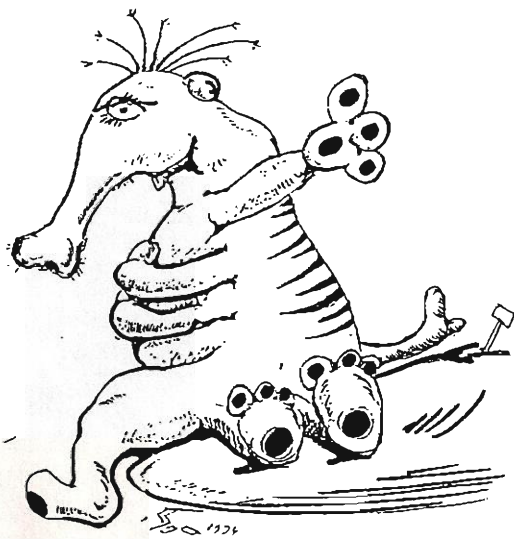
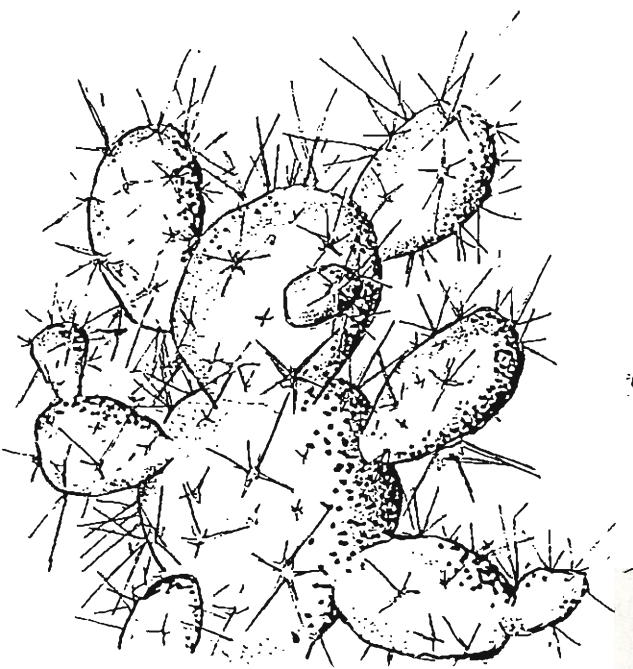


OPUNTIA

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OPUNTIA is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Canada. The cover art is by Franz Miklís, Nussdorf, Austria. Garth Spencer lives in Vancouver, Canada.

EDITORIAL: Normally each issue of OPUNTIA is 16 pages, in the same format as this issue. I can't afford to distribute 1000 copies of a 16-pager, but a 4-pager is simply a double-sided flyer, much cheaper to print. I will be distributing most copies of this ish at Con-Adian in Winnipeg, but some will go out at ConVersion in Calgary and perhaps other SF cons if opportunity is available.

WHAT I LEARNED FROM MINDING OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESS

Garth Spencer on Canadian fanhistory

From the late 1970s and early 1980s onward, Canadian fanzines have featured occasional articles on fanhistory. Taral Wayne wrote occasionally on fanhistory in Toronto's *Luna and Beyond ...* and *New Canadian Fandom*. Other NCF articles included Michael Dann's biographical piece on Nils Helmer Frome, an early B.C. fan noted as a good artist by Sam Moskowitz in *Science Fiction Studies* (Vol. 12, 1985). Frome published two issues of *Supernatural Stories*, in 1937 and 1938, and *Fantasy Pictorial* in May 1938. Luc Pomerleau published his "Ten Years of Quebec Fandom" in NCF. Other articles have appeared in *Maple Leaf Rag* (Victoria), *Torus*

(from Ottawa) and the *Ottawa SF Statement*. Dale Speirs' *Opuntia* (Calgary) regularly features fanhistory.

A few themes have emerged already. The earliest Canadian fans appeared as early as fandom itself, although in the 1930s they were few and isolated. Most of the earliest Canadian fans appeared in the Toronto area, from the 1940s onward. Canadian population centres are usually concentrated in the south, up against the American border. This means that they are usually at least some hours' drive away from each other, and may have much more frequent contact with fans across the border. Canadian fandom tends to come down to regional, if not municipal groups. The upshot is that Canadian fanhistory has appeared as a series of narratives about separate fan communities.

Their independence may be a good thing, insofar as it encourages original, spontaneous fanactivity, new kinds of fun to do together. It can be a problem when communication from earlier committees fails, and fans run into the classic fanish organizational problems.

The earliest Canadian fan groups appeared in Toronto and Vancouver. Today there are fan communities in Halifax, Wolfville, and Fredericton (the Maritimes), Quebec City, Montreal (in Quebec), Ottawa, Toronto and London (in Ontario), Winnipeg (Manitoba), Calgary (Alberta), Vancouver and Victoria (B.C.). There have been groups reported in Lethbridge (Alberta), Regina and Yorkton (Saskatchewan). Conventions are being held regularly in Calgary, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal and the Halifax area; Boreal, the Quebec writers' francophone convention, perambulates from place to place in the province.

A brief rundown of the origins of contemporary fan groups:

Vancouver's B.C. Science Fiction Association, originating in the 1960s at the University of British Columbia, was possibly the earliest appearing fan group in western Canada. Until 1977 their regular convention, V-Con, was one of the few conventions in western North America. *BCSFazine*, BCSFA's monthly clubzine and newsletter, is traded around the world. V-Con has been in suspension since V-Con 20, in 1993.

The Edmonton SF and Comic Art Society, founded in the mid-1970s at the University of Alberta, was for a time the largest and most active Canadian fan group. At its height in the late 1970s, ESFCAS founded NonCon, Alberta's perambulating regional convention, in 1978; it has been hosted in Calgary, Banff (as Banffcon), and Red Deer.

When ESFCAS first took form, fannish activity seemed to be concentrated more on self-publication than on conventions. ESFCAS members produced a great many fanzines in the late 1970s, such as *Ncology*, a well-known, entertaining, respected clubzine; *The Monthly Monthly*, shared in rotation by an editorial collective; *Compound Fracture*, *Weird Tails*, *New Canadian Fandom*, Robert Runté's Canadian newszine; and John Durno's *You Can't Get to Heaven on Roller Skates Infrequently*.

A good many APAs were also set up about that time. If you haven't run across them before, APAs [Amateur Publication Associations] were a sort of closed, circular fanzine; each member of the APA sent in a contribution of at least so many pages per mailing, an Official Editor collated these contributions, and then sent the collations out to all the members. Different APAs focused, at least initially, on different topics or themes. And no, sigs and bulletin boards

have not assumed the same function. The most prolific Edmonton APA OEs were Rob and Derek McCulloch, who set up Star Trek, comics and even James Bond topical APAs. Derek McCulloch later moved to California and was a partner in Strawberry Jam Comics, an independent comic book title.

Veterans of ESFCAS set up two literary cons, ConText I in 1989 and ConText II in 1991, which could not continue financially but probably helped produce SF Canada, the writer's group, and *On Spec*, the semiprofessional speculative fiction quarterly. Former ESFCAS members have gone on to professional writing, and participation in SF Canada. ESFCAS has been in suspension but may revive.

Winnipeg was the home of the fanzine-oriented Decadent Winnipeg Fandom, a group of friends publishing from the mid- to late 1970s. Members have since moved on to Minneapolis (Garth Danielson), Edmonton (Randy Reichardt), or professional writing (Steve George). Since the early 1980s Winnipeg has been the home of Star Trek Winnipeg, which in 1984 founded the annual Keycon. Another Manitoba convention has recently started up in Brandon.

I have characterized Calgary as the second hardest fan group to document, after Maritimes fandom. Current Calgary fandom traces back largely to DEC, a single group founded in 1978, which hosted NonCons 4 and 6, and veterans of which staffed NonCons 11 and 16. Differences over policy at NonCon 6 led to the founding of ConVersion in 1984, which was followed by an efflorescence of Calgary conventions. The ConVersion SF Society's fanzine *XenoFile* bid briefly to succeed Michael Skeet's *MLR* as Canada's newszine.

For some reason Saskatchewan fandom is still sporadic. A Harland Ronning, in Saskatchewan, was the Official Editor of CANADAPA for a while; he has not been heard from in

some years. Another APA (Half-Remembered Dreams), OE'd by someone named Pukka T. in Yorkton, has apparently disappeared. (More information will be welcome.) Georges Giguère, of Edmonton, once reported on "Wandering Star", an SCA-like group also in Yorkton, inspired by the elven people in *Elfquest* and in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*; again, nothing more has been heard from this group since 1987. Regina briefly hosted a Speculative Fiction Society, founded by Dave Panchyk in 1987, which produced five issues of *Spūtrian* (a clubzine), and held a one-day literary con. Panchyk moved to Edmonton in the early 1990s. Apart from notice of NoPraircon, held in May 1993, nothing more has been heard from Regina.

You may notice that usually one or two cities per province are cited here as fan centres; that is partly because population tends to be concentrated in the south, and partly because, until recently, there were one or at the most two SF clubs per city. Now, clubs that go back to the 1960s and 1970s are accompanied by several Star Trek-inspired, comics, or gaming clubs, and we are starting to hear of more northern fans, such as the U.S.S. Endeavour in Prince George.

One interesting feature of Canadian fandom is that, every now and then, someone proposes to link Canadian fans together, most often through a national newszine. The 1940s and 1950s fanzine *Canadian Fandom* was not actually an early attempt at a newszine, but it was a member of the Canadian Alliance of Fan Publishers (which basically amounted to an imprint on a collection of fanzines). In the 1970s, Vaughn Fraser founded CANADAPA, which was intended as a forum for Canadian fans but was overcome with media- and comics fans.

From 1981 to 1985, Robert Runté was publishing *New Canadian Fandom*. Robert was concerned to establish that there *was* a Canadian regional fandom, and a growing body of Canadian SF and fantasy writers. It now appears more likely that there are Northeast, Midwest and Pacific Northwest fandoms overlapping the border, with Quebec fandom forming a realm to itself. NCF came out more and more seldom from 1982 on. When a fan in Victoria started *Maple Leaf Rag*, Robert passed on the news function to him, and NCF became a genzine until 1985.

Other national fan institutions started during NCF's printing history — the Canadian SF and Fantasy Awards, and the Canadian Unity Fan Fund. During MLR's printing history, Canadian fans put the awards (now called Auroras) on a sounder footing, and revived the Fan Fund in the hope of making Canadians from different regions better acquainted.

Michael Skeet (a transplanted ESFCAS member in Toronto) started up his own newszine, *MLR*, when *Maple Leaf Rag* folded in 1987. When *MLR* folded, a fanzine in Calgary called *Xenophile* proposed to carry on the news function. Today, the Canadian national newszine is *Under the Ozone Hole*, edited in Victoria (again) by Karl Johanson and John Herbert. It's an odd thing that most of the newszines have come from Western Canada.

Two or three other national institutions started in the late 1980s or early 1990s, these of a more professional nature: SF Canada, the national writers' organization (with offices in Edmonton and Victoria), and *On Spec*, a semiprofessional magazine of speculative fiction (also with an address in Edmonton).