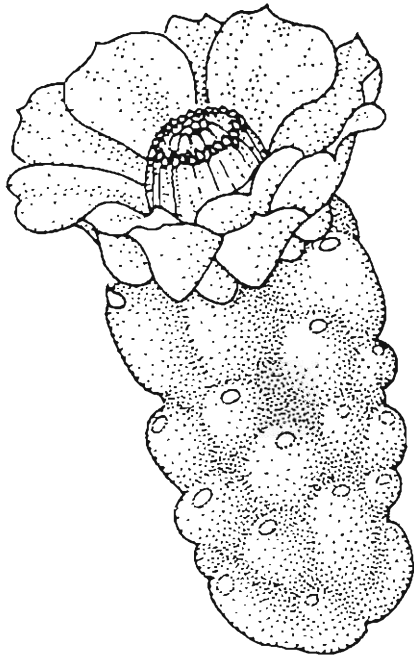


**OPUNTIA**

**44.1D**



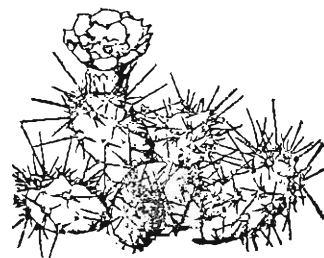
**OPUNTIA** is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zinc, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage.

Whole-numbered OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, and x.5 issues are perzines.

**COVER ART CREDIT:** *Consolea picardae* is a new opuntioid species recently separated from *Opuntia* by A.E. Areces-Mallea, who also did the drawing. From the January/February 2000 issue of CACTUS AND SUCCULENT JOURNAL (U.S.), pages 41-46

**I ALSO HEARD FROM:** Scott Crow, Lloyd Penney, Randall Tin-ear, Karen Johnson, E.B. Frohvet, Ginger Mason, Henry Welch, Antonio Kruger, Sheryl Birkhead, Chester Cuthbert, Pascal Lenoir, Jeff Ninjilacious, Harry Andruschak, John Held Jr, Steve Jeffery, Joseph Nicholas, Picasso Gaglione, Bruce Pelz, Robert Sabella, Andrew York

LETTERS  
TO THE  
EDITOR  
[Editor's  
remarks  
in square  
brackets]



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

1999-12-21

There are exceptions to the general rule that collectors are somewhat fickle and the market may dry up after a half-century or so. Baseball cards, for instance, continue to bring good prices, in five figures in the case of one particular rarity. I suspect that some collectibles reach their peak in about a half-century because they are sought for nostalgia reasons by persons who like them as young people. I think this may have happened to dime novels. They were getting a lot of publicity around mid-1900s but I've read almost nothing about them in recent years. By now there's practically nobody left to remember having enjoyed them as kids. So, is the same thing about to happen to the market for the early prozines and SF hardcovers published before World War Two?

[Fad collectibles such as collector-edition comics (not intended for reading), Beanie Babies, Pokemon and other trading cards, and pogs are not likely to survive because they are artificially sustained by mass-market advertising, not a natural base of collectors. Long-term collectibles that will survive are stamps, books, and coins, because they have natural markets. People collect those items not just out of nostalgia but as historical items or thematic collections (cacti on stamps, Roman coins, Sherlock Holmes books).]

[This is subject to the proviso that survivability does not equate to price. The USA Elvis stamps, for example, are already worth less than face value if you try to sell mint sheets to dealers because so many were printed. The Zeppelin stamps issued by the USA back in the 1930s, on the other hand, are holding their value after being briefly inflated to higher levels by fad collectors during the 1980s. I don't think SF or mystery magazines or books will decline much in price since the number of copies is dwindling (blame acid paper and careless handling) and the demand will be boosted by Internet sales such as eBay auctions. I believe that e-commerce will be the saviour of genuine collectibles because dealers can now afford to handle items which may have low demand locally or not be worth cataloguing but can be sold by on-line auction or Website advertising.]

The changes in recording media are alarming because they are accelerating. The flat 78-rpm record was far ahead of all competing recording methods like cylinder discs for a half-century. The LP era lasted about 35 years. Now the CD seems to be threatened by new types of disks before it has reached its twentieth birthday. Will there eventually need to be a Recording Machine of the Year club, which will provide the latest type of mechanism each December to enable members to play the latest innovatory recordings?

[My understanding is that DVD players are backwards-compatible with CDs and can play them. What bothers me is that so much good stuff on vinyl will never be updated into new media.]

FROM: Russ Forster

1999-12-27

23145 Melrose

East Pointe, Michigan 48021

I wouldn't argue that 8-tracks are the pinnacle of recorded sound (vinyl is still my favourite) but I would rate most 8-tracks higher than cassettes. The real point is that it's the music not the format that should be the most important factor. Is a mediocre Pink Floyd album worth \$227 on any format? Not for me!

6325 Keystone Street  
Simi Valley, California 93063

You receive a greater variety of publications in trade than just about anybody. I think I've always been aware that other fields have their own fanzines, but I've never tried to pursue publications from any of these other fields. I receive a fair number of SF and related fanzines, but I'm only receiving a fraction of the fanzines from the English-speaking world. The thought of trying to participate in an even larger field of amateur publishing stretching off into infinity is a little unsettling. I suppose my attitude might be the core reason for the fragmentation of fandom. Different people can deal with different amounts of material, and nobody wants to deal with more than they can handle.

[You can, however, dabble slightly in other fields. I only participate in a few mail art projects, just enough for the fun of it. Punkzines are read and enjoyed but I don't go out to raves. The Papernet is nearly infinite but one only has to connect to a few nodes.]

## ZINE LISTINGS

by Dale Speirs

[The Usual means \$2 or \$3 cash, trade for your zine, or letter of comment on a previous issue. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable around the world.]

**Pink Mind Wallabies #1** (The Usual from Karen Pender-Gunn, Box 567, Blackburn, Victoria 3130, Australia) A memorial issue to her husband Ian, dead too young of cancer at age 40. Various articles by him written just before his death, and a few by Karen.

**CounterClock #7** (The Usual from Wolf von Witting, Lakegatan 8, 13341 Saltsjobaden, Sweden) In English, about Swedish and other European fandom, with convention reports, fanhistory, and news reports. An excellent view of fandoms unilingual anglophones usually remain in ignorance of.

**Shipyard Blues 2000** (The Usual from John D. Owen, 4 Highfield Close, Newport Pagnell MK16 9AZ, England) Thoughts on Chechnya and the trouble it will cause Russia for decades to come, cybernews, and music reviews. Extended essays on Stanislaw Lem, and the message of Babylon 5 and how easy it is to lose freedom.

**Covert Communications From Zeta Corvi #4** (The Usual from Andrew Murdoch, #508 - 6800 Westminster Highway, Richmond, British Columbia V7C 1C5) Reviews, SF award lists, letters of comment.

**Word Play #2** (The Usual from Scott Crow, Box 445, Clements, California 95227) Single-sheet discussing word use and mis-use, such as “the lion’s share”, ramping up, and that longtime favourite of doublespeak users, ‘mode’.

**Mani Art #125** (Pascal Lenoir, 11 Ruelle de Champagne, 60680 Grand Fresnoy, France) Mail art assembling zine. Send 60 copies of 15 cm x 21 cm artwork or 60 postcards. No black-and-white photocopies. Leave 1 cm margin on longest side. A nicely bound volume, with the postcards slipped into a pocket. The quality of the art varies from pointless scribbles dashed off to prints that show aforethought and conscientious work. Addresses of the contributors are included as part of the usual “doc to all”, so you can solicit the ones you like to join your part of the Papernet.

**Mani Art 2000 Fake Project** (Pascal Lenoir, as above) Someone circulated a hoax call for contributions in Lenoir’s name, which he didn’t know about until he saw the announcement in a British zine. When contributions began arriving, he did a graceful thing and finished off the project anyway. Same format as issue #125.

**The Bibliofantasiac #16** (The Usual from Cliff Kennedy, 39 Claremore Avenue, Scarborough, Ontario M1N 3S1) Short fiction, poetry, reviews, and letters of comment.

**Nova Science Fiction #1** (US\$6 from Wesley Kawato, 17983 Paseo Del Sol, Chino Hills, California 91709-3947) Fictionzine specializing in alternative history, not to be confused with NOVA EXPRESS, the SF reviewzine. Best story in this bunch is “Double Trouble”, when a multiverse tavern is simultaneously and accidentally double-booked by two Thousand-Year Reich groups celebrating Hitler’s 60th birthday (the old man won the war). This zine suffers from variable typefaces and a puzzling article that appears to be about gaming (it is illustrated by various labeled hexagons). Alternative history is a popular sub-branch of SF, and a zine specializing in it, with good content and production values, should do nicely.

**The Knarley Knews #78 to #80** (The Usual from Henry Welch, 1525 - 16 Avenue, Grafton, Wisconsin 53024-2017) Genzine with mostly letters of comment but a few reviews, and a bit of commentary. A trip report to Israel reads like a typical con report, cataloging sites visited, what they ate, but nothing of any substance. The Holy Land, home of great religions and centuries of conflict, is trivialized thus: “*It was a wonderful trip. We felt very safe in Israel. The ice cream was great.*”

**The Fossil #307** (Membership details from Joseph Diachenko, 9217 Mimosa Drive, La Plata, Maryland 20646) Those who think that zines began in the 1970s or as far back as the 1930s should consider this journal, devoted to the history of amateur publishing. The Fossils began in 1904, so in other words, the history of the historians themselves is rapidly approaching its first century. Zinedom began in the 1850s with cheap small printing presses, and amateur press associations (apas) were underway by the 1870s. The issue at hand comprises an article by Ken Faig Jr which traces Samuel Joshua Steinberg, an active and controversial zine publisher of the late 1800s and early 1900s. I wish more punkzine publishers could see this and realize they are nothing new. A century ago, teenaged girls were publishing zines, young men were libeling each other in print, and politicking in apa organizations made the Boer War look like an anti-climax.

**Probe #109** (The Usual from Science Fiction South Africa, Box 781401, Sandton 2146, South Africa) Nicely-produced clubzine in digest size with card covers. Lots of fiction, reviews, a learned essay of SF and psychology, and letters.

**Tortoise #7** (The Usual from Sue Jones, Flat 5, 32/33 Castle Street, Shrewsbury SY1 2BQ, England) The moving house issue, MacDonald's restaurants considered as teleportation chambers, and the Millennium celebration in Charles Darwin's home town (and hers).

**Popular Reality V436#4** (US\$1.50 from Susan Poe, 1116 Shepard Street, Lansing, Michigan 48912) Newsprint tabloid with cut-and-paste underground ads and various rants from anarchists and the lunatic fringe. The anarchists, as usual, are mostly unreadable due to bad writing and esoteric arguments about who said what to whom in their tiny little circles. Where's Stewart Home when you really need him?

**Twink #16** (The Usual from E.B. Frohvet, 4716 Dorsey Hall Drive #506, Ellicott City, Maryland 21042) Articles on the law in SF, political correctness from a woman who resents her disability being renamed more euphemistically, new ideas in SF, reviews, and letters of comment.

**Infiltration #15** (\$2 from Jeff, Box 66069, Pickering, Ontario L1V 6P7) What hackers do on the Internet, infiltrators do in buildings and tunnels, go where they aren't supposed to be. This is the maritime issue, with accounts of exploring abandoned or vacant ships in harbour, B.C. ferries in transit, and the Brent Spar on the North Sea.

**Fanzine Fanatique - Nov 99** (The Usual from Keith Walker, 6 Vine Street, Lancaster LA1 4UF, England) 4-page listing of fanzines and small-press periodicals. The average SF zine does better than this. Not worth the trouble.

**And Stuff #3** (The Usual from Doug Bell, 12 Hatherley Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 8QA) Perzine about taking up a new residence and job, a Greek tour, and letters of comment.

**Atom 2000** (L2 or US\$5 from Ken Cheslin, 29 Kestrel Road, Halesowen, West Midlands B63 2PH, England) Thick anthology of fillo art of the late Arthur Thompson.

**Erg #148** (The Usual from Terry Jeeves, 56 Red Scar Drive, Scarborough, North Yorkshire, YO12 5RQ) Historical look at pulp SF, including those riveted-plate spaceships, air aces, early aviation magazines, and self-sufficient farm life.

**It Goes On The Shelf #21** (The Usual from Ned Brooks, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720) Reviewzine that emphasizes older material deserving another look, as well as recent small-press books deserving of a wider audience.

**Limousine #9** (US\$2 from Libby Donovan, Box 11, San Mateo, California 94401-0011) Perzine of a newlywed, with personal accounts of life, reviews, and miscellaneous.

**Muuna Takeena #6** (The Usual from Timo Palonen, Hepokuja 6 B 26, FIN-01200 Vantaa, Suomi Finland) 40-page reviewzine with lots of European zines that one would never see reviewed in North American or British zines. All in English, so unilingual

anglophones can relax. Also includes a rant about why most punkzines are so cruddy; truer words were never spoken. Well recommended.

**Vanamonde #333 to #347** (The Usual from John Hertz, 236 South Coronado Street, #409, Los Angeles, California 90057) Single-sheet apazine published weekly. Reasonably understandable to those who don't belong to the apa. While each issue is thin, in a couple of months at a weekly pace they add up to a regular zine.

**Grammar Q And A #20 and #21** (IRC for sample copy from Misti and Scott Crow, Box 445, Clements, California 95227) Single-sheet zine enlightening questioning readers on the complexities of the English language. Questions include the differences between could/should/would, bring/take, whatsoever/whatever, and the correct meaning of abated.

**As The Crow Flies #2-#3** (The Usual from Frank Denton, 14654 - 8 Avenue SW, Seattle, Washington 98166-1953) Single-sheet perzine, with brief accounts of family life.

**99 Last Balloons** (The Usual from Christina Lake, 12 Hatherly Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 8QA) History of Bristol SF clubs, trip and convention reports, and letters of comment.

**Adventures Of An Unemployed Entomologist #10** (US\$2 or zine trade from Box 3026, Worcester, Massachusetts 01613-3026) No longer unemployed but now looking after a job as a technical writer. Also some reviews about insects in movies, and memories of her recently deceased father.

**For The Clerisy V7#37** (The Usual from Brant Kresovich, Box 404, Getzville, New York 14068) Lead-off article is on how to beat the craving for alcohol, which could, I think, be used just as easily for dieting. Following on is an account of Chiune Sugihara, who was the Japanese Schindler, then various reviews, and letters.

**Plokta #17** (The Usual from Alison Scott, 24 St. Mary Road, Walthamstow, London E17 9RG) Watching the Y2K River of Fire in London, how not to prepare Maple Ambrosia, bad SF convention skits, New Zealand bungie jumping, and letters of comment.

**Zine Guide #3** (US\$8 from Box 5467, Evanston, Illinois 60204) Dare I say this is the successor to FACTSHEET FIVE? Slick cover and illustrated throughout, 160 pages, and hundreds of zine reviews. Also a thoughtful essay on zine preservation in library collections and a checklist of library collections.

**Stet #9** (The Usual from Dick and Leah Smith, 410 West Willow Road, Prospect Heights, Illinois 60070-1250) Thick, nicely-

produced fanhistoryzine in card covers.

-8-

Large sections on fanhistory include Hugo and convention lists, a fanspeak lexicon, and thoughts about the future of fandom. Also articles on drinking, poisoning (for informational purposes only), and a fannish calendar.

**The Thought #117** (The Usual from Ronald Tobin, Box 10760, Glendale, Arizona 85318-0760) This issue leads off with the aftermath of Y2K, or, more accurately, the lack of an aftermath. There is the first part of an extended essay on language authoritarianism, letters of comment, and some reviews.

**Southern Fandom Confederation Bulletin V7#6** (The Usual from Julie Wall, 470 Ridge Road, Birmingham, Alabama 35206) Clubzine of an alliance of Sunbelt states SF clubs, with news and notes, listings of conventions and zines, con reports, and letters of comment.

**H2SO4 #12** (US\$5 from Jill Stauffer, Box 423354, San Francisco, California 94142) A bit of everything with essays, movie reviews (serious ones, not capsule quickies), fiction, poetry, and miscellaneous. An hilarious article on what's wrong with animal shelters and how to sort out the problem: "*Ozzy Osbourne look-alikes should be hired by the SPCA to take cardboard boxes full of kittens to the local Safeway; good Samaritans will snap up those felines within minutes ("Thank God I was there!")*".



**Artistamp News #11** (\$4 from Ed Varney, Box 3655, Vancouver, British Columbia V6B 3Y8) Nicely printed journal devoted to artistamps, what philatelists call cinderellas. Artistamps are faux postage stamps created by mail art enthusiasts, and each issue of this periodical not only reviews them but includes actual samples in a glassine envelope. Additionally, there are essays on mail art, letters of comment, and news of the mail art field.

**Ethel The Aardvark #89** (The Usual from Melbourne SF Club, Box 212, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 3005, Australia) Clubzine with news and notes, letters of comment, and book reviews.

**Think** (Mail art Usual from Sandra Garrison, Box 321, El Segundo, California 90245) Mail art assembling of collages, historical accounts and other texts, and mail art. Variable quality as is normal in mail art projects, but I particularly enjoyed the Mail Art History Revisionism which cheerfully rewrites the history of the field by using detoured photographs.

**Sugar Needle #12** (The Usual from Phlox Icona, 1174 - 2 Briarcliff, Atlanta, Georgia 30306) Zine devoted to candy, especially the weird stuff like Chocolate Russian Roulette, which contains 12 chocolate bullets, one of which has a hot chili in it. For those who'll eat anything, try the recipe for Velveeta Cheese

Fudge, one more proof of the decline of western civilization. An undated extract from POPULAR MECHANICS tells how houses will be built in the future from molasses bricks. Probably about the same time we get those aircars in every garage.

**Covert Communications From Zeta Corvi #5** (The Usual from Andrew Murdoch, #508 - 6800 Westminster Highway, Richmond, British Columbia V7C 1C5) SF thoughts, awards lists, and letters of comments.

**Warp #49** (The Usual from Montreal SF and Fantasy Association, Box 1186, Place du Parc, Montreal, Quebec H2W 2P4) Well-produced and illustrated clubzine with lots of news and notes of SFdom in central Canada, reviews, letters, and a supposed script from BABYLON 5 (Internet download, of course).

**FOSFAX #198** (The Usual from Falls of the Ohio SF and Fantasy Association, Box 37281, Louisville, Kentucky 40233-7281) 84 microprinted pages of political (American, mostly) disputation, extended book reviews (mostly SF, military, and history), and an equally extended letter column.

**PhiloSFy #14** (The Usual from Alexander Slate, 8603 Shallow Ridge, San Antonio, Texas 78239-4022) SF genzine that emphasizes discussion on ethics, in this issue related to health care and governance.

**Linguica** (Sample copy US\$2 from Sarah Ovenall, 1821 Hillandale Road, Suite 1B, PMB 132, Durham, North Carolina 27705) The theme of this apa is languages, covering every aspect from etymology to grammar to culture, although the members do veer off topic into personal life, movie reviews, etcetera.

**Point Of Divergence** (US\$10 per year for postage, plus 30 copies of your zine, double-sided 8½ x 11. Write first to Jim Rittenhouse, Box 562, Lisle, Illinois 60532, to verify vacancies are available.) This bimonthly apa requires a minimum of two pages of original material once every other issue. It is devoted to alternative history and sizes up at roughly 250 pages per bundle. World War Two and the American War Between The States tend to dominate the discussions, other alternatives are discussed as well, such as asteroid impacts, workers' revolutions, and colonialism gone awry. Solid reading; mostly essays and extended commentary but also some fiction, as some POD members are working on novels and timelines.

## **MAIL ART LISTINGS.**

**Send A Message To The Future:** (Message to the Future, Box 3655, Vancouver, British Columbia V6B 3Y8) Take the opportunity to send your personal and unique postcard message to the future. Just write, draw, paint, collage, glue a photo, or use any method you want to complete the front of an archival

postcard blank (or use any other 4 inch by 6 inch postcard). Your postcard and its message (story, poem, art, photograph) will be put in a time capsule to be opened by the Mayors of the Greater Vancouver Regional District in the year 2100. Have fun, get serious, be creative, think about it, take your time, but be sure to send your postcard to us no later than April 30, 2000, for inclusion in the Vancouver Millennium Time Capsule and for display at various venues during 2000.

**Nobel Peace Project 2000:** (Smith and Gold, R.R. #1, Box 257, Nobel, Ontario P0G 1G0) In a remote corner of Ontario, the village of Nobel was part of the arms build-up in the early years of the 20th Century. This build-up culminated in the horrors of WW1. Now, at the beginning of the 21st Century, as arms production and war economies are on the rise, Nobel will be on the site of the Nobel Peace Project. Nobel, named for Swedish chemist Alfred Nobel, is just north of Parry Sound on the Georgian Bay in the Canadian Shield.

From 1912 until its final closure in 1985, Nobel was the location of the large C.I.L. (Canadian Industries Ltd.) explosives plant. Massive amounts of explosives were manufactured; cordite, TNT, dynamite, nitroglycerine, and gelatin explosives. At one time the plant employed 4000 people, mostly women. After

Armistice Day in 1918, the demand fell off, but again expanded in preparation for WW2.

It is tragically ironic that Canada is again sending troops to foreign wars at the beginning of the 21st Century and is part of another arms buildup, the New World Order. Since we know that the Armistice in 1918 caused a fall in demand at the C.I.L. plant in Nobel, we would like to challenge this direction by stimulating an armistice mentality with the Nobel Peace Project.

Send mail art, visual poetry, postcard fictions. No jury, no media or size limitations, no returns, documentation to all. All work received will be exhibited at Upland Studio in Nobel, Ontario, and then the project will travel. All poetry received will be read at every opening. Deadline July 1, 2000.

**Home:** (Ginger Mason, Postfach 126, 5612 Villmergen, Switzerland) I've recently moved from Canada to Switzerland and am struggling with the concept of 'home'. I know it's not about changing flags, the four walls, or even necessarily where the heart is. Do you carry 'home' within you? Or on your back like a snail? What do you need to feel "at home"? Deadline October 2000. Free medium and size. Documentation to all.

**Reparation De Poesie's Artist Book #11:** (collectif Reparation de poesie, a/s de Jean-Claude Gagnon, 359 rue Lavigueur, app. 1,

Quebec, Quebec G1R 1B3) We invite you to participate in the next issue of our artist book. Send 100 original pages or multiple visual art, mail art, visual poetry, postcards, computer art, copy art. Maximum size 8.5 x 5.5 inches or 14 x 21.5 cm. No selection made. A copy of the book will be sent to each participant. The theme is free. Deadline is March 1, 2000.

**Mani Art #124:** (Pascal Lenoir, 11 Ruelle de Champagne, 60680 Grand Fresnoy, France) 60 copies of 15 cm x 21 cm artwork or 60 postcards. No black-and-white photocopies. Leave 1 cm margin on longest side. Nicely bound volume of mail art assembling, with the postcards slipped into a pocket. Addresses of the contributors are included as part of the usual "doc to all".

**Dada + 2000:** (Postkunst, c/o Lothar Trott, Turnerstrasse 39, 8006 Zurich, Switzerland) Meditation in Dada; a mail art project. What means Dada for you? Only a word or more ... Please send your very special Dada drawing, stamps, postcard, envelopes, all kinds of Dada mail art. Free technics and size, periodical documentation. Works will make an exhibition, no return. Deadline: 1 April 2000.

**World Wide Party #7:** (Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta T2P 2E7, Canada) On June 21st, year 2000, will be the seventh annual World Wide Party.

At 21h00 your time,

raise a glass and toast your friends in the Papernet around the world. Have a party if you will, do a one-shot zine, prepare and post a batch of mail art, or whatever else you may think of. The World Wide Party was first suggested by Benoit Girard of Quebec and boosted by Franz Miklis of Austria. The idea behind a 21h00 toast is to get a wave circling the planet celebrating zineish friends and connecting everyone in the Papernet briefly by a common activity. Write to me how you celebrated WWP #7; documentation to all.

**Collage d'aujourd'hui:** (Diane Bertrand, Art terre, 9109 Deschambault, Saint Leonard, Quebec, H1R 2C6) Mail art collage.

**Stampzine:** (Picasso Gaglione, 450 Taraval Street, #276, San Francisco, California 94116) Edited and published by Picasso Gaglione and friends. STAMPZINE is an assembling collection of rubber stamp art featuring the hand-stamped works of international artists. Anyone wishing to contribute should send 75 hand-stamped copies of rubber stamp artwork on 8.5 x 11 pages. All contributors will receive a free copy.

**Self Portrait:** (Brigitte Nieubuur, H. Tollensstraat 18, 3521 XX Utrecht, Nederland) Mail art project: self-portrait. Technique your choice. Size: 9 x 9 cm. In return: Portraits of fellow mail artists reproduced and Internet exhibition.

**The Cosmic Cross:** (Wilfried Nold,

Eppsteinerstr. 22, D-60323, Frankfurt/M.,

Deutschland) The Cosmic Cross is an ancient symbol that accompanies the development of all humanity. It appears in the cosmos, both the microcosm and macrocosm, in many forms. Oftentimes it merely stands for radiance, for light in all its forms, for the light of the sun or for the divine light. As a symbol it transcends religious or philosophical meaning. It is all embracing and knows no bounds. It reconciles opposites and unites extremes. It points towards the centre and it shows us that we must come to the point. It points beyond mankind and leads to God, in whatever form He is worshipped. For Wilfried Nold, the initiator of the Mail Art project "The Cosmic Cross" is a way of consciousness, a way of worship for all of humanity. It unites, heals, sanctifies.

Mail art is the opportunity for people to communicate worldwide. It is a way of exchanging information by mail (also via the Internet) or through personal contact. When I create a mail art appeal such as this one, I unexpectedly multiply my knowledge and my opportunities. The unwritten rules are: Non-profit; no fees will be charged. No returns; contributions will not be returned to you, as they are usually kept by the initiators. No jury; everybody can participate and give it their best. Communication; the addresses of all participants will be listed. Documentation; all participants will receive documentation of the project.

Contributions to this project might be any form of manual, artistic, literary, theatrical expression, reflection, meditation about the topic, ideas for projects, dances, games, quotes, references to relevant literature, etcetera. All contributions will be included in the archive, with the participant's full name and address, and can thus be shared with others. All contributions are shown in an exhibition or touring exhibition. Planned for the exhibition are projects in which all participants can take part. Once a year the initiator sends a newsletter to the participants in which the contributions are documented. The archive is timeless. Upon death of the initiator, the archive will be transferred without charge to an institution responsible for providing further access to the "Cosmic Cross Archive". Judicial proceedings are not possible.

**Voices At The Edge Of The World:** (Silvano Pertone, via Gallesi 20/32, 16163 S. Quirico, Genova, Italy) The 20<sup>th</sup> Century is ending. The powerful, who have been establishing rules for a long time, are planning a taken-for-granted future for us. They are telling us to carry on, just trying to control our minds and emotions, and to make us forget ourselves and our past. PSYCHE OUT is asking you for your help in order to fight against any kind of false new century celebration, because it's from our roots that we want to start the future. Why don't we try to leave a sign of our presence in the century that we're going to leave? Send us your free musical, graphic, or written message

expressing fears and hopes about the future. Your message and a lot of other underground artists' ones will be collected and published as a someone looking beyond self-interest, indifferences, and "HAPPY OBEDIENCE!!" track. I hope to receive your news as soon as possible.

**Brain Cell Fractal:** (Ryosuke Cohen, 3-76-I-A-613, Yagumokitacho, Moriguchi-City, Osaka 570, Japan) Send 150 stickers or some other type of small mail art image. These are collated into a collage on an 11" x 17" poster, and a copy sent back to each contributor, along with a list of names and addresses of those participating.

**Artist Trading Cards:** (Chuck Stake, 736 - 5 Street NW, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1P9, Canada) ATCs are works of art created on 64 mm x 89 mm card stock. They are the same size as hockey trading cards, but the similarity stops here. Cards may depict anything, be 2-D or 3-D, they may be original, a series, an edition, or a multiple. Cards are signed on the back by the artist and, if necessary, an edition number is included. ATCs are paintings, drawings, collages, photographs, rubberstamp works, mixed-media, etchings, found images, recycled works of art, assemblages, etcetera. In effect they are miniature works of art, the only stipulation being that the card fits in the standard plastic sheets that hockey cards are normally stored within.

Cards can be traded in person or by mail.

**Souvenirs D' enfance Perdu:** (Francesca Maniaci, 4315 Drolet, Montreal, Quebec H2W 2L7, Canada) Please help me by sending your lost childhood memories. Ongoing project, periodical documentation. Maximum size A4.

## WHERE WOULD YOU HIDE A CENTAUR?

I seldom read fantasy novels, since 99% of them are hackneyed trilogies recycling King Arthur or Gonad the Barbarian. It is too much trouble to search the shelves at the bookstores for the precious few that do not involve a young man/woman questing to the throne they are rightly entitled to but which is occupied by Lord Evil. The quest for the Sacred Knickknack of Qwerty usually involves at least three volumes, perhaps more, depending on sales.

I have a small sub-collection in my library of fiction involving SF fans or conventions, such as the infamous McCrumb books and a dozen or so others. I include only professionally published books in this collection, not the mimeographed faanfiction that abounds in zinedom. I saw a mention in LOCUS of Diana Wynne Jones novel **Deep Secret** (Tor, 2000, mass-market paperback, ISBN 0-812-57572-5) which crosses a fantasy quest with an English SF convention. Since one of her previous books was THE TOUGH GUIDE TO FANTASYLAND, which gleefully and with malice

aforethought trashes all those fantasy trilogy cliches, I thought I'd take a chance on the book. I was not disappointed.

The plot starts off with Rupert Venables, a Magid stationed on Earth by a secret organization to watch over those foolish humans, much as Plato's Guardians. Earth is part of a continuum of planets ranging from Ayewards (magic accepted as a daily and visible part of life) to Naywards (technological planets such as Earth). Venables must find a replacement for the Senior Magid of Earth, who kicks the bucket at the start of the novel and gets the plot rolling along. He narrows the list down to five candidates and decides to bring them together at an English SF convention for vetting.

Meanwhile, in another part of the continuum, an evil Emperor has gotten what he richly deserved and was assassinated not by magic but technology, a bomb that obliterated him and his entourage and leveled the castle. Unfortunately there was no Heir Apparent named at the time, and Venables is asked to assist in searching for the rightful occupant to the throne of the Empire. It turns out that the short list for Senior Magid of Earth and for the new Emperor have names in commons.

Everyone shows up in due course at the convention, bent on their own particular business and/or mayhem. The bloodier pushing

and shoving is for the Emperor's job, and one of the suspects is the Evil Stepmother, who happens to be the wife of the convention's Guest of Honour. If you're going to have bizarre characters show up on a straightlaced planet like Earth, the best place for it is an SF convention. Everyone will assume that the centaur is just an entry in the Masquerade, and the space/time warp in the hotel corridor is just the usual confusing hotel layout one sees in cities everywhere.

The plot proceeds smoothly. Diana Wynne Jones knows SFdom and illuminates fans perfectly. We've all seen those stereotypes at conventions. Unlike Sharyn McCrumb's vicious stereotypes leavened with malice, Jones is a bit kinder, if not in description, then at least in attributing motives. The book reads as polite and mild humour, not taking itself over seriously. It alternates between two character viewpoints, describing each event from different points of view, and thereby illuminating the characters without being preachy. Well recommended for SF fans.

## **IF IT HAD HAPPENED OTHERWISE**

Review of **The Hinge Factor: How Chance And Stupidity Have Changed History** by Erik Durschmied. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1999) ISBN 0-340-72829-9, hardcover, 394 pages. Durschmied is a war correspondent; I'll come back to that fact in a moment.

The book covers 17 famous battles in chronological order, from Troy (1184 B.C.) to the Gulf War (1991 A.D.). Along the way some of the usual suspects are trotted out, with great moments in stupidity such as the charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava during the Crimean War, straight into the Russian cannons. This because of a mis-interpreted ambiguous order between two brothers-in-law who weren't speaking to each other, which wouldn't matter back on the baronial estates but did matter when they were commanding troops on the battlefield. Spion Kop taught the British that guerilla war by Boers meant a new way of doing things, such as not marching up a hill in a thin red line, the value of smokeless ammunition, and inventing the concentration camp.

Each chapter covers one battle, starting off with a teaser, then the account of what went wrong, followed by what-if?, and finally the hinge factor, the one or few things that changed the battle and the course of history. What if, for example, the Bismark had topped up its fuel tanks before heading out into the North Atlantic in 1941? What if those military orders hadn't been found wrapped around three cigars in an abandoned enemy camp just before Antietam?

Most of the battles can be fairly said to have changed history. Some did not make any influence in the long run but are still

useful in illustrating hinge factors. As Durschmied reaches our present time, he begins to interject himself in I-was-there accounts. This is what led to the final, and worst, selection, the Gulf War, which appears to have been added only so he could write about his time there as a news reporter. The Gulf War's hinge factor, says Durschmied, was in the first hour of Desert Storm, when the Allied Coalition over-ran Iraq in force. I submit that there was no hinge factor at all in this police action. The Tide of History washed over Iraq like a tsunami, for the Coalition was so overwhelmingly superior that even a British general couldn't have lost it, much less well-trained American commanders who knew what they were doing.

Durschmied, I found, has a somewhat annoying literary style. His invention of dialogue for the protagonists is barely tolerable, but he uses too many exclamation points. Emphasis is not needed in good writing! A reader can tell when something is astonishing! "*They were on the wrong hill!*" is one example of too many unneeded exclamatory sentences. He should also understand that teaser introductions and ominous foreshadowing only work where the reader doesn't know the outcome.

I'll rate this about 2 stars out 5. The literary style and egoistic insertions downgraded what could have been a much better book. And may God protect us from British generals.



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