

Dpuntia 7.1



OPUNTIA #7.1

Late March 1992

LENINGRAD COWBOYS GO AMERICA

ISSN 1183-2703

OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It can be had for \$1 per copy, letter of comment, or trade for your zine.

EDITORIAL: This issue introduces the [.]1 series of OPUNTIAS, which will review whatever I read and enjoyed enough to want to tell you about it. Generally there will not be any killer reviews; they serve no useful purpose that could not be better met by simply ignoring the offender.

This first issue of reviews does not cover the mass market material. Such is well covered elsewhere in other zines, not to mention LOCUS. The last thing this planet needs is yet another review of THE DIFFERENCE ENGINE or MOVING PICTURES.

A few movies are mentioned, but most of the material is literary, and much of it rather old. Good luck finding some of the items. In a future .1 ish, I shall write up many of the zines I get in trade. Everyone else keeps reviewing my zine, and I should return the favour.

The .1 issues probably won't be that frequent. I read a fair bit, mostly periodicals, but writing up reviews is a different matter. I write a review column for an aquarium magazine and that is hard enough. I don't know how Joseph Major does it.

Imagine if you will eight Elvis impersonators standing with their backs to a hurricane-force wind, wind that blows their hair straight out in front of their faces about a foot. They are wearing pointed shoes; the points are about a foot long. Some have Dutch beards, some are skinny, and some are plump. They are a band called the Leningrad Cowboys. Leaving their native Finland at the request of their agent, the band inflicts themselves on America.

This is a road movie; it consists of vignettes of the Leningrad Cowboys making their way across the USA to a gig at a Mexican wedding party. The band travels in Cadillac land yachts. You know the kind, the huge barges from the 1960s and 1970s, available for \$2500 with a bit of bargaining from any used-car dealer in North America. This is a straightforward comedy; no classical scenes that one remembers, but a pleasant way to kill a couple of hours. The movie opens in a tundra in Finland, allegedly, although why there is a forest surrounding the farm is never explained. For that matter, they never explain why there is a farm in the tundra, especially one that has a barn equipped with a pay telephone.

The band arrives in New York with accordians at ready but are quick to adapt; they'll play anything from a confident country & western song lamenting life on the steppes to an impressive version of Steppenwolf's "Born To Be Wild" backed up by French horn and bala-laika. Even the bike gang they were playing for was impressed. They play at the Mexican wedding party as a great success; a Finnish band tootling along with a Spanish singer helping out on lead vocals.

There is a corrupt manager who steals the band's money and feeds them a diet of onions. That Cadillac must have been a pretty grim car to ride in.

I took in a movie tonight, "Other People's Money", with Danny DeVito playing the part of Larry Garfield, a New York financier who specializes in taking over undervalued companies and then liquidating them. His target is New England Wire & Cable, which has a book value of \$25 per share but is actually trading at \$10 to \$15 per share. The movie is summed up at the end by a proxy war where the two sides debate before the vote on whether to liquidate the company or keep it going. Gregory Peck is the good guy, the boss of the company, who knows all the employees by name.

His speech basically goes as follows. The stock liquidators such as Larry do not create or build, they destroy and put people out of work. Even the robber barons of a century ago at least built something, a coal mine or a railroad. Larry would only break up the company and sell off its equipment, real estate, and other assets. A town that depends on New England Wire & Cable would be devastated, and high unemployment would follow. The crowd cheers him.

Larry gets up and makes his rebuttal, once the booing has died down. He makes the point that the company has a declining market; fibre optics are eliminating much of the demand for wire. And while the employees and town say how much the company has done for them, they have still taken wage increases and hiked utility rates without too much concern for their mainstay. The stockholders who bleat about how it would be a terrible thing to liquidate the company just to make a profit are revealed as hypocrites, since the reason they invested in the first instance was to make money. The company is currently solvent, but because it has a declining market, will eventually go bankrupt.

Now a typical cliched movie would have had Peck win, but at least here they showed a bit of good sense. Larry won

the vote. The movie producers immediately fudged the ending by having the Japanese invest and rebuild the company, but they recognized that in the real world stock liquidators have a part to play in business.

As I drove home from the movie, I started thinking about slide rules. When I was in grade ten in 1970, I used a slide rule in physics class. In 1971, pocket calculators were introduced in retail stores at about \$100 for a simple four-function calculator. \$100 was more than a week's wages, and the slide rule makers were not too worried. But I bought one. It only was a few years later that slide rules were no longer used in classrooms; in 1972, I and all my classmates used calculators.

A lot of manufacturers talk about quality in their advertisements. I'm sure the slide rule companies made excellent slide rules, just as some companies used to make excellent buggy whips.

COME SPY WITH ME

I've always been more interested in short stories rather than novels. I find that most novels I read are obviously padded, and I start skimming great chunks of text until the action picks up again. As a consequence, I buy mostly periodicals and anthologies. I'm not strictly an SFer; I do pick up mysteries. A while back, I bought a batch of mystery magazines from Off The Wall, a secondhand bookstore which carries a lot of unusual material, here in Calgary. One item was the February 1985 issue of ESPIONAGE, a shortlived digest. It contains a Ron Goulart story "The Zanzibar Diet", whose lead character Jake Conger is a retired agent of the Wild Talents Division, which specializes in paranormal spying. Conger's talent is invisibility. He is dragged out of retirement so as

to track down Dr. Heinrich H. Luftwaffe Jr., a frozen Nazi found hidden under Munich back in 2016. He invented a cheap foodstuff called the Zanzibar Diet, which has the side effect of turning people into obedient serfs. The story proceeds in the usual humorous Goulart style. It detours into Detention Acres, New Montreal, an underground prison 180 metres below the surface. The facility is jointly operated by the governments of Canada and the Minimal British Empire, and is used for political prisoners.

Canada is used as an exotic locale; the hero's airplane naturally flies into a blizzard. This cliché is redeemed somewhat by the pilot of the plane, known to all as Blinky on account of his eyesight, but fortunately they land safely.

The story is set in the next century, so it might be assumed that the prison camp is but science fiction. While building a prison 180 metres underground would be SF, it is not particularly farfetched that Canada and Britain would hold political prisoners. Britain already has detention without trial, most commonly used for the IRA. Canada invoked the War Measures Act against Quebec in 1972. This Act has since been abolished but it has been replaced by the Emergency Planning Order. Section 6 of this Order allows the Solicitor General of Canada to "establish, administer, and operate civilian internment camps".

I suspect that such camps are not likely to be set up, not because of lack of political will, but rather due to the crippled state of the Canadian Armed Forces, hurt by decades of budget cutting and neglect. Consider the statements of commanding officers during the Oka crisis; the Armed Forces could handle one such incident but not several due to a lack of manpower and equipment.

Sharyn McCrumb's "Bimbos of the Death Sun" is a reasonably accurate portrayal of a typical SF con, albeit some unfair as to character motivation. The usual gang of suspects are there; the overweight woman who dresses up as a princess, the RPGer who struts about as Runewind the Viking warrior when not in his job as a janitor, and the author who has written 26 books on Runewind (or was it one book 26 times?). McCrumb is weakest on the motivations of characters; a costumer is criticized on the grounds that the time and effort put into masquerades could be used to be a fashion designer. McCrumb confuses avocations with vocations and expects that a hobby is no good unless it is a moneymaker. Not every fanzine editor wants to start another Time-Life, not every RPGer is someone who was unable to get into the military, not every costumer wants to run a fashion store. The heroine of this novel, Marion Farley, is a sexy Mrs. Peel type, and obviously the alterego of the author. I've never seen a photo of McCrumb; if she is reasonably pretty, then I'll concede, but if she is short and dumpy then she is just as guilty of wishful fantasizing as some of her characters.

But this is not a review of "Bimbos". Rather it is a look at another of her books, "Highland Laddie Gone", a Gathering of the Clans equivalent to an SF con. Not the Scottish equivalent of an SF con, for the Gatherings are not a genuine part of Scots history. They are something celebrated by North Americans and are fantasy exactly as Runewind is fantasy.

How this review got started has to do with Harry Andruschak. If you've read his locs or perzines, then you will know he has taken up Scottish Country Dancing.

[continued next page]

Speirs is a Scottish name, originating in the Border Counties. My father's ancestors were Lowlanders who came to Canada in the 1800s. When I looked Harry on one of his perzines, I asked the question "How come everyone celebrates the Highlanders, who were illiterate oatmeal savages, while the cultured Lowlanders were ignored?".

Harry's reply (1991-11-26) is as follows. "Many tend to go overboard, producing what some Scots call Tartan Tamfoolery. Another label is Brigadoonery. A good/bad example of this sort of thing is the ceremony known as The Kirkin o' the Tartans, which many USA-Scots will tell you is an ancient ceremony dating back to the mists of time, or maybe to the Proscriptions."

"Well, the truth is that it goes back to 1941, in Washington, D.C., as a fundraiser for WW2 bonds. And you can tell some damned Englishman invented it, because 'kirk' is not a Highland word, but Lowland Scots. If you travel in the Highlands today, you will find that many of the churches have been renamed to kirks, or even 'wee kirk', but this is mostly for the tourist dollar."

"How come everyone celebrates the Highlanders ... etc.?" Consider this. Why do we remember the Charge of the Light Brigade, which was a failure? Why not the Charge of the Heavy Brigade, which occurred a few hours earlier and was a total success? You know the answer; the Light Brigade had a poem written about it that can still stir the blood."

"Much the same happened to the Highlanders. You would think that after the Proscriptions, the Highlands would be down and out, and stay that way. That was the whole point of the Proscriptions. Anyone wearing tartan was killed on the spot, even babies in tartan diapers. The land was deforested and ruined, sheep brought in, and the Clearances begun. Mass starvation led to mass emigration. Weapons were forbidden. The power of the Clan was smashed beyond recovery. Miserable, destitute, bro-

ken, with no obvious future, that should have been the end of it."

"So along came Sir Walter Scott and his Waverley Novels. The impact of these novels was immense, even if they depicted Scottish Highlands that never really existed. They inspired Queen Victoria and Prince Albert to visit, who fell in love with the land and things Highland Scottish. And the great turnaround began."

"As a Canadian, if you wanted to wear a tartan, you could choose the national 'Maple Leaf' tartan or the old 'Canadian Centennial' tartan. And every Canadian province has its own tartan. My own kilt is Dress Cameron Modern, since my mother's sept is to the Camerons. But if not, I could choose any of the dozens of general, geographic, or special unit tartans. The latest catalogue from Dunedin Scottish offers US Marine, US Navy, West Point, and US Forces tartans. I kid you not. Tartan tamfoolery."

"While I may attend a Highland gathering or two, my main interest is still the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society. I should mention that most Highland Gatherings are not all that interested in the RSCDS. We may be invited to put on a demonstration, but that is all. The main focus is on Highland dancing, the Highland Fling, the various sword dances, and so on. Brigadoonery, in some cases. The RSCDS is considered too old-fashioned, square, and more interested in having fun than taking a serious interest in such 'ancient' ceremonies such as the Kirkin o' the Tartans."

[End of letter]

Brigadoon is a Scottish village in a play. The minister prays for protection from the corruption caused by change. The prayers are answered when the village exists only one day in each century, sleeping away

the intervening decades. Thus the village never changed or at least very slowly. The Gathering of the Clans is much the same; it exists only one weekend a year and is a Brigadoon of Scottish culture that never was. Tartans themselves are ersatz culture, as they date back only to 19th-century cloth merchants who unloaded their plaids on a gullible public.

And so I come to "Highland Laddie Gone", set in Virginia, USA, where the American clans are gathering for the Glencoe Mountain Games. Glencoe it is in more than just name, for it is the scene of two murders. The first murder is that of a Campbell who more than lived up to the reputation of the family name. This sour man was universally disliked; the list of suspects includes everyone who knew him. If the police are going to catch the murderer, it will not be by locating someone with a motive; they'll have to concentrate on means and opportunity. The second murder is of a dealer in Scottish knickknacks and books, who also ran a con game on the side, bilking people out of money by soliciting contributions for the Scottish Republican Army. The non-existent S.R.A. has lots of supporters in the USA, and members of the underground (mostly doctors and retired businessmen) identify each other with the password phrase "Stands Scotland where it did?". Questions as to why the S.R.A. hasn't been reported blowing up anything are put off by replying that the time is not yet ripe. Forsyth, the con man, puts the S.R.A. contributions to good causes, such as himself. His death scene is, in my opinion, the best writing in the book, a combination of pathos and black comedy. Pathos from his dying hallucinations; as his body goes numb and cold, and his vision fails, he is once again flying on a WW2 bomber, hoping to get home safe but knowing that the plane will crash in the dark waters below. Black comedy because he was stabbed to death in a portable toilet, and his body discovered by a wimpy mama's boy.

As the Games continue, we see a few genuine Scots wan-

dering about disgusted by the ersatz Scottish culture being celebrated. One explains the true story of the battle at Culloden, where Bonnie Prince Charlie and a ragtag army went down to defeat, and with them, the hopes of a Scottish throne. [And yet, and yet, there were more Scots fighting for the English side than for Charlie.] Another Scot is a young woman from Glasgow who clawed her way out of the slums and into the heart of an American doctor. She snagged him in part by claiming to be the niece of the Duke of Rothesay, and having married him, is now desperately trying to keep him from blabbing that claim to all and sundry. She is afraid that sooner or later he will tell that to someone who knows that the Duke of Rothesay is Prince Charles, and she will be exposed as the imposter she is.

The investigation into the murders is carried out by a police officer dressed up as a Confederate. He happened to be nearby at the time the first murder was reported, taking part in a re-enactment of the Battle of Wicker's Ford Hollow. The Confederates and the ersatz Scots were in different areas of the same park. Much to their disgust, a group of SCAers was booked for the following week. ("Those people are crazy", sniffed the Chatten Maid of the Cat. "I agree with you there, ma'am", said Confederate Colonel Lightfoot MacDonald.)

McCrumb writes this book in the same style as "Bimbos" but with a little less venom. There is the obligatory love interest, and a sheriff who has to have matters explained to him a la Dr. Watson, which helps out the reader in making sense of the story. There is a Hill Sing, equivalent to filking except it is done outside and, in this case, finished up with "Home on the Range". The murderer is written up to be an unsympathetic character, but I actually found myself feeling sorry for the murderer, who had logical reasons to act that way.

At the Co-op Book Exchange I picked up a hardcover of two Strugatsky stories, "Far Rainbow" and "The Second Invasion From Mars". I quickly lost interest in the former story, being unable to penetrate it more than a few pages, but greatly enjoyed the second story. Each story had a different translator, so perhaps the fault lay there instead of on Arkady and Boris. The "Invasion" is translated by Gary Kern. I give any story only a few pages to catch my interest, and have no patience with those who insist that one must work to understand the story. If a story has many levels, as does "Invasion", then I find it much better reading. It must have some surface interest to encourage the reader to go through it completely; other levels of the story are then much easier to analyse and reflect upon in subsequent readings. No one wants to analyse and reflect upon a telephone directory or a chemical handbook of tables, and a heavy-to-digest novel is the same.

The Martians having learnt from their first attempt at invading Earth, they have returned and this time succeeded. The events are told from the point of view of Mr. Apollo, a retired schoolteacher. The invasion itself is offstage, and the Martians are peripheral figures at best. The story is not about the takeover but how the new regime is established, and in particular how the changes affect the townspeople. New regulations and policies (the Martians pay a premium for gastric juice) are quietly absorbed into town life. The brief fighting and occasional appearance of secret police are mostly a matter for gossip. Like lumpenproletariat everywhere, the townspeople are frightened by change. If they cannot ignore it or avoid it, and must deal with it, then the change will be rationalized so that it is acceptable and not so upsetting. In any event, the cares of normal life soon outweigh any political considerations. Policy changes by the Martians are no sillier than those of the previous rulers, and if the Martians will pay money for

stomach contents, setting up pumping stations, the people will be happy to receive a steady source of income.

Mr. Apollo writes about the events after the invasion but his major concern in life is getting his pension troubles straightened out. All else may be crumbling but he must look to his own, and his diary is filled with progress reports on his daily encounters with bureaucrats. He trades postage stamps with another philatelist, the pharmacist, and their dicker over gummed labels is of as great a concern as anything a person could feel about revolution and invasion. This is a reasonable attitude, after all, for unless one is directly in the line of fire, or has loved ones fighting at the front, then distant war and politics are irritations at worst. His wayward daughter gives him one heartache after another, and what is the murder of a rich man by secret police beside that? Her husband has gone off to fight against the invaders, and Mr. Apollo can only think that if he were at home then she would not be so tempted by other men. Never mind the Martians; once they are assimilated into society there is no worry. The farmers are content with a new cash crop introduced by the Martians, and hunt down rebels who would take away the source of good money.

The connection between this story and how the communists managed to rule for so long is quite obvious. I do wish the Strugatskys had not named all the characters after Greek mythical figures, as this constantly jars the reader by shouting "This is a satire!". The fossilized rule of communism is easily understood in the face of this story, and Gorbachev's downfall can be just as easily understood in his causing tumultuous change that upset people the wrong way. It is an answer to the question of why people tolerate dictatorships as long as they do.

THE SWEET SONGSTRESS OF SASKATCHEWAN

I picked up a hardcover copy of "Sarah Binks" at the Co-op Book Exchange. Published in 1947, the author Paul Hiebert chronicles the career of Sarah Binks, the Bard of North Willows, whose untimely death at a young age of mercury poisoning (she bit down on a mint candy while she had a thermometer in her mouth) deprived Canada's flattest province of its Poet Laureate. Even so, in her brief ascent she had won Saskatchewan's highest award, the Wheat Pool Medal, the only time it was ever given for poetry.

Who could ever forget such classics as:

"The farmer is king, oh, the farmer is king,
And except for his wife and his daughter,
Who boss him around, he runs the thing,
Come drought, come hell or high water."

Try as one might, her ode to the calf sticks in the mind as she laments:

"Oh calf, that gambolled by my door,
Who made me rich who now am poor,
That licked my hand with milk bespread.
Oh calf, calf! Art dead, art dead?"

Yes, art is dead since Binks passed on to the Great Perhaps. This book is a serious study of Binks' life and times. If you've ever read any critical biography of any literary personage, then you will be familiar with the style of this book, the straightforward setting out of the facts of her life, the poems quoted and analysed, and the polite criticism of other critics whose interpretation differs from the author. It should be mentioned, if only in passing, that Sarah Binks is completely fictional. The book is a devastating parody of CanLitCrit, enough for it to win the Leacock Award for Humour.

Daughter of Jacob and Agathe Binks, Sarah grew up on a homestead farm about halfway between Willows (originally called Wallows) and Oak Bluff (a corruption of "okay bluffed", a reference to a successful Cree bluff during a dispute with Colonel MacSqueamish). On the farm, Ole the hired man and Rover the dog played significant parts in Sarah's life. Grandfather Thurnow could always be relied upon for pungent advice. A best friend for Sarah was Mathilda Schwantzhacker, on the neighbouring farm.

Sarah wrote quite a number of poems, most of which were independent of each other, but a number of them were part of cycles or phases. Her "Ode To Spring", published in The Horsebreeder's Gazette, created a sensation amongst the Saskatchewan people, striking a chord in their hearts during a time of -55°C weather, and reminding them that if March was here then spring couldn't be that far behind.

The Grizzlykick Symphony is a group of poems Sarah wrote as she observed the courtship of Mathilda and Stemka Gryczlkaeiouc (pronounced 'grizzlykick'). Stem was a wealthy landowner; between he and his father, they owned a complete square mile of Saskatchewan prairie. The land was not much for wheat, so they grew potatoes and barley for Father's experiments in new beverages, and Stem lived off the bounty on gophers, being a keen and ardent hunter.

A major influence on Sarah was her schoolteacher William Greenglow, who had studied geology but for various reasons washed up on the shores of Willows. Her geological phase of poetry is easily and directly attributed to him. As the Literary Editor of Horsebreeder's Gazette remarked, "She expresses not only the soul of Saskatchewan but its very bones; the Jurassic, Triassic, or the plain Assic, are all there. She puts the Carboniferous up to us."

[continued next page]

Her greatest epic, the one that won her the Wheat Pool Medal, was the lengthy "Up From The Magma And Back A-gain", obviously depending heavily on her geological education. Comprising thirteen cantos, a prologue, the epilogue, index, and a full-page illo of the thirteen Schwantzhacker sisters, this set of poems has never been fully analysed by scholars. Just to take one extract, from Canto 4, The Skin Age, we read:

"In schist and shistose rocks are writ the bans,
For him whose eye can Runic read, and cast
The other optic upward till it spans,
In tortured gaze the future and the past:
For such a one that panoramic view
Shows rock to soil, and soil to groat and greens --
Nay, such a one already smells the stew
Of beet and barley bubbling with the beans."

But life was not a bowl of wheat grains all the time, as all critics agree that Sarah's literary output can neatly be divided into the Pre-Regina and Post-Regina periods. Her two weeks in that gigantic metropolis, capital city of Canada's flattest province, was spent in the company of farm implement salesman Henry Welkin, who had sold a harrow to Jacob Binks. Regina, originally named Pile of Bones (I am not making that up, it really was), was an exhilarating experience for the impressionable Sarah. The opera, the aquarium, the public library, all these things Welkin showed her, not omitting his special pride, the factory that manufactured the farm implements he sold. But it was too much too fast, particularly for nature-loving Sarah. She was disgusted at Wascana Lake; as indeed most people are even today, although the Parks Dept. is constantly experimenting with methods to control the algae.

(Another I'm-not-making-this-up disclaimer; recently the Calgary Parks Dept. received a letter from Regina Parks asking if we had much practical experience in algae control; they were looking for advice. In my capacity as

an experienced Pest Control worker, I was asked to provide advice for them.)

The trauma of Sarah's visit plunged her into gloom after her return to the farm sans Welkin. Her poetry was sparse for some time, and when it resumed, the mood was dark and depressing. Matters were not helped when Rover died at the advanced age of sixteen not long after Sarah's return. It would be too depressing to quote more than the following fragment.

"When I'm buried in a graveyard,
And this feeble flame is snuffed,
Will a spottled magpie murmur,
Mutely sigh with ruff unfluffed?"

But the farm work had to go on, and chores wait for no one. As Sarah resumed work, her poems became more cheerful, witness "Spreading Time" or "The Duck Hunt". The latter poem is now considered to be her greatest work, but at the time it was "Despond Not" that caught the public fancy. And it was in the near future that she began work on "Up From The Magma".

This epic had its origins in an aborted work of years ago, which Sarah had never been happy with. One fragment stayed with her, and it was the basis for renewed work that finally produced "Magma".

"Should maddened pterodactyl chance to meet
With raging crocodile,
Then crocodile the pterodactyl eat
Or pterodactyl eat the crocodile."

Had it not been for her untimely death, we could have seen many more works of this nature. She was indeed Canada's answer to Robert Burns. But while Scotland honours its dead, we have yet to celebrate a public holiday in the memory of the Sweet Songstress of Saskatchewan. More's the shame on us.

HERDING 10,000 CATS

1991-12-22

Which is what Frank King, Chairman of the 1988 Calgary Olympic Winter Games had to do. His book "It's How You Play The Game: The Inside Story Of The Calgary Olympics" was published earlier this month. I expect most of the 5000 copies of this hardcover will be sold locally. (It can be had for \$35 from Script: the Writer's Group Inc., Suite 200, 839 - 5 Avenue SW, Calgary, Alberta, T2P 3C8) About 10,000 volunteers helped stage the Games, of whom I was one. In the book, King lists all the volunteers, in random order, in small print at the bottom of each page, footnote-style with about 35 names per page. Since they weren't in alphabetical order, I guessed that they might be in order of when they volunteered. I joined in 1987, so I started at the back of the book and worked my way forward to the front, finally finding my name listed on page 199.

I was Publications Editor for the Olympic Arts Festival, and produced the show catalogue for OLYMPEX 88, a stamp show held during the Games. It was basically the sideshow of a sideshow. The only reason it was held was because it is a requirement of all Olympics; many of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) collect stamps. It was through OLYMPEX 88 that I was able to add to my collection a commemorative cover signed by IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch. Interestingly, pin trading was the focus of the news media during the Games, as some pins went for up to \$250 each. But when the Games were over, pin trading quickly dwindled, and today every pawn shop in Calgary has a windowfull of pins. There is no stable secondary market for pins. Stamp collecting, on the other hand, does have a large secondary market, and the commemorative postmarks and covers issued during the Games will hold their value far longer. The catalogue I edited, incidently, is still available from the Calgary Philatelic Society, Box 1478, Calgary, Alberta, T2P ZL6, at \$6 each.

The Calgary Philatelic Society was asked to help stage OLYMPEX 88, particularly since it had the frames to display the stamps. I could go into the details how OLYMPEX was planned, but this is a book review, not a diatribe, and it wouldn't do my blood pressure much good. Someday I'll write a book, but suffice for now it can be mentioned that the Olympic bureaucracy was as bad or worse than the City of Calgary bureaucracy.

Frank King was one of the moving spirits in the bid to hold the Calgary Games. He is a petroleum corporation executive. I was always under the impression that the CEOs of big business got where they did by skill, but King writes that their bid and planning of the Games was naive at best and constantly fraught with people wandering about asking "What do we do now?". This was, as it turned out, actually a good thing. Since King and his people didn't know what was expected of a bid, they went and asked all the IOC members. This turned out to be a novel approach, as traditionally cities bidding for the Games simply told the IOC what it was going to get, whether the IOC really wanted it or not. King learned that the IOC didn't care to hear about how the Olympics would benefit the local economy, because after all, no matter who won the bid, someone's economy would benefit. Instead the Calgary bid emphasized the Olympic ideals, and the legacy of endowment funds that would train future athletes.

ABC paid \$386,000,000 for North American television rights, and NBC had dropped out of the bidding only a few million dollars behind. This blew the previous record of \$91,000,000 (Sarajevo) out of the water, and the Lake Placid amount of \$15,500,000 was outright pathetic. At the time, everyone said that Calgary got so much money because it was in the right time zone and because Canadian broadcast technology is compatible with American technology. But as King writes, it was an entirely different reason. Again, it was due

[continued next page]

asking, in this case the three American networks, what they wanted out of the Games. Previous Games had scheduled events without regard for viewing audiences, with not enough prime time events. They were held at the wrong time of year, so Calgary had its Games in the last two weeks of February, which is 'sweeps' time for television, when the ratings are determined. Figure skating was held during the prime time for American audiences, a survey having revealed it is the single most popular event of Winter Games for viewers. Cross-country skiing, of great interest to Scandinavian countries but a box-office bomb in North America, was held in the morning when it would be prime time in Europe. Calgary went out of its way to help position television cameras in good locations, and for the first time the Winter Games were extended to sixteen days so as to provide an extra week-end of events.

With 10,000 volunteers and a few hundred paid staff, it was no surprise that more than a few people had their own agendas. Keeping everyone on track was a problem, and while King says he made an effort to communicate to the public and to us volunteers, some of the information in his book might have forestalled complaints had we but known. There were the usual battles with bureaucrats, a good example being King's attempts to hold the federal government to its promise of \$200,000,000 in lottery funding. With nine Ministers of Sport in seven years, I can understand King's frustration during a time of unstable federal governments. Calgary Mayor Ralph Klein, a populist, had appointed himself as unofficial opposition, and kept leaking documents to the news media. As King writes, "Anticipating that the Mayor's Office would white out the copy numbers, we included special hairline coded marks on his copies of the most sensitive documents. Thus, when a reporter showed me a copy of a confidential document, I could tell at a glance if it had come from the Mayor's Office. Our game of leak detection worked, but we were a bit like a dog chasing a bus; what were we going to do about it once we caught it?"

Most of the problems with the Calgary Games were not that serious in retrospect, and received attention because the news media requires controversy to sell papers. Only one serious scandal resulted in prosecution as the Games Ticket Manager was caught attempting to line his pockets, but he was detained before the scam really got rolling. The Olympic Saddledome, now the home of NHL hockey and rock concerts, had a cost overrun that was a sensation at the time but is now forgotten.

Like organizing an SF con, King didn't know what he was getting into. He writes that had he known what is involved in running the Games, he would never have taken on the task. But the difference between an SF con and the Calgary Games is that there was never any argument during the Olympics about whether organization was needed. Unfortunately there are still too many SF conrunners who consider organization a dirty word, a method of restricting the con and forcing it into doing things it doesn't want to do. Things like liability protection (you're not protected from lawsuits just because the con is incorporated) or asking the customers what they want out of a con.

About that last item. Few cons really ask what the congoer wants. The proof is in the fact that the same tired old writer's contests keep appearing, and are lucky to draw more than a few entrants. Masquerades desperately need a breath of fresh air. And one has to wonder at fanzine panels scheduled for ballrooms or Star Trek trivia contests for broom closets, when we all know it should be the other way around.

The Calgary Games went out of its way to keep a tight watch on expenses, and finished with a profit now used as an endowment fund. I know from personal experience that the Games had little waste; even the banners were sold afterwards. SF cons that run up a \$15,000 debt fail to learn from the lessons of history; don't spend more than you make.

I was browsing in WH Smith when I spotted amongst other magazines a copy of MARXISM TODAY. It was a double issue dated December 1991/January 1992 with large letters announcing that it was the final issue. I am not now, nor have I ever been, a Marxist, but I couldn't resist the temptation to see how the editorial staff would explain away recent traumas inflicted on Marxism. Never having seen any previous issues of MARXISM TODAY, I was taken by surprise by its content.

Ostensibly the journal of the Communist Party in Britain, I was amused to see that tributes paid to it were laudatory coming from the Tories and damning with faint praise from the Left. This periodical claims to have originated the word "Thatcherism", and to have predicted the decline of labourism in advance of the fact. Since it is a British magazine, it naturally concentrates on local politics such as Mrs. T and the EC (sounds like a rap group, doesn't it?). But the writing is good, and there is no dogma in turgid, unreadable prose. In fact, it reads a great deal like THE ECONOMIST, which I consider to be the best newsmagazine sold in Canada, save for ALBERTA REPORT. TIME, NEWSWEEK, and MACLEAN'S are nowhere near those two when it comes to writing good articles.

The final issue of MARXISM TODAY contains an article by a staff member on why she thought it was a sexist mag, various fears and loathings about Thatcherism, and standard moaning about how the West should not celebrate too loudly about the collapse of communism, seeing that its economy is not well either. There is an analysis about the riots of 1991 in Britain and why they were more dangerous than the riots of 1981. (Because in 1981 looters stole VCRs, but in 1991 they burned schools and community centres). This issue is riddled with advertisements from Left-wing magazines inviting readers to subscribe

to their zine now that MARXISM TODAY is dead. And not only that, they take Visa and Mastercard, and if you subscribe now, enjoy a discounted rate.

Stuart Hall writes about why Thatcherism is not yet dead, and is still tunnelling underneath British society. Angela McRobbie writes about why 1960s radicalism is not dead, and is still tunnelling underneath British society. Many of the writers share a belief that while Marxism is dead and gone, socialism will survive. Socialism defined as 'social democrat' not as the communists used the term. The New Democratic Party in Canada may be socialist, but it was always embarrassed to be lumped in with Soviet communists calling themselves socialists.

There is fear among the writers in MARXISM TODAY over the future course of the EC. Will it sustain liberal democracy with budget problems? with an influx of refugees from eastern Europe? with a trade war against Japan and the USA? We live in interesting times.

A few interesting quotes ...

Geoff Mulgan: "The Marxists who once loved nothing better than to declare the obsolescence of their opponents ... now find their own guns turned around."

Angela McRobbie: "The moral majority now seems to comprise only the sort of eccentrics whom the Tories cannot risk letting loose in public places for fear of what they will come out with."

Eric Hobsbawm: "Building or rebuilding viable, flourishing, and humane economies ... requires more than a return to suitable principles excerpted from Adam Smith."

Peter Jenkins: "You have no future now except to dance on the graves of Lenin and Eric Hobsbawm."

MISSION IMPROBABLE

One of my favourite television shows in my younger days was MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE. Part of the attraction was the catchy theme music; the other part was the ridiculous complicated methodology used by the Impossible Missions Force. So the sight of a IMF book in the Co-op Book Exchange brought back memories, and I sat down with anticipation to read MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE - THE PRICELESS PARTICLE, by Talmage Powell (1969). This hardcover was of a series put out by Western Publishing Co. under the Whitman imprint. Various other television shows had books in this series as well, which was aimed at juveniles. I have a MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E., and I see titles listed for HAWAII FIVE-O, STAR TREK, LAND OF THE GIANTS, and THE INVADERS.

The title doesn't make much sense because the price-less particle is actually a formula to synthesize a protein that will cheaply feed the world. Dr. Belorra, who invented the stuff, is prisoner of Aqaban, a standard Arab dictator in charge of the Masacar regime. This being 1969, the Rooskies are in it as well, with Captain Stefan Zovoloff trying to make Aqaban an offer he can't refuse, tanks and guns in exchange for the protein formula. Mr. Phelps, briefed by the usual vapourizing tape recorder, has been advised that whoever has the formula will be able to produce limitless quantities of food at minimal cost.

Aha!, I thought. I can see why the IMF wants to stop the secret from getting out. Anyone with such a process could destroy the world's agricultural economy. Cheap food in abundance would knock out the props from under grain exporters such as Canada, United States, Australia, and Argentina. Farmers would go bankrupt, grain would rot in the fields for lack of a market, government after government would go into debt subsidizing farmers, who represent a potent political force in any country.

The book fooled me however. It seems that the bad guys wanted to restrict use of the formula, while IMF and fellow do-gooders wanted to ensure the destruction of farming. Either that or IMF's next assignment would be to think up how to house and employ all the farmers flooding into the city looking for work. They can't all grow flowers instead. If they did, roses would be down to 10¢ a stem instead of \$4 each. The factories could hardly take on a sudden surge of unemployed labourers. Government action being what it usually is, they would prolong the situation by subsidizing farmers to stay on the land.

The IMF succeeds in getting the formula, freeing the doctor and his daughter, and, for good measure, leave the country by stealing Zovoloff's plane. The sequel to this book, had it ever been written, would have been MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE - THE SECOND GREAT DEPRESSION.

THE MEAN STREETS OF CRAD KILODNEY

Every kind of Establishment has its *bête noire*, someone they'd rather see go away and leave the experts in peace. In Canada, the Literary Establishment has Crad Kilodney, who, when he is not earning a living selling his books on the streets of downtown Toronto, is busy hoaxing or suing the CanLit crowd. No rest for the wicked.

Kilodney writes and publishes his own books. Nothing too unusual in that; many authors have done so. But Kilodney has the courage to do what few of us would dare; he sells his books himself, not just to stores, but standing on street corners and working the pedestrians. This is all the more remarkable in view of his book titles. BLOOD-SUCKING MONKEYS FROM NORTH TONAWANDA (since sold out), EXCREMENT, PUTRID SCUM,

and JUNIOR BRAIN TUMORS IN ACTION are not the kind of books you'd buy on impulse as a Christmas gift for Aunt Edna.

While working on the sidewalks, Kilodney carries a tape recorder concealed on himself, and records the conversations with customers and other urban life. He has compiled three volumes of conversations on ninety-minute cassettes, still available at \$10 each. If you don't want to buy all three on spec, I recommend Volume 2.

This is slice-of-life stuff. Kilodney tapes drunks, incoherent street people, religious nuts, good customers, and bad customers. I choose Volume 2 of his tapes to review because it has two items of interest, an assault on himself, and a science quiz given to the nation's bankers and brokers. Bear in mind that these tapes were made on the street, not in the studio, so expect a bit of traffic noise, dead spots, and so forth. Nothing serious though; the conversations are quite understandable and Kilodney adds in after-the-fact commentary to help the listener.

Kilodney was following an aggressive drunk about Toronto the Good (as it is affectionately known to us out west) when he got a little too close to the action and became mixed up in a fight. We hear the grunts and oofs of the scuffle. The drunk is brought to ground and held by a pedestrian and Kilodney while waiting for police to arrive. It takes them twenty minutes to show up, during which time a woman who didn't see the fight comes along and takes pity on the drunk. Kilodney finds himself not only restraining a drunk but trying to convince passers-by that the drunk, not Kilodney, is the villain of the piece.

Kilodney finishes off Volume 2 by taking his microphone out of concealment and doing person-on-the-street interviews. Downtown Toronto is where Canada's financial centre is, where the banks and stockbrokers congregate.

He has one simple question for pedestrians. "Why does the Earth have seasons?". You remember all this from Grade 6 of course, but financial geniuses have better and more important things to think about. A banker suggests that the Earth has seasons so as to let the land rest between crops. Another pedestrian believes that summer is warmer because we are closer to the equator.

I suppose that to be fair, it is not necessary for an actuary to know at what angle the Earth is tilted. It does explain why New Age (rhymes with 'sewage') has been able to catch on. There are, alas, too many people who don't know the difference between an open mind and an empty mind.

ON THE STREET WITH CRAD KILODNEY, Volumes 1, 2, and 3 are available at \$10 each on cassette. Cheques or money orders payable to Crad Kilodney, P.O. Box 54541 1712 Avenue Road, North York, Ontario, M5M 4N5. If you are interested in his books, an SASE for his most recent listing.

TIME CAPSULES

Yet again with the Co-op Book Exchange. This time, a homeowner was cleaning out some old TIME magazines, dating from the 1950s and 1960s. I took a few that had cover stories dealing with space exploration.

The August 10, 1962, issue of TIME had a cover story "Reaching For The Moon". On my way to that story, I was diverted by a few others. The thalidomide tragedy was just starting to become known. The Trans-Canada Highway was almost completed. Some reporters dropped by Prime Minister Diefenbaker's house without calling ahead; they had an impromptu press conference. Just rang the doorbell and asked if he was in. Try that

[continued next page]

today and you won't even get onto the grounds, much less walk up to the door. On a facing page was an ad by CN-CP Telecommunications advising that telegrams get results in collecting overdue accounts.

The cover story reported that NASA had recently decided on the Lunar Orbit Rendezvous for the moon landing rather than the Earth Orbit Rendezvous procedure. Ranger 5 was not yet launched, and the plan for Gemini was that it would land somewhere east of the Rockies in the Great Plains, using a parawing to descend to Earth. Now this would make a good alternate history, much more interesting than yet another alternate Civil War anthology.

The July 23, 1965, TIME cover story was on the first Mariner 4 photos of Mars, all three of them. But again I was sidetracked, this time by a report on the capture of Lucien Rivard, who escaped from Bordeaux Jail when he was allowed to flood the skating rink. Since the temperature was above freezing at the time, this resulted in scandal, nearly bringing down the government. As TIME archly reported, "In all justice, the Mounties should have surprised thickest Lucien Rivard watering the lawn.", but he was captured more prosaically inside a house. Elsewhere, we learn that more U.S. troops will be sent to Vietnam as LBJ starts to escalate the war.

The first two Mariner photos were shades of gray, with no immediately visible information, but the third photo had clearly recognizable craters. In discussing the many problems the JPL had to overcome, TIME used the freshly-minted word 'glitches', and explained to readers that it was "a spaceman's word for irritating disturbances". I looked this up in my dictionary out of curiosity; it says this word was introduced into English in 1962 from the the German word 'glitschen' (to slide or slip). No doubt it came to NASA via von Braun and his team.

ARE YOU A DELTIOLOGIST?

That is, do you collect postcards? I'm sure that SF must have its share of postcard collectors, since it is an occasional method of communication. I don't collect postcards myself except for Calgary Olympics, but my mother does. She subscribes to the POSTCARD COLLECTOR and mails the issues to me after she's done reading them. This monthly magazine is US\$21.95 per year in the USA and US\$32.95 for Canadians; write to Joe Jones Publishing, Box 337, Iola, Wisconsin 54945.

Much like any other collectibles magazine, it has articles on various themes, reports of new issues, lots of ads, and checklists. The February 1992 issue is on postcard valentines, naturally. There is a syrupy article on the history of Valentine's Day, but of more interest is the saga of the Desert Storm postcard. These cards were produced by the Kuwaiti Information Centre in Cairo during February 1991 and ineptly distributed to personnel from the Allied forces. There was a propaganda message with illustrations of weaponry used against Iraq, all bordered by the flags of the Allies. (The Maple Leaf on the Canadian flag was more like a Maltese Cross, but that is a minor point) On the back of these postcards, Kuwaiti volunteers wrote messages such as "Dear soldier: Please kill Saddam.". Initially the postcards were passed out by children in areas near where USA soldiers congregated but the Mutawa (Muslim religious police) stopped them because the postcards honoured St. Valentine, not one of the figures of Islam. The postcards were then given to the USA embassy in Riyadh for distribution. A misunderstanding occurred, and the postcards were passed on to the gift shop for resale. The gift shop refused to sell them because they had writing on them and therefore tossed them into the dumpster as damaged goods. Desert Storm indeed.

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

WHY YOU GOT THIS ZINE

TO:

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