

OPUNTIA #10.5B



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OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. Whole-numbered issues are sercon, .1 issues are reviews, and .5 issues are perzines. Available for \$1 cash, letter of comment, or trade for your zine.

ART CREDIT: The cover is a drawing of a magpie (Pica pica) done by George Miksch Sutton about 1953 and re-printed in a number of birding books.

FUTURES PAST

The above-named magazine has recently put out its third issue, covering SF in 1928. Not just Gernsback either, as there were movies in those days, so unrepentant media fans should be taking this zine as well. In this issue are discussed the first SF artist Frank R. Paul, in-depth articles and interviews on E.R. Burroughs and Jack Williamson, and numerous bibliographies.

If you're not familiar with FUTURES PAST, it is covering the history of modern SF one year at a time, beginning with 1926 in issue #1. Well printed and laid out, and worth subscribing to. Sample copy is US\$5, six issues at \$20 in USA, \$28 elsewhere, from Futures Past, Box 610, Convoy, Ohio 45832, USA.

Recommended.

COMPUCOMEDY

I took in the movie SNEAKERS, a comedy starring Robert Redford and his merry band of computer hackers (Sidney Poitier, Dan Aykroyd, River Phoenix) plus Maid Marian (Mary McDonnell). The gang is a typical one-of-everything group, with a Negro, a blind man, the young kid (one almost expected David Niven to walk in, protesting "But surely you're not going to send a young lad like him up in this weather?"), the crazy, and a leader with a past. Aykroyd is the crazy, a guy who believes every conspiracy theory ever put about, from faked moon landings to JFK being shot (but not killed; he's in hiding with Elvis).

The plot starts off by showing how Redford's gang earn their living; they test security systems by breaking into them and showing management how to improve them. The movie begins with them attacking a bank. One scene struck me as perfectly true to life: when the alarm system goes off, the security guard frantically pages through the Job Procedures Manual to find out what to do about it. Redford's gang is duped into stealing a computer chip that can break any secret code in the world, be it the central banking system or air traffic control. Like any good quest, they must chase about trying to get the chip and keep it away from both the Mafia and the National Security Agency.

Ben Kingsley is excellent in his role as the repressed technomerd working for the Mafia. ("So you work for organized crime?", asks Redford. Replies Kingsley, "They're not that organized.")

Another amusing scene: Aykroyd is using a stolen instruction manual to figure out how to bypass an electronic device. "I got it from a friend who was in Operation Desert Storm." Pause. "Of course he was on the other side."

The biggest excitement in October is usually Thanksgiving but this year politics are keeping everyone stirred up. Alberta has a triple dose of elections. Not only are we voting yes/no on the new constitution with the rest of Canada (October 26), but Albertans vote October 19 in the province-wide municipal elections. The Tories are having a leadership campaign as well, Premier Getty having resigned as party leader so that his personal unpopularity would not affect the constitutional referendum.

UNACCUSTOMED AS I AM TO PUBLIC SPEAKING ... 1992-10-7

My boss Harold lives in the village of Turner Valley (pop. 400), about a 45 minute drive southwest of Calgary. Turner Valley was where Alberta's petroleum industry began in the early part of this century, although the output of gas and oil has since been surpassed by other parts of the province. Sam Nickle, the elderly oil millionaire and my friend from the Calgary Philatelic Society, once told me about a natural gas pipeline built in the early days when the technology was still primitive. The Turner Valley supply of natural gas to Calgary was sent through cast-iron pipes buried in clay subsoil. Over the years the pipe rusted away but the clay held the shape of the pipeline and kept the gas sealed in. The gas continued to move through the non-existent pipes.

Harold was a village alderman on Turner Valley Council but this time he is running for mayor against the incumbent. Today he had to take time to get a speech written for a candidate's debate tonight. In many villages (and cities, for that matter) a sizeable number of positions are filled by acclamation. Two Calgary alderwomen were acclaimed, for example. Some of this is due to voter satisfaction with the incumbent, but a lot of it has to do with the realization that anyone in politics must be prepared to receive a lot of abuse, work long hours, and

face a better-than-even chance of marriage breakup. (Which reminds me of a Tory in Red Deer who only stood for office because his wife was an ambitious social climber who pushed him all the way into a minister's position. He fell in love with a legislative assistant and married her, then quit politics. His ex-wife was left out of the social circle she had wanted so desperately to belong to.)

DOING THE RIGHT THING

After the new constitutional deal was negotiated between Prime Minister Mulroney and the ten provincial premiers, Don Getty resigned as Alberta's premier. Getty didn't want Albertans voting against the deal just because they didn't like him. The provincial Tories have been in a lot of trouble lately because of poor financial management. As the joke goes, the difference between Tories and socialists is that the Tories are the ones who nationalize corporations, subsidize them with billions of dollars, then sell them at a loss. In the last provincial election, Getty was defeated in his Edmonton riding. A backbencher gave up his seat in the riding of Stettler so Getty could be elected in a bye-election there. The backbencher was appointed to a patronage job and Stettler received various public works, including raising the level of a lake. But all this was catching up with Getty. He didn't want the constitutional reform defeated in Alberta by voters protesting against him, so he resigned in an effort to disassociate the two things. A valid point, since no one should decide an important issue on the basis of personality. (Okay, so I live in a dream world.)

Prime Minister Mulroney, on the other hand, barges through Canada sowing alarm and woe amongst friend and foe alike. His political handlers are trying to keep

him out of western Canada, where his popularity is such that he would do more harm than good for the Yes side. Mulroney's basic problem is that he exaggerates too much and cries wolf too often. He made a speech saying that Canada would collapse into chaos and civil war if the constitutional amendments were rejected. This speech was ignored by most Canadians because he said the same thing would happen a few years ago when the previous amendment, the Meech Lake Accords, were rejected. Nothing happened then; we all went to work the next day as usual, the garbage was still picked up, and the sun came up the next morning.

But this time, Mulroney's hysterical nonsense was picked up by the international press. Foreign speculators began to dump Canadian dollars. The Bank of Canada had to raise interest rates by two full percentage points to defend our currency in international money markets. Five-year mortgage rates soared to 9.5% overnight.

THE CHARLOTTETOWN ACCORDS

People I know who haven't read a book since they graduated from high school twenty years ago are busy reading the constitutional amendments, known as the Charlottetown Accords, after the town they were negotiated in. I won't bore you with a clause-by-clause discussion of the draft text (which differs from the legal text, of which more later) but I'll mention a few things about it.

It all goes back to the British North America Act of 1867 which revised previous constitutions. Since Canada was a British colony at the time, the B.N.A. Act was passed by the British Parliament. This left Canada in the peculiar position of not being able to amend its own constitution. The problem was partially solved in 1982 when a new constitution was passed by the British giving Canada control of its laws. This was known as patriation of the constitution. It wasn't repatriation since there was nothing to

repatriate. But unfortunately Québec never signed the 1982 constitution since the separatists happened to be in power at the time. It would be like New York State refusing to sign the Declaration of Independence. In 1990, the Meech Lake Accord was to have brought Québec into the 1982 constitution. Trouble was, Manitoba and Newfoundland didn't ratify it. Trying to get all the provinces to agree on constitutional reform is like trying to herd cattle; as soon as you think you've got them all rounded up and headed in the proper direction then one or two animals break loose from the herd and scatter.

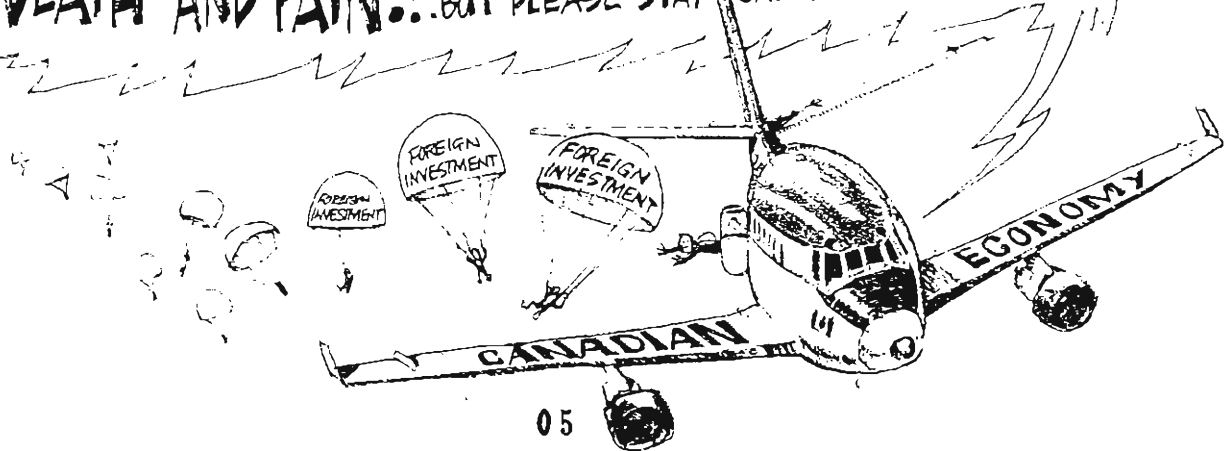
Once more with feeling, and the First Ministers (that is, the Prime Minister and the ten provincial premiers) negotiated a new deal in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. This time they decided to let the taxpayers decide, and the matter was put to referendum.

ALL KINDS OF NEAT STUFF

Entrenched into the new deal is the principle of the double majority. A change affecting certain groups is to be ratified not only by a majority vote in Parliament, but also a majority of the group affected. For example, any change affecting francophones must be approved by a majority of francophone senators. Groups entitled to double-majority rights are limited to such as francophones, aboriginals, and a few others. Not all identifiable groups are entitled to this, only the few that have been historically important.

Senators are now to become elected, instead of being appointed like the British House of Lords. They will be reduced in number down to 62, with six from each province and one from each territory, and possibly extras representing aboriginals. While it is nice to reduce the size of the Senate from 104, the down side is that the House of Commons will increase to 345.

THIS IS CAPTAIN MULRONEY SPEAKING, PLEASE FASTEN YOUR SEATBELT.
WE ARE EXPECTING SOME TURBULENCE AHEAD... BUT IT COULD
GET WORSE! ANY MOMENT NOW THE PLANE MAY
EXPLODE INTO A MILLION BURNING PIECES AND
PLUMMET TO THE GROUND WITH BITS OF OUR
BODIES CRASHING EVERYWHERE WITH
DEATH AND PAIN!! BUT PLEASE STAY CALM AND DON'T PANIC.



FLAMES ALONG THE BORDER

The Charlottetown deal proposes to establish a Canadian Common Market. I should explain to my foreign readers that our provinces have trade barriers against each other that make pre-EC Europe look like post-EC Europe. Brands of beer made in one province are not available in another province, for example. Peculiarly, Canada has free trade with United States and Mexico but not within itself.

Three levels of government would be recognized; federal, provincial, and aboriginal. (Municipal governments have always been creatures of the provinces and don't have any constitutional status.) In Canada, provincial premiers rank as equals to the Prime Minister, and the feds cannot interfere in certain areas such as education, forestry or tourism, to name a few. The accords would formalize the division of powers to eliminate duplication.

LEBANON AND QUEBEC

Québec currently has about 25% of Canada's population and under the new deal is to be guaranteed 25% of the seats in the House of Commons. In addition, three of the nine Supreme Court justices must be trained in Québec civil law, which is based on the Napoleonic Code. (The rest of Canada uses English common law.)

But what happens if the population balance changes? This is what started the Lebanese civil war, as their constitution favoured Christians over Muslims based on outdated demography. Why should Québec have 25% of seats if they decline to, say, 10%? It is not to protect their culture since other parts of the constitutional deal cover that. British Columbia is the fastest growing part of Canada, but would be denied representation by population in the future. Québec already has veto powers over changes that affect its culture; it does not need an unfair proportion of Commons seats.

WOULD YOU BUY A HOUSE LIKE THIS?

There are two parts to the Charlottetown Accord. The Consensus Report On The Constitution (Final Text) is, despite its title, not the final text. It is the deal that the First Ministers signed. Copies of this have been widely printed and distributed. The second part of the Accord is the infamous 'legal text', still being negotiated after the first part was released and the referendum announced.

The first part of the Accord is riddled with "to be negotiated at a later date" clauses. The details not having been settled, voters will essentially be asked to write a blank cheque. Since many of the paragraphs allow for significant changes afterwards, voters will have to execute a leap of faith. When you buy a house you expect to have the land title inspected, the property surveyed, terms of payment specified, and date of occupation named. You would refuse to sign a contract that said the date of occupation would be decided at a later date and the land title subject to further negotiation.

THE LEGAL TEXT

1992-10-9

The second part of the Accord was released today, the legal text. It contains a few surprises, for a number of points do not adhere to what was said in the first part of the deal. The Consensus Report said aboriginal governments would be democratically elected; the legal text says hereditary chiefs would be permitted. It is one thing to allow the Queen to inherit a throne because she does not have effective day-to-day powers. But allowing hereditary politicians can lead to obvious problems.

While checking something in a park, I saw a housecat on the icy pathway, crouched down in the snow. A couple of metres in front of it was a magpie; the same distance behind the cat was another magpie. The cat didn't look very happy. It was sleeting weather, but worse yet the two birds were razzing the poor feline. They acted in unison. One magpie would flutter toward the cat while another attacked from behind. The cat had to watch opposite directions simultaneously, an impossible task. As I approached the trio, the magpies flapped up into the safety of nearby trees. The cat seized the opportunity and dashed off down the footpath to the safety of home.

SIGN WARS

A constant duty of City maintenance staff is to remove advertising signs off public boulevards and parks. Most signs are pieces of cardboard on a wooden stake or a sandwich board. They generally advertise small Ma-and-Pa businesses such as landscape maintenance or window washing. Into the garbage they go.

A few years ago, a City employee successfully argued in court against a policy that civil servants had to resign if they wanted to run for office in a municipal election. Court of Queen's Bench ruled that they henceforth only had to take an unpaid leave of absence. This same civil servant is running in the municipal election again, but this time he got a temporary court injunction allowing candidates to put signs on public property. The result was predictable; the roadways and parks are cluttered with signs. Weather and vandals distribute the signs all over the turf. It is enough to make me think about supporting the death penalty.

Some candidates, though, have found that putting up signs

all over public boulevards has cost them votes. They were flooded with angry phone calls and were forced to withdraw the signs. Unfortunately other candidates don't give a damn, figuring that all the signs from other candidates will cancel each other out as far as lost votes go. To make matters worse, the referendum committees are also taking advantage, and mixed in with aldermanic signs are "YES" signs and "NO" signs. (Which reminds me of a joke I heard about the politician urging people "On October 26, vote N.F.W.")

Mayor Al Duerr has probably only a dozen or so signs in the entire city. There are about half-a-dozen opponents in the mayoralty race but Duerr is expected to win re-election by a landslide. He's been a good mayor, and there are no issues in that race. Some of the aldermen are in trouble, but the biggest excitement is in the two school board races, where budget cuts and user fees have parents in an uproar.

WAITING IN CHURCH

1992-10-16

Went down to the Motor Vehicles Division office this morning to renew my car licence plates. The fee is \$50 per year but I took the option of paying \$100 for two years, which saves me waiting time every second year. Entering the M.V.D. office, I took a numbered ticket, #70 it was. #55 was being served at the time, so I had a twenty-minute wait. This always reminds me of being in church. The M.V.D. waiting room is a cavernous space with about the same seating capacity as the average church. The congregation, or I should say, people renewing their licences, sit quietly waiting to be called. Some cross their arms on their chest and doze off, waking every few minutes and looking around to see if they missed their number. Others chat in a muted hush (I don't know why, it isn't a library) that is exactly what a church congregation sounds like while waiting for the preacher to ascend the pulpit to

begin services. When a clerk calls out the next number to be served, one almost expects her to add the name of the hymn. "Number 66, When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder". As with any congregation, there are people with bad coughs hacking away every minute or two. They couldn't get tickets to the symphony orchestra performance, so instead they came here.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GOOSE ISLAND?

1992-10-17

The Mounties founded Calgary in 1875 at the junction of the Bow and Elbow rivers. Within twenty years, Fort Calgary had become The Corporation of the City of Calgary. The original fort was demolished, the Mounties moved to a new location, and the site at which the city began became a railroad yard, with a metre of fill covering the foundations of the fort. Demolition of the fort was done because the structure wasn't worth keeping and nobody worried about heritage sites in the pioneer days. Additionally, every pioneer settlement wanted to project a progressive image, which is why all old postcards show views of the latest edifices instead of some ratty old stockade. One wouldn't want settlers to think that Calgary was a Wild West town that needed a fort for protection. A century later, of course, heritage sites were all the rage. The railroad yards were removed, the fill scraped off, and the fort foundations uncovered and preserved as an archeological exhibit. The first frame house built in Calgary, the Deane House, is still in existence, although it had been moved to a different location. It is named after the Mountie who lived in it. Archaeologists wanted to locate the original foundations so they could excavate for artifacts, but no one knew where they were.

Enter radar. The petroleum and mining industries use surface-search radar to locate pipelines, shallow mineral deposits, and soil types. So recently the staff at Fort Calgary have been using radar to locate the founda-

tions of Deane House. This saves a lot of time and trouble, not having to dig exploratory trenches all over the place. People are also looking to find the exact location of Goose Island, which once existed at the junction of the Elbow and Bow rivers. It has since been buried; the Fort Calgary Historical Society hopes to find it and possibly recreate it. The Bow river is cluttered with quite a few islands as it goes through Calgary, many of which were merged together into bigger islands by landfill. I don't know why our ancestors were so obsessed with making big islands out of small islands, since all of them are by law used for parks or natural reserves, not built on with houses or factories.

CHROME DOMES

1992-10-18

I saw two ads side-by-side in today's CALGARY SUN. One was from a company dealing with hair restoration, although it was not possible to tell if they meant hair transplants, toupees, or some miracle ingredient that would grow it back. There were the usual before and after photos, and the text read as follows: "Believe it! Losing your hair hurts your image. You want hair yet the fear of what others might think holds you back. In life we do only go around once; it's your image that counts, not what others think ...".

Next to this ad was a larger one by Alderman Ray Clark who is running for re-election tomorrow. His bald head is notably conspicuous, and notwithstanding the other ad he is considered a shoo-in at the polls.

I have to wonder if the juxtaposition of the two ads was inadvertent, or if the composing-room staff at the newspaper decided to have some fun.

And for the record, I am 37 years old with a full head of hair and no sign of incipient baldness.

Stopped off at the Altadore Elementary School on the way home from work. It is where my polling station is, and I voted for the municipal candidates. Three ballots, for mayor, alderman, and public school candidate. (Catholics vote for a different set of candidates for their school system.)

HIS RALPHNESS

Mayor Al Duerr was declared re-elected one minute after the polls closed at 20h00. The first results started to come in about thirty minutes later. The only excitement in the mayoralty race was whether or not Duerr would be able to break the record set by his predecessor Ralph Klein, who was re-elected in his last campaign with 91% of the vote.

Klein was originally a television reporter who covered the city desk. He figured that what with all the council and committee meetings he had attended over the years, he knew as much, if not more, than any alderman about running a large city. So he stood for mayor, and upset the established candidates, one of whom was the incumbent. In the next election, Ralph was in by a large margin, with his third and final term getting him 91% of the vote. He then jumped to provincial politics and became Minister of Environment, and recently announced he was running for party leader to replace Getty. He may have trouble with that campaign because he is not a team player, and often wanders off on his own tangent, putting noses out of joint in the Tory caucus. But as a Calgary mayor, he was a legend in his own time.

Ralph is a populist, and in physical terms, a short, roly poly man. Generally cheerful, he was famous for doing much of his work from a basement tavern called the Saint

Louis, in a pension hotel a block behind City Hall. He figured he got more work done in the bar because there weren't as many interruptions as would be the case in his office in City Hall. He enjoyed the good life and good food. As a consequence, he was variously known as His Circumference The Mayor, or occasionally His Blimpness. His years in the news media enabled him to manipulate them as no other politician could. On one occasion that endeared him to City workers, he shut up instantly a reporter complaining about lazy civil servants by threatening to tell a few stories about the reporter's goofing off back when. Ralph knew where all the media skeletons were buried, and as a consequence was treated carefully by reporters and editors, all of whom had something to hide.

Duerr hasn't been as colourful a mayor. The only title he picked up was His Yuppiness, and it fits him exactly. If you've ever seen a 40ish yuppie with wire-rim glasses and hair starting to thin out, then you've met our mayor.

AND THE WINNER IS ...

1992-10-20

Duerr appears to have won re-election with about half a percentage point more than Klein's record. My boss Harold was rather quiet this morning. He lost his bid for mayor of Turner Valley by a 3-to-1 margin against the incumbent. He told me it wouldn't have hurt so much had he been reasonably close, but to be toasted so badly ...

WHAT SO PROUDLY WE HAIL

While Alberta was exercising itself over municipal politics, eastern Canada was worried about an upside-down flag at the World Series baseball game between

Atlanta and Toronto. A Marines colour guard carried the Maple Leaf flag upside-down into the opening ceremonies, which ruffled a lot of Canadian feathers. I can't get excited about it myself. It was obviously an unintended error, and I feel sorry for the 18-year-old Marine who carried the flag. For years to come, his regimental mates are going to be teasing him about it. Canadian news media were swamped by phone calls from angry television viewers, who seemed to think that it was a deliberately done insult by Yankees still upset at losing the War of 1812. There has been a tremendous run on American flags in Toronto stores. No prizes for guessing what the fans intend doing with them at the game. One final thought on flags: about half of all people flying the Union Jack probably have it upside-down.

I can't understand the hoorah over a 'Canadian' team being in the World Series, since the team is composed of American and Latino players. No different than an 'American' hockey team where more of the players are franco-phones than not, and the rest are anglophone Canucks.

It is all bread and circuses.

TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY

Meanwhile, in the continuing saga of friendship across the border, Mulroney made a speech in favour of the constitutional accord in Québec. He told the audience that if the Accord was rejected, Québécois would end up like Cajuns, with a diluted culture of banjo players. This was ignored by Canadians used to Mulroney's exaggeration, but stirred up a firestorm of protest from Louisiana, where the Cajuns took exception. A Cajun leader remarked that the musical instruments of choice among them are violins and accordians. This struck me as an odd defense of their culture, but perhaps he was speaking ironically.

CALGARY'S MOST EXPENSIVE CHRISTMAS TREE 1992-10-23

I was running some errands today when I drove through Confederation Park, which I used to be in charge of during the middle 1980s. Driving through the valley in which the parks lies, I saw a clump of spruces on the east side of 10th Street NW, which brought back a rush of memories.

Three of the spruce trees are relatively young. The average motorist would never notice that the other spruces in this clump have trunks about 30 cm diameter, compared to about 10 cm for the three.

At the Parks Dept. maintenance depot in Bearspaw during the 1987 Christmas, there was a Christmas tree, a spruce decorated in a safety theme. The ornaments were hard hats, respirators, goggles, gloves, and other safety equipment. While the decorations emphasized on-the-job safety, the tree served as a reminder that safety is not something we stop worrying over after quitting time.

On November 26, 1987, shortly after 01h00, an auto travelling at a high rate of speed left the roadway as it was proceeding north past Confederation Park on 10th Street. The car clipped the corner of a parking lot, smashing two concrete curbstones, and just missing a streetlight. The tires disintegrated on impact with the curb. The car, running on rims, smashed through the clump of spruces; three of them, each 10 m tall and 30 cm in diameter, were snapped off like broomsticks. The debris was strewn far and wide. The next morning my crew cleaned up what the firefighters and tow-truck operator had missed. We found parts of the car 50 m away at the top of a hill.

[continued next page]

It took firefighters an hour to cut the victims loose. A woman died in the tragedy, and a man was left in a coma. I never heard how the man turned out. There was a brief paragraph in next day's newspaper about the accident but no followup. Just a routine fatal accident. Of the three spruces hit by the car, one was salvaged as a Christmas tree and the other two trashed. Replacement trees were planted the following spring. Five years later, I suspect I am the only one outside the victims' families who remembers the accident. Firefighters and police see hundreds of such accidents, and unless there was some unusual factor, they wouldn't remember. City maintenance crews clean up after hundreds of accidents, and each year we replant hundreds of runover trees.

An expensive Christmas tree. Its cost included the value of the tree itself (and its two mates), the car that was totally destroyed, the unfinished life of a woman. There was the cost of a firefighter crew and trucks to spend an hour cutting open the car (and probably two hours after doing the paperwork). A fatal accident usually brings out about four constables and an inspector to do the investigation and consequent paperwork. The paramedics in their ambulance, the emergency ward staff at the hospital where the man was taken, and the Medical Examiner's night duty staff at the morgue where the woman was taken. Was there a claims adjuster from the insurance company? The funeral could not have been cheap. And the Parks Dept. had to clean up, then plant new trees.

I estimate the accident cost about \$30,000. That's quite an expensive Christmas tree.

GUARD YOUR BORDERS, YANKEES

Not to be outdone by Mulroney, an Alberta cabinet minister said that if the Accord was rejected, there would be a huge flood of Albertans fleeing south into the USA. The moving companies, however, are not planning to hire extra staff.

VOTE #2

1992-10-26

Stopped off at my polling place on the way home from work and voted on the constitution. This time the poll was at a community hall on the military base (I live a block away from CFB Calgary). I voted no.

No to Québec being guaranteed 25% of seats in the Commons when they already had double-majority veto in the Senate. No to increasing the number of M.P.s. And no to a 'deal' that would not end the current round of constitutional negotiations but merely start off the next round.

THE SUN STILL CAME UP THE NEXT MORNING

1992-10-27

The constitutional Accord was defeated by approximately a 60 to 40 split. Québec, Alberta, and British Columbia were the three major provinces that rejected it and Ontario barely approved it by 0.2%. The Accord is dead.

Interestingly, my riding approved it, voting yes by a couple of hundred votes. This is the riding where Preston Manning, leader of the Reform party, intends to run in the next election against the present M.P., a Minister Without Portfolio. Reform took a strong stand against the Accord.

No flood of Albertan refugees has strained the ability of the state of Montana to handle them. Interest rates declined, the loonie strengthened in money markets, and the garbage was still picked up by the Sanitation Department.

Now we look forward to the Alberta Tory leadership race. The six cabinet ministers who stood as candidates were surprised to learn from Premier Getty that they must take leaves of absence to campaign in the race to succeed him.

DIRTY TRICKS

1992-10-28

Now Albertans turn their attention to the provincial Tory leadership race, which got off to a bang as a result of a 'prank' played by a New Democrat aide. This chap forged a letter from one leadership candidate suggesting that Alberta's debt could be paid off by cashing in Ralph's empties at the bottle recycling depot. Klein was not amused. Neither was the fellow who had his signature forged on the letter; he asked the police to investigate. The NDP aide who forged the letter is in hot water with the Member he works for. Poor judgement from someone who should have known better.

ONLY IN CANADA, EH?

Thrifty Car Rentals is selling a 1993 calendar featuring hockey superstar Wayne Gretzky. The calendar sales are to aid the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. In addition to the regular glossy calendar, there is also a braille version. At a press conference last week here in Calgary, both versions of the calendar were unveiled with pomp and ceremony. A blind man demonstrated the braille calendar to the news reporters, but the demonstration was a failure: he couldn't read it. The head office of CNIB had sent him the francophone version, and unfortunately he didn't know French.

MORE PICA PICA

1992-11-3

The building I work out of is stuccoed. Construction was completed in 1991, so the stucco should still be pristine. It is, in most places, but along one wall it is marred by chips. Everytime I walk by, I've been puzzling about why and wherefrom the chips. No vehicles are parked adjacent to the wall, so the chips can't be blamed on careless drivers. Weathering should affect all parts of the stucco, not just one area.

Today I finally discovered the reason. Driving into the depot compound, I saw a magpie clinging to the stucco. It was hanging upside-down on the wall, trying to extract water from a hose tap. The bird quickly gave up and flew away. No surprise really, since the water to outdoor taps was shut off a few weeks ago so the winter cold wouldn't freeze them. The magpie flew over to the other side of the building where we have our vehicle wash. Here there is a gravel pad clogged with a fermenting mixture of grass, leaves and mud washed off the mowing machines. Even in the cold it still teems with insects and other magpie food.

When not scavenging on stucco, the magpies work trees and utility poles, although most of them prefer to hop along on the turf, stopping to tilt their heads and eye the ground for edibles. As seen from my office window, there is always at least one magpie in view. Must be fertile soil.

BUT DID HE CASH IN HIS EMPTIES?

1992-11-10

While other Tory leadership candidates earnestly talk about how they would balance the budget, Ralph Klein is not only marching to the sound of a different drummer, he's leading a mariachi band. Today at a speech to the Alberta Restaurant and Food Association, Klein told his audience that if he is elected party leader, he would introduce discounts on volume sales of booze (supply and prices of alcoholic beverages are set by the government) and oppose laws banning all smoking in public places. Klein said that after eating in the St. Louis Hotel all these years, he couldn't imagine the owners banning smoking. "Somehow it [smoke] sort of blends in with the grease from the chicken and chips, and it just sort of adds to the flavour", said Klein. He is, needless to say, a smoker, but is also famous for never buying his own cigarettes. There is the story of someone asking him what brand he smoked, to which he replied, "What brand do you have?".

The last of the seasonal workers have been laid off in the Parks Dept., and we are now doing tool inventory and getting everything ready for winter. There was some gas and diesel fuel left over in jerrycans; rather than let it sit over the winter, we take it in to Heritage Park, a pioneer village on the banks of the Glenmore Reservoir, where it is used in the steam engines of their railroad. I had to turn in my pickup truck a couple of weeks ago when the first seasonal layoffs began, and as a consequence, bumped my Equipment Foreman out of his fuel truck. The fuel truck still had a couple of hundred litres of fuel on board, so that plus the jerrycans were taken to Heritage Park.

When I arrived, I was directed to the engine roundhouse, which, despite its name, is not round. Bob, the chief engine driver, is a retired railroad man who looks after the steam fleet of Heritage Park. I backed my truck up to one of the steam engines. While Bob emptied the cans into the fuel wagon (3000 gallons capacity), I pumped the bulk tank on my truck. Although I have seen the steam engines often enough driving by the park, this was the first time I had gotten close to one. I hadn't realized they were so huge and tall. I had to handpump the fuel up a 3 m gradient, and it was hard work; even with the winter cold I was sweating. While we loaded the fuel, Bob and I were talking about his time on the railroad. He drove one of the last steam engines in Canada, which went out of service in 1959.

The Heritage Park steamers were all liquid fuel powered, with fuel wagons attached to the engines. Bob had no patience with coal or wood power, and quickly debunked the idea that there was any glamour in shovelling coal into the maw of a boiler. "You won't catch me doing that!", he said with definite emphasis. It was eerie in the silent house, with all the engines looming high above us. The dull black iron emphasized the mass

and weight of the engines. One could easily imagine a horror story set in this roundhouse.

STAMPING AROUND CALGARY

1992-11-12-pm

Went over to the Marlborough Inn tonight to help set up the annual stamp show CALTAPEX 92. It only takes a couple of hours to put up fifty exhibit frames, four of which will contain my exhibit "The Postal History of the 1988 Calgary Olympics". Like most stamp shows, the event is being held in a single large ballroom, about 600 m² in area. The exhibits are in the middle of the space, with the dealer bourse around the edge of the room. There are 24 dealers, just a small number, but high quality dealers. Most of the setup for the show, such as tables for the dealer bourse, is by the hotel in accordance with the written contact that specifies in exact detail what is to be done. Too bad some SF cons can't seem to do this. CALTAPEX charges no admission fee, breaking even on the dealer fees.

THE QUIET REFERENDUM

1992-11-13

While the rest of Canada has been exercising itself in the Accord dispute, the Inuit tribes of Arctic Canada had their own referendum. The voting took place from November 3 to 5, but the results took time to compile over such a vast land and were only announced yesterday.

In 1982, all the residents of Northwest Territories (both aboriginal and European-descent) voted to split NWT in half. The western half would be Denedeh, the eastern half Nunavut. In May 1992 they voted yes by a narrow margin to the boundary line. From what I hear, Denedeh is having trouble because there are so many different tribes (plus the whites) and it is difficult

to agree on a constitution. Nunavut Territory is 80% Innu, so they didn't have as much trouble in settling the claims, and the November 1992 proposals were approved. One interesting aspect of this vote was that people who did not vote at the polls were officially recorded as 'No' votes. As the saying goes, not to decide is to decide. Nunavut is the eastern half of the NWT mainland and most of the Arctic Archipelago, plus a few islands in Hudson Bay. Total area is 2.2 million square kilometres.

MORE STAMPING AROUND

1992-11-13

Last night we set up the exhibit frames, today we filled the frames with our exhibits. Each frame holds sixteen $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ pages, held on with double-sided tape. A sheet of plexiglass fits overtop the pages, and is then clamped to the frame and screwed on, making it impossible to steal the pages. People kept leaving the plexiglass at right angles to the aisles, sticking out into pedestrian traffic during setup. The plexiglass is almost impossible to see, as I demonstrated twice in five minutes when I walked into the same sheet (I forgot it was there the second time). It wouldn't have been so bad except the security guard saw me both times.

Phil, the show chairman, asked four of us to move a heavy box. Phil also works for the City of Calgary, (in the Fire Dept.) and when we lifted the box he remarked that one could instantly identify the City workers by how we lifted. The others all bent over at the waist to lift, using their back muscles. Phil and I squatted to floor level, keeping our backs straight and lifting with the legs, exactly as we had been indoctrinated by years of safety lectures. Our Safety Officers would have been proud to see us.

Exhibits were judged last night, and mine took a bronze, about what I was expecting.

The show officially opened at 16h00, and the dealers were doing good business from the word 'Go'. I picked up a few topical stamps for my fish-on-stamps collection, but spent most of my money on modern Ukrainian covers. I bought them from a Calgary dealer whom I never visit in his store because it is downtown, and I hate the hassle of trying to find a parking space. He is Canadian-born but of Ukrainian descent, and just came back from an extended trip to Europe. The recent events in USSR/CIS have resulted in a sudden surge of interest amongst stamp collectors, myself included. I decided to try and build up a collection of Ukraine on covers (that is, stamps genuinely used on envelopes at the correct postage rates) showing the transition from Soviet to independent republic. I'm using the covers from Vasilkovsky and Sidyuk as the starting point, and trying to fill in gaps elsewhere. CALTAPEX already is seeing the trend amongst exhibitors; there were two different exhibits on Soviet-to-independent philately, and I'm sure there'll be more in future years as collectors get enough material to build up exhibits. The Baltic states and Ukraine are most popular, since they have supplied more emigrants to us, and also because there are no supplies of covers from the Islamic republics of Soviet Central Asia.

LORD OF THE FLIES

1992-11-19

Budget time again, and I've been sitting at my desk at work on the 1993 plans. My office has large windows looking out onto the entrance to the depot, and to the roadway intersection in front of it. A good view, but the large glass area is also the most effective insect trap I've ever seen. The garage doors in the building are often open as equipment enters and exits, and a multitude of flies, mosquitoes, moths, and fungus gnats make their way into the gloomy interior. From there, they flutter into the office and spend the remainder of their short lives futilely battering them-

[continued next page]

selves against the glass. The small size of the office requires that the desks be tight to the walls below the windows. The end result is that a constant drizzle of dried-up insect husks rains down on my paperwork. Each morning the first task of the day is to blow off the desk. It must be done briskly enough to scatter the lately departed insects, but not so strongly that the paperwork is mussed up.

VOTE #3

1992-11-29

Yesterday the members of the Alberta Progressive Conservative party voted for their new leader. Alas, no one got a clear majority of the vote, so there will be a runoff vote next Saturday between the top three finishers. Ralph Klein, thought to be the frontrunner since the day Getty resigned, was shocked to come in second behind Minister of Health Nancy Betkowski. She won the ballot by one vote. Klein and Betkowski each got 31% of the vote; the third place finisher Rick Orman trailed with 14%. Klein even lost his own riding by 2-to-1 against Betkowski. The other six candidates were nowhere. They were a collection of undistinguished cabinet ministers and the lunatic right. The vote did allay fears that the Tories might lurch to the right; Betkowski and Klein are both Red Tories and Orman is a pragmatist.

But the vote has been quickly pushed to one side by more important matters. Specifically, the Calgary Stampeders football team are playing against Winnipeg this afternoon in the Toronto Skydome for the Grey Cup. The Cup is the championship game of the Canadian Football League. Calgary hasn't won the Grey Cup since 1971, while Winnipeg won it a year or two ago.

Calgary won the Grey Cup. What else is there to say? A victory parade will be held later this week. It is all bread and circuses.

Rick Orman withdrew from the race yesterday, so Klein and Betkowski will fight it out on Saturday. Klein has been making a few paranoid statements lately that will probably cost him the premiership. He accuses the defeated candidates of setting up an Anybody-But-Klein movement. Since most of the other candidates are putting their support behind Betkowski, this claim might be true on the surface, but I think Klein was going to be without their support anyway.

For the last few weeks I've been attending a course on Tuesdays on Urban Forestry. All Parks workers will go through this course eventually. For us foremen it was basically a refresher on tree planting, pruning, identification, etc.. Some of the labourers were sweating though, but they need it in order to get ahead. During the noon hour, I made a quick trip downtown to pick up my mail at the post office. I had forgotten that this was when the parade was being held to honour the Stampeders, but fortunately I came in right behind it. It was slow work pattering along behind the street cleaners, who kept missing quite a few horse droppings. As a result, the street was full of what appeared to be drunk drivers swerving across the lanes but who were in fact just trying to avoid the droppings.

The afternoon session of Urban Forestry was a practical one out at the City Nursery, a few minutes from my house. Parks Dept. learned a long time ago that the best courses for its employees were in-house, designed and taught by its own staff, rather than outsiders. In today's session, one of our younger gardeners was to demonstrate the proper method of chainsawing down a large tree, using a mis-shapen poplar that had to go. Unfortunately, young Stewart made the wrong cut on the tree and had to spend quite some time redoing the cut so the tree would fall properly, all the while with twenty of his coworkers razzing him. We didn't tease

him too hard though, because every one of us has goofed up in a similar fashion at one time or another.

TEAR DOWN THE WALLS

1992-12-4

The federal Minister of Trade Michael Wilson today stated that the provincial trade ministers have agreed to begin negotiations aimed at eliminating interprovincial trade barriers by 1995. They hope to establish a Canadian common market by June 1994, and, allowing for the time needed for thirteen legislatures to pass the laws, get it up and running by March 1995.

Ralph Klein has been rather testy over the last few days, saying things that suggest he does not function well under pressure. This is the first election he has had to struggle. Used to winning comfortably, he doesn't seem to be able to face the possibility of defeat with dignity.

VOTE #4

1992-12-5

Although he lost his own riding again, Ralph won the race for Premier by 46,245 votes over Betkowski's total of 31,722. Premier Ralph only has about a year or so to turn the fortunes of the Progressive Conservative party around before he has to call an election. He has to balance three factions: the rural ridings, the Calgary ridings, and the Edmonton ridings. Good luck to him, he'll need it.

SMOKE ALONG THE ROAD

Driving down Southland Drive to my office, I saw a huge cloud of white smoke billowing into the sky. At first I thought it was a house fire, but as I drove closer, I saw that it was coming from a tandem-axle tanker truck. The

truck was obviously having engine trouble; diesel engines normally put out black smoke, not white. The truck was moving slowly down the road with its emergency flashers on, barely out of first gear. The smoke lingered for ten or fifteen minutes before thinning out and disappearing. As I drove past the truck, I saw the sign on it. It was an environmental cleanup company.

THE CANADIAN MAGAZINE OF SPECULATIVE WRITING

The latest issue of ON SPEC has just arrived, dated Winter '92. This is Canada's answer to ASIMOV'S, and is a nicely printed perfectbound digest of SF. If you would like to see a sample copy, send C\$6 (in Canada) or US\$6 (USA and overseas) to ON SPEC, Box 4727, Edmonton, Alberta, T6E 5G6.

BOWMAN'S

For a number of years I've been buying pulps from Ray Bowman (Box 167, Carmel, Indiana 46032). His catalogues were digest-sized, basically photocopied booklets. Beginning with #99, he switched to a tabloidzine format and began taking ads from other dealers. Then a few pulp stories started creeping in, and one or two locs. Nowadays the catalogue is in 8½ x 11 magazine format, accepts original manuscripts, and calls itself FANTASTIC COLLECTIBLES MAGAZINE. \$2 will get you a sample copy; it can best be described as an adzine.

Writes Bowman: "We are purchasing a limited number of manuscripts for use in our magazine. Our requirements are for original fiction of the 'hard science' variety (no wizards or swordplay please). We wish to purchase fiction that John Campbell would have liked 30 to 50 years ago."