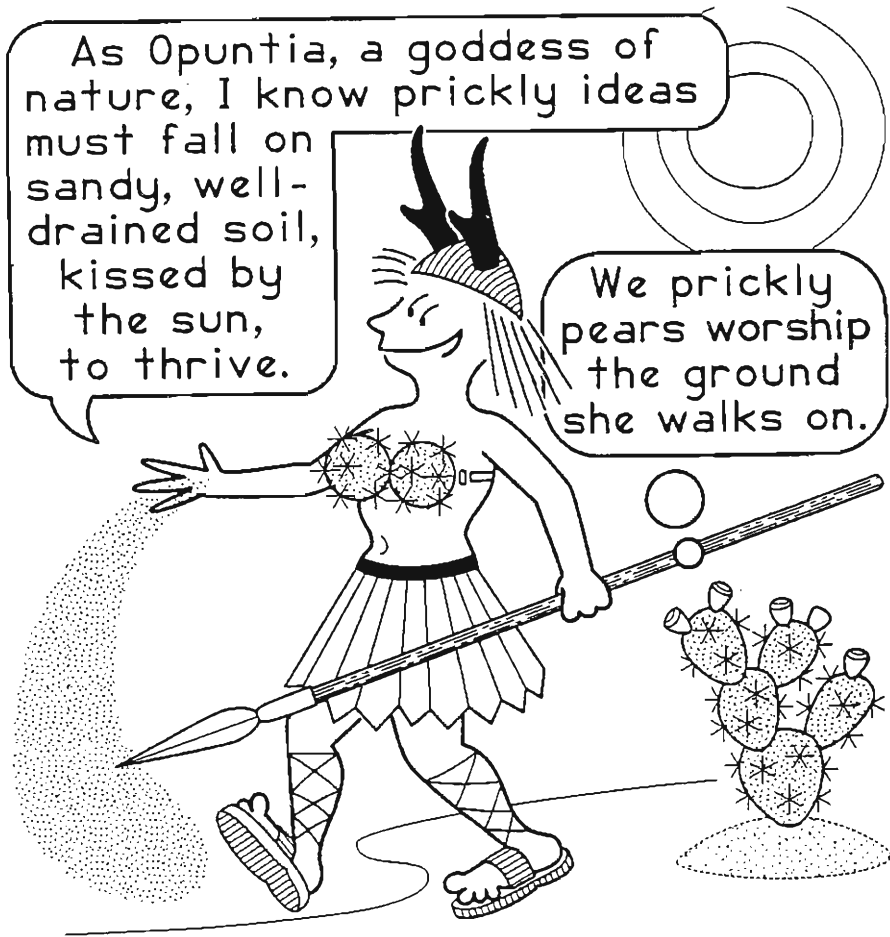


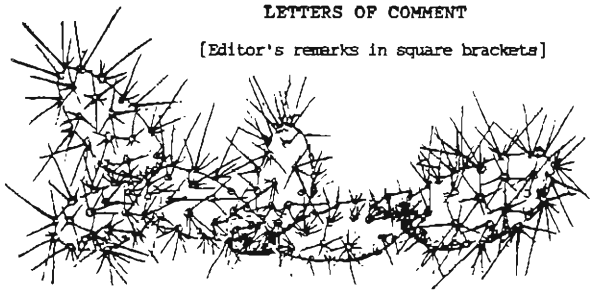
# OPUNTIA 25

As Opuntia, a goddess of nature, I know prickly ideas must fall on sandy, well-drained soil, kissed by the sun, to thrive.

We prickly pears worship the ground she walks on.



[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



OPUNTIA #25

September 1995

ISSN 1183-2703

OPUNTIA is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or a letter of comment on a previous issue.

COVER ART: Teddy Harvia, 701 Regency Drive, Hurst, Texas 76054-2307.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: From Andrea Paradis at the National Library of Canada, we are advised that the SF exhibit "Out Of This World" is on the World Wide Web. The exhibit is at <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/events/sci-fi/esci-fi.htm>. The home page of the NLC itself is at <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/>. Not owning a computer, much less having Web access, I'll rely on my faithful readers to write me a brief review of this netsite. Can anyone oblige me?

A brochure to hand from the Canadian SF & F Foundation looking for \$25 a year for membership. Its reasons for existence are vaguely to promote Canadian imaginative writing, and more specifically to establish an anglophone juried SF award (= Nebula), organizing academic conferences (= Canada Council grants), and a clearing house of information about SF authors, organizations, and activities. Details from 42 Park St., Scarborough, Ontario M1N 2N5.

FROM: Bridget Hardcastle  
13 Lindfield Gardens  
Hampstead, London NW3 6PX, England

1995-7-14

Interesting piece on hectography in OPUNTIA #24. It's something I want to try when I can find the right inkstone. I have everything else, but I'm making it with a vegetarian equivalent to gelatin. I want to make raspberry flavoured contributions to CHEFF, the foodie apa. 'Twas interesting to read about the underground political use of hectos, though not surprising once you think about it.

FROM: Ned Brooks  
713 Paul Street  
Newport News, Virginia 23605

1995-7-11

I enjoyed the account of the research into the origin of the hectograph. My late uncle Eddie Planas had a book called ENQUIRE WITHIN that contained, among many other things, a recipe for making hecto jelly and inks. Long after seeing his copy I bought a book of the same title,

[continued next page]

but I don't think it is the same book as I can't find anything about hecto in it. Edward Planas copy ... was probably British, while mine was published in Philadelphia in 1856, probably too early an edition for hecto. There is one reference to copying, a brief hint that any ink may be made into a suitable copying ink by adding sugar to it. This must refer to the technique you mention of taking a copy of a letter by pressing a piece of damp paper against it. But a copy made that way would be a mirror image, unless the impression is so strong that it could be read from the back.

[The copied sheet was a thin transparent paper which enabled one to read it through the back side as normal writing.]

I once owned a Heyer hecto, the type where the gelatin is only about 1/8 inch thick and is bonded to a piece of canvas. This can be rolled up for storage, and for use was stretched on a light steel frame. It was long enough that legal-length paper (8½ x 14) could be used.

FROM: Don Fitch 1995-7-15  
3908 Frijo  
Covina, California 91722

Hectography was already rare in fandom when I was a neo circa 1959. It had a bad reputation, for which I suppose various reasons. It was by then somewhat obsolete technology, supplanted by the mimeo (more precisely, the silk screen mimeo, preferably a Gestetner). Many of the people who had used it were, errr, somewhat limited in the ability to move speedily and skillfully, and to understand the idiosyncracies of the medium, all of which it demands if the results are to be of a reasonably high level. The gelatin/glycerine/water pad is a colloid, the properties of which vary according to temperature, humidity, and age. These need to be sensed/understood/recog-

nized, and compensated for. If that isn't done properly the results can easily range from disgusting to disastrous. Many fans, too, tried to take it beyond its natural limitations. Despite the implication of 100 copies a print run of more than about 50 should never have been attempted. If some copies were too faint to be legible, the fault was that of the publisher who refused to accept this fact, not of the medium.

On the other hand, hecto was recognized as having an extraordinary virtue. Like spirit duplicating/dittography but unlike mimeo and printing presses, it is capable of providing multiple colours in a single print run. Ditto master-sets were commonly used for hecto, though they had to be reversed since ditto is in a sense an offset process. They were available not only in the common purple (popular because it produced more legible copies than any other colour) but also in red, blue, green, and black. European fans sometimes provided us with the rare yellow and brown.

A few fanartists took advantage of this capability of the medium, but as far as I can recall not many of them were especially good artists, with the notable exception of Mae Strelkov. In general, I think, spirit duplicating was preferred, both because getting good results was more certain and because the print run could be up around 100 copies, which was close to the average fanzine circulation in those days. My 3rd Grade teacher had a rotary hectograph that used a gel-covered flannel pad, much better than the flat pan type because the timing of the contact between the paper and the dye/gel could be timed more easily; one merely cranked slower as the dye strength weakened.

It seems generally accepted that the membership limit of The Fantasy Amateur Press Association (the first fanapa) was originally set at 55 (later enlarged to 65 after almost everyone went to mimeo or ditto) largely because that was considered the upper limit of reasonably legible pulls from a hecto pad.

FROM: Joseph Major 1995-7-11  
 3307H River Chase Court  
 Louisville, Kentucky 40218-1832

You discuss earlier methods of repro, including "a process where letters were pressed against a damp sheet of paper and a copy made by ink offsetting". That system seems to have still been used until quite recently. "With the assistance of a wet paper copier, I made copies and sent the originals to the President.", says one such user, Virginia Heinlein (GRUMBLES FROM THE GRAVE, page 209) reporting on her and her husband's efforts in 1958 to demand accountability in arms control. Wet-paper transfer was also used by spies. A problem of writing invisible-ink letters is that the secret writing leaves marks on paper, which serve as warning signs for hostile codebreakers. Agents finally learned to write the secret message on one sheet of paper and then press it against another, transferring the ink as with the wet-paper copier, and then sending the second page, free of such signs as disturbed paper fibres, while destroying the original.

FROM: Murray Moore 1995-8-3  
 377 Manly Street  
 Midland, Ontario L4R 3E2

Looking at the delightful cover of #24, I ask, rhetorically, what would art-challenged faneds do without Teddy Harvia?

I feel foolish asking this, exposing myself as ignorant about one of the foundations of fanzines. My impression was that hectography preceded ditto reproduction. You do not mention ditto in "Who Invented The Hectograph?". Is ditto not different from hectography and how is it different?

[Hectography came first, but was messy and limited to the point that people almost immediately began to experiment to come up with better methods. Spirit duplicating and ditto were immediate successors, being paper plates that were easier to work with than gels. There were countless variations of hectos, dittos, and thence to mimeographs. Flat plates gave way to hand-cranked rotary to electric rotary presses, and all of these have yielded to the photocopier.]

FROM: Harry Warner Jr. 1995-7-23  
 423 Summit Avenue  
 Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

You gave me a considerable scare in the 24th OPUNTIA. When you began your hekto article with that quotation from ALL OUR YESTERDAYS, I had a foreboding that you would immediately cite the index of the current WORLD ALMANAC, or a biography of Abraham Lincoln describing how he invented the device to produce quickly all the needed copies of the Emancipation Proclamation. I feel much better after having read your essay because my failure to dig out the identity of the hektograph's inventor obviously wasn't the result of laziness. If you spent all that time and trouble with the resources of huge Canadian libraries and still can't state with certainty that so-and-so created the first hektograph, I can hardly have been expected to do likewise with the microscopic resources of the Hagerstown library.

[I was worried that after I published the essay, I would get a response that the inventor of the hektograph was written up in some well-known fanzine of 1963 or on page xx of the ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA.]

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Tom Feller, Chester Cuthbert, Henry Welch, Teddy Harvia, John Thiel, Sheryl Birkhead, Robert Lichtman, Buck Coulson

That the world economy moves in long waves of 50 to 60 years, the Kondratieff long wave, is still under some dispute, although the ayes seeming to be winning over the nays. William Thompson (1990) refers to "the curiously inconclusive saga of long wave testing". In looking at long waves, one can easily see the trend of the long wave at a distance, but detailed analysis on economic data swamps the sine wave with noise, a good illustration of not being able to see the forest for the trees. The Kondratieff long wave is sometimes referred to as a cycle, but this is not correct, as the word 'cycle' implies a return to the original starting point. The K-wave rises from depression to recovery to prosperity and back down through recession to depression. But the depression of one wave is higher than the depression of the previous wave. Technological progress ensures that the majority of people living in the downswing of the 1990s and early 2000s will still have a better life than those who lived in the Great Depression sixty years ago. Consider the polio vaccine, fresh fruit in season all year round, and good roads that have reduced a half-day's travel down to half an hour.

Long wave researchers are using some interesting indicators to illustrate the K-wave. Robert Philip Weber (1981) looked at British Speeches From The Throne from 1795 to 1972, and found a cycle of speech themes that averaged out at 52 years. In the bottom of the K-wave the Throne Speeches concentrate on the economy. Wealth is the great obsession. As the economy improves, the speeches shift to a pre-occupation with social reform. At the top of the long wave, optimism prevails and the speeches emphasize international matters. In the restraint phase, everyone scurries back to traditional values and fiscal restraint becomes a virtue.

The K-wave at its height is marked by good financial feeling, accompanied by a load of debt, both private and public. Debt payments sap away money for other uses and the long wave starts to turn down. Retail stores suffer and unemployment stays naggingly high over decades. As the long wave touches bottom, everyone is desperately searching for an edge over the competition, touching off a cycle of technological innovation. Such innovation is considered by most K-wave analysts to be the actual beginning of the next long wave. Innovation means reduced costs and money freed up for re-investment, which sets off the prosperity phase. Humans being what they are, they believe the prosperity will keep rolling this time around, and their debt can be paid off out of ever rising incomes or inflated away.

Debt crises also follow a 50 to 60 year cycle, starting during the recession phase (Pfister and Suter 1987). The harshness of a K-wave nadir depends on how well people respond to it. The bottom of a K-wave is not necessarily a grinding, appalling depression as occurred in the 1930s. The Great Depression would have been milder and shorter had it not been for the trade wars and hard lines on international debt.

The innovation phase of our K-wave is beyond any doubt that of the computer. In the 1930s, it was mechanization for the masses, such as motor cars, farm tractors, and electrification. In the 1870s-1880s, it was railroads, chemicals, and steel. In the early 1800s it was cotton textiles and iron.

There is also a trend of wars during the upswings, but it is still questionable if this is cause or effect. All the competitive tensions between countries tend to be expressed too often as war, whether directly or through proxies. The best time to fight a war is when prosperity is in sight, to pay for those munitions.

Traditionally, K-wave analysis lumped all the data as much as possible. Modern research (Thompson 1990) has refined this after noticing that the world economy is led by certain economic sectors and certain countries, which account for most of the change. The innovations previously cited are responsible for most of the economic expansion of their times. Incremental innovation, say increased food production by better crop fertilization, will increase the aggregate size of the economy but not explosively. Outright radical breakthroughs create entire new industries growing exponentially at first, then incrementally. Railroads were an innovation in the 1800s, but not since. Computers are presently reshaping the way we live, but the law of diminishing returns will eventually apply to them just as with railroads. There are only so many railroads that can be built, only so many cars that can be practically used, and only so many things that can be practically computerized. It would be nice to know what the next innovation phase will be like during the 2050s, but that is not for us to ever know. I'm hoping it will be the colonization of space, not the few tin cans in orbit we have now, but reproducing colonies on the moon and Mars. But that way lies madness and SF.

It is not only innovations that change from one wave to the next, but countries who dominate the world economy. Britain's economy dominated the 1800s, the USA has been in charge of the 1900s, and chances are that Japan will have the next century. These dominant nations can be used for the major approximation of each K-wave. Small minor countries (Uganda, Samoa, Canada) are incremental next to the economic superpowers. Just as the pound sterling was the international currency of the 1800s, so it is that the American dollar is accepted everywhere today. Ukrainian postage rates are now set in American dollars and converted to the hyperinflated karbovantsi at the time a letter is mailed. Canadian finance ministers take abuse or credit

as the loonie sinks or rises against the American dollar.

Although orthodox economists take innovation as the main motivator of the long waves, this may be an effect of our banking system. Banks around the world create money out of nothing, using the so-called reserve system. In some countries, the government still controls the moneysupply, which is why Ukraine has hyperinflation. In most of the world, certainly Europe and North America, money is created by banks not responsible to the government of the day. There is valid historical reason for this, as independent banks do not hyperinflate the economy by running printing presses overtime to print more money. But they are not perfect, either. The start/stop nature of our economies is taken for granted; many assume it is a basic law of nature; but it is an artifact of banks lending too much money and then having to correct for it to avoid hyperinflation. If one could ever reach the Economy of Abundance, what Ernest Mann calls the Priceless Economic System, the Kondratieff long waves might disappear. If so, the next question is whether or not innovation will slow down or stagnate.

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After some years of flyers arriving in the mail, tantalizing us with promises of relaxation and fun times, Yvonne and I finally relented and made plans to go to Midwestcon 46 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Now that's a sizable number after the con name, and this con has been in operation since 1950. It bills itself as "The Original, The Genuine Relaxacon", and was a four-day event from June 22 to 25. As a companion to it was FanHistoricon 3, the irregular gathering of fans who wish to preserve the past and history of fandom.

For us, FanHistoricon 3 was a saving grace. It gave us a little programming to go to, and was more of what we're used to. Yvonne and I attended some of the panels, and found that they consisted half of actual decisions being made, and half of reminiscing of things the audience had heard of but hadn't experienced themselves. Unfortunately, this took away from the actual topics to be discussed.

[Lloyd included a flyer with the FanHistoricon programme on it, listed as below.]

10h00 - Timebinders business meeting. Summary of organizational goals, current and future projects, election of officers, site selection for FanHistoricon 4, etcetera. Peggy Rae Pavlat presiding.

12h30 - "Big-Hearted Howard". Interview with Howard DeVore by Dick Lynch.

13h15 - "Saving Fandom" What fannish ephemera is important to keep, why and how to keep it, and what to do with it if you can no longer keep it. Where will your collection go when you are Finally Fafiated?

14h15 - "Documenting '60s Fandom". What should a fan history of the 1960s contain?

15h15 - "'70s Fandom: Is Any Of It Worth Preserving?" Among other things, changes in copyright law and the move from paper to convention fanac during this decade make its history harder to preserve. Is it worth the effort?

16h15 - "Midwestern Fandom: Its Trials And Triumphs"

One of the panels was "Saving Fandom". It talked about fannish ephemera consisting of pins, flyers, buttons, fanzines, T-shirts, and various publications and promotional items. While some fans have taken it upon themselves to save ephemera in themes, like WorldCon bidding items, the only existing depositories for this kind of fannish collectibles are the various SF libraries around the continent. There are about twenty of them, two of them being the Merrill Collection in Toronto and the Ward Chipman Library in Fredericton. The panel was interested in the efforts of the Merrill and the CSFF Foundation announced in Winnipeg. I have already sent information about the Foundation to Peggy Rae Pavlat, who is the senior officer of The Timebinders, the group who stage FanHistoricon.

The entire proceedings of FanHistoricon 3 were video and audio taped, and I gather that transcripts will be available Real Soon Now. I heard at one point that FanHistoricon 4 will be held at Tropiccon in Florida in December.

The weekend finished up with many WorldCon bid parties, and a wonderful banquet. After-dinner speaker Jack Chalker regaled us with funny WorldCon stories from the 1960s.

CONVERSION 12  
by Dale Speirs

Calgary's annual gencon went July 21 to 23 this year, in the new location of Glenmore Inn. Easy freeway access, difficult by bus, located at the extreme southeast edge of Calgary. Everything was on one level, with no elevator waits to get to the consuite.

I missed the opening ceremonies on Friday night because of my work shift, but did arrive in time to attend a panel by Alan Dyer on recent results of the Hubble Space Telescope. A bit about the aftereffects of the Jupiter comet crash, but mostly on what the HST was intended for in the first place, a look at distant objects to the edge of the visible universe. Also that evening, and later in the con as well, was Dr. Phil Currie of the Royal Tyrrel Museum of Palaeontology, the world's largest fossil museum. Currie always gets a full room for his talks on the latest discoveries about dinosaurs; he is on the cutting edge of this stuff.

In the evening I went by the Consuite for the BanffCon 95 milkshake party. (INSERT PROMO HERE) BanffCon was last held in 1989. Not surprisingly, it is located at Banff, Alberta, in the heart of Banff National Park, with mountains lying about all over the place. GoH is Terry Pratchett of Discworld fame. BanffCon 95 goes October 6 to 8 at the Banff Park Lodge. Memberships are C\$40/US\$30 to September 30, and C\$50 at the door. Details from Box 20001, Calgary, Alberta, T2P 4H3. Plus you have to pay to get into the park. Banff is 1½ hours drive straight west of Calgary, 1 hour if you have a radar detector.

Saturday morning I wandered back into the Consuite and was surprised to discover it was crowded. Earlier that morning, some ConVersion people had gone over to publicize the con on a local television breakfast show.

They succeeded beyond their wildest dreams, and we saw the videotaped result in the Consuite. The costumers sitting in the audience certainly caught the eye of the show host. The host was interviewing a comedian who appeared somewhat resentful at being upstaged by the wizard sitting in the second row. But it was all in good fun. I was waiting to hear the usual remarks on 'sci-fi nerds' and such, but the host only referred to ConVersion as a 'science fair'.

The Consuite also ran a continuous feature for a contest to identify 120 brief extracts from SF movies. On the TV set were shown the clips from obscure to newly released movies; the winner got 99 right. It was a great conversation starter for people in the suite and was so popular that as late as the GoH speeches on Sunday, one of the GoH was still frantically scribbling entries down (he won third place). Someone remarked that if you could identify all of them, you needed to get a life most definitely.

At the Consuite and later at the dance, Santa Claus was handing out little goodies such as candy or octahedral dice. The Masquerade was brief but good quality. At the start of the event, the presenter had members in the audience come up and display their hall costumes. We assumed he was stalling for time due to some usual backstage delay. The real reason was that there were only eight entries; we were in and out in a half hour. On the other hand, this made for more time dancing. Of the eight entries (three of which were non-competitive) I particularly liked the Klingon chartered accountant.

The Art Show was the normal collection of cute dragons and cats. The only thing that stood out for me was by Kerri Norris, who did ink on glass, a media I've not seen before. The dealer bourse had a higher proportion of books than in previous years, although still high in media SF.

[continued next page]



I took along OPUNTIA's and various other zines for the freebie table. From past years, I knew to take twenty of each, as that is as many as will be taken. I never get a response from anyone who says they got the zine at the con, but one can hope, and at least plant the idea that zines exist. I was surprised to see copies of the Ottawa apazine APAPLEXY there; I picked some up to read. Most of the freebie table was taken up by con flyers and book promos.

ConVersion 12 had thinner programming than normal. I am not complaining, as this gave me an opportunity to have extended chats with people and not worry about rushing off to a panel. Robert Runté and John Mansfield were in particular rich lodes of Canfan gossip, unfortunately mostly unpublishable for fear of touching off fan feuds from Vancouver to Ottawa. The panels at ConVersion 12 continued the trend of emphasizing writing workshops and other panels for the wannabes who hope to become pros. ConVersion is still a gencon (with a solid Star Trek track), but does seem to be drifting to a literary con.

On Sunday there was a "Meet The GoHs" brunch in the hotel restaurant, which had good food. The GoHs adjourned to the ballroom at 11h30 for the speeches. Rather boring this year. Greg Bear was a witty Toastmaster and artist Len Wein was the class clown, but GoH Lois McMaster Bujold gave a long, droning speech that bored the audience.

Sunday afternoon, John Mansfield and Cliff Samuels were on a "Convention Update" panel. A brief discussion on ConAdian, more about ConVersion, and digressions on the state of fandom in general. Samuels mentioned that since Canadian fans don't travel much to cons outside their geographical area, the exchange of good ideas in con-running is slow or none. This seems true enough, as the average distance between conrunning cities in Canada is a minimum of 200 km. Winnipeg last year was responsible for the greatest mixing of Canadian fans in decades, but

few will travel if it is more than a day's drive. Cliff Samuels holds a new position with ConVersion as Historian. (He is a past Chairman and is presently with Banff-Con.) The Historian is charged with the specific duty of advising new cons what did and didn't work in the past, and with ensuring that knowledge learned is passed on to those who should know.

John Mansfield discussed the economies of scale of large conventions such as WorldCon. Canada's problem in hosting WorldCons is that there are basically only two cities capable of handling them, Winnipeg and Toronto. SF cons are unusual for most hotels because they take up so much space compared with, for example, a Rotary convention. I have had people ask me why Calgary doesn't bid for a WorldCon. The answer is that our convention centre, built in the 1970s, is obsolete and much too small. The Stampede grounds could easily host the programs, but there are no hotels in the area. We have had conventions with 10,000 attending, but they did not need facilities beyond a ballroom. Or, in the case of the 1988 Winter Olympics, they were spread over 100 km.

ConVersion runs about 500 attendees, about as much as any local hotel can handle. Only about four or five hotels in Calgary can take the con, as most prefer to reserve their facilities for weddings and family reunions, which are the big moneymakers. One hotel where ConVersion was at one time is downtown, leading to complaints about finding a parking spot. Another hotel has the only kosher kitchen in Calgary, meaning that its restaurants are fully booked Fridays and Saturdays. And so on.

ConVersion 13 will also be Convention 16, with Aurora Awards and such. GoH is C.J. Cherryh. At the Glenmore Inn again, from July 19 to 21, 1996. Membership is \$25 until October 1, sent to Box 1088, Calgary, Alberta, T2P 2K9.

FROM NATIONAL LIBRARY NEWS: OUT OF THIS WORLD

by Elizabeth Butler and Dale Simmons

Marketing & Publishing, NLC

Over 350 visitors were at the National Library's latest exhibition, "Out of This World: Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy", which opened May 12, 1995. The exhibition, developed in conjunction with the Toronto Public Library Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation, and Fantasy, is a journey into our imaginative heritage that defines Canadian SF and fantasy, and places it in a historical and international context.

Planning for the collaborative project began in 1991. After four years of time, travel, and research into Canada's considerable body of SF and fantasy literature by exhibition researchers Hugh Spencer and Allan Weiss, a master plan was created and delivered. Preparations completed, all that remained was to give the exhibition a stellar launch. Voyageurs present on May 12 had the opportunity to encounter some of Canada's best SF and fantasy authors, including Judith Merril, Candace Jane Dorsey, Elisabeth Vonarburg, Jean-Louis Trudel, and Daniel Serigne. Danielle Grenier, host of "CBOF Bonjour", and John Lacharity, host of "CBO Morning", copiled the evening's events, which included opening remarks by Marianne Scott (National Librarian) and Lorna Toolis (Collection Head, Merril Collection). Copies of OUT OF THIS WORLD, an anthology of essays specially commissioned for the exhibition, were presented to the National Librarian by Bob Hilderley of Quarry Press, which copublished the work. The Aurora and Boréal awards were given to the Library by James Botte, Chairman of CanCon 95, and Jean-Louis Trudel, Co-ordinator Boréal 12, to become part of the exhibition display. Closing remarks by Mrs. Albani Guarnieri, M.P. and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, and Elisabeth Vonarburg, completed the first phase of the evening.

From the auditorium, the delegation proceeded to the "Transporter Room", where visitors awaited their turn to be propelled into the sphere of Canadian SF and fantasy. Once on the other side, visitors wound their way through a time tunnel filled with interactive exhibits, quizzes, a video station, comic creation centre, and costumes from SF and fantasy films. This tunnel provided the link to the main exhibition room where those assembled were able to experience close encounters with books, comics, television and radio broadcasts, theatre props, original art for film animation, costumes, film posters, and alien objects.

The travellers took home memories of this exhibition by stopping at the counter run by the Friends of the National Library, where products associated with the exhibition were for sale. T-shirts, baseball caps, POGs, yoyos, and a poster featuring a stereogram. Exhibition souvenirs will continue to be sold throughout the year. Also on sale was the anthology of essays OUT OF THIS WORLD. This publication offers 26 essays on Canadian SF and fantasy, with drawings by Heather Spears. It is available throughout Canada at your local bookstore. Exhibition items can be purchased by contacting: Friends of the National Library of Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, K1A 0N4.

CAN\*CON '95

by Lloyd Penney

Can\*con '95 took place May 12 to 14, 1995, at the Talisman Hotel in Ottawa. This gathering had many titles. It was the 4th Annual Conference on Canadian Content in Speculative Literature, and the 15th Convention, the 1995 Canadian National SF&F Convention. It was also host to Boréal 12, the newly-revived francophone SF&F convention, to the 1st Annual Academic Conference on Canadian Content in Speculative Literature, and Computer Expo II. It was

[continued next page]

co-host to the opening of the National Library of Canada's new exhibit on Canadian SF&F.

The con was well run, but did have some problems. The programme book never did arrive, which meant that the first day's worth of programming did not happen for the most part. People didn't know if they were on panels or where they might be. A quick programme guide was produced, and distributed to as many of the attendees as they could find. The con suite was small, hidden away, and underused, as were the con office and the green room. The hotel promised rooms they did not deliver for that weekend, so the art show and computer expo were shoved into the back of the dealer's room. The function space was strung out through the entire length of the hotel, so much of the weekend was spent walking from room to room. Directional signs were non-existent, and room signs indicated what was in the rooms but most of these signs did not go up until Saturday afternoon.

I should have expected that such a highly literate and pro-oriented event would have little for the fans or readers, but chairman Jim Botte assured me there would be something for everyone. I left the convention a little disappointed and alienated. I recognize the hard work and effort that Jim, Farrell McGovern, and the rest of the committee put into the con, and think that in spite of the few cavils above, the con was a success. It's just that I think a WorldCon caters to all interests of all of its attendees, and a Convention should and must do the same.

There is much more of a connection between American pros and fans than there is in Canada. Can\*con was very pro-oriented, with fans and readers left to do little else but fawn over the authors, and hang out with themselves. ... This was reflected in the separation of pros in clumps, fending off fans who wanted to speak to them.

My wife Yvonne was the co-host with Paul Valcour at the Aurora ceremony; the original co-host, Capucine Plourde, could not come to the con. Yvonne was pressed into service very late Saturday night, and stayed up late doing much of the translation work from Dennis Mullin's English script into French. Things came off rather well, and the desired bilingual flavour of the awards came off as planned. Yvonne discovered after the ceremony, when she went to congratulate the French-language Aurora winners, they all refused to speak to her or even acknowledge her. Was her French not the best? Were they offended that an Ontarianne instead of a Québécoise did these duties?

Yvonne and I went to Can\*con '95 because of Jim's assertions of variety for all, and because of our nominations for the Auroras. I guess we're just used to fannish conventions with the enjoyment of SF&F and fun in mind, not the professional self-absorption of the ultra-litcon.

CAN\*CON '95, CONVENTION 15, AND BOREAL 12

by Tasia Papadatos

[reprinted from OSFS STATEMENT #217, somewhat edited]

Although Can\*con was disorganized and suffered from a lack of volunteers, as a convention it was a success. The opening of the Canadian SF exhibition at the National Library was interesting and well attended. Many people came simply for the exhibit itself. Very few left disappointed. It was also the first time that the Boreal and Aurora awards have been presented at the same convention. Both ceremonies were entertaining and humorous. The unveiling of the new stamp by Canada Post was a bonus that few in the audience expected, thanks to the efforts of Janet Hetherington.

[continued next page]

The evening parties were full of people, writers, editors, and fans, including quite a few neos. All were mingling and having a good time. If some authors were hard-pressed during the day to talk to people, it was because they had autograph sessions to go to at various shopping centres, and panels to attend. Without those autograph sessions, they were not entitled to Canada Council grants. Yes, there was no programming book; yes, some panels were switched at the last moment; yes, it was poorly attended. It was also one of the most relaxing and enjoyable conventions I have ever attended. The panels were superb, many dealing with a history of Canadian SF writers and delightfully obscure books and trivia. The highlight of the convention, personally, was conversing with Dave Duncan, the GoH, and Tanya Huff, the well-known fantasy writer, who is as humorous and down-to-earth as her heroines. People like Robert Runté, Christine Kulyak, and Cath Jackel, who have done so much for Canadian fandom, were happy and thrilled to be at Can\*con.

Snob Con? If a person doesn't read SF, or Canadian literature, or is not involved in Canadian fanzines, they had no business being there. This convention was geared towards readers, writers, and editors; the organizer made it plain from the beginning. Comparing Convention to a WorldCon is ludicrous and pretentious. A Canadian gathering of several hundred people can neither imitate, nor should it, an international gathering of 5,000 people, most of whom don't read at all. Can\*con has never claimed to be the usual convention. It was always geared to writers, would-be writers, and readers, with the emphasis on Canadian. So much of SF is dominated by Americans that it's time we celebrated our own efforts and achievements. Next to the WorldCon at Winnipeg, we have never seen such a gathering of Canadian SF writers, editors, researchers and fans.

AND NOW A WORD FROM SOMEONE WHO WASN'T THERE  
by Dale Speirs

Convention comes to my hometown next year, and the dispute about Can\*con '95 is of more than passing interest. The two articles you have just read have been edited by me to remove some of the text to emphasize what I noticed in first reading them. If you go back and re-read them, it seems that what happened here was that Can\*con and Convention are two different styles of conventions. Can\*con is a small literary con, intended to appeal to a specific audience. Convention traditionally has been a gencon; as the national convention it should address a wide range of activities, including non-literary.

I spoke with a number of people who attended Can\*con and who had divergent opinions exactly the same as Lloyd and Tasia. Some were upset that it was snobbish. Others thought it a great thing. Upon subsequent reflection, I can see why there were two schools of thought on Can\*con and Convention. It all depends what subfandom you move in and what you expect from a con.

It is thus my prediction that in 1996 it will be the turn of the Canlitcrit crowd to be annoyed. Convention 16 is part of ConVersion 13, which is a gencon, not a litcon. The ConVersion people put on a good show each year, so one can expect at least a programme book, but the Convention activities will simply be an extra track of programming, exactly like the Star Trek track. The Aurora Awards will be used as an extra bit of advertising. I'm too lazy to look up the reference, but Garth Spencer mentioned in one of his fanhistories that the problem of Convention is that it is always a subtitle to the host convention, not the attraction.

The Can\*con '95 programme book is now referred to as "The Last Dangerous Programme Book".

MAIL VIRUSES  
by Dale Speirs

Chain letters are the paper equivalent of the computer virus, plugging up the mails rather than a hard drive, and propagating themselves despite pressure against them. The analogy must not be stretched too far, of course, as chain letters are easier to get rid of than a computer virus. Pyramid or Ponzi schemes can be considered as a more dangerous version of chain letters, but that is outside the topic of my essay.

I regularly skim the current scientific periodicals to look for future writing ideas. Sometimes what I come across can be used immediately, while other possibilities wait for years. One such example was a paper in the 1994-9-1 issue of NATURE, by Oliver Goodenough and Richard Dawkins, titled "The 'St. Jude' Mind Virus". This paper dealt with chain letters, in particular the infamous appeal to St. Jude letter (reproduced further on in this essay), and how chain letters can be treated as human information parasites.

Goodenough and Dawkins point out that viruses are all information parasites, whose duplication costs must be paid for by the host. Biological viruses copy DNA or RNA, computer viruses copy electronic impulses, and chain letters are viruses copying words on paper. On the Internet, a variant form of chain letters is the incorrect posting that keeps being reposted by newbies unaware of the refutation. An example is the posting about how the government is going to shut down BBSes, which one clubzine I know of fell for. There is some immunity to viruses, otherwise the world would be buried under T4 phages and chain letters. I recall back in the early 1970s when I was living in student residence at the University of Alberta (Edmonton) how a chain letter virus infected the residence, swept through it in hours, and died that same evening. The letter asked the recipient to send a bottle of hard

liquor to each of five names on the list, then delete the top name, and add one's own name to the bottom. There were about 1000 students living in residence. Within an hour, every photocopier and typewriter had a lineup of eager students waiting to get back free bottles. None of them were that well educated in the principles of exponentials, and most were to be disappointed. This was the fastest and most visible demonstration of a chain letter I expect to see, as it was easier for participants to hand-deliver the letters, and thus the virus spread in hours or minutes, not weeks or months.

Getting back to the St. Jude chain letter, Goodenough and Dawkins report that the U.S. Postal Inspection Service is well familiar with it, going back past the institutional memory of the USPS, with periodic outbreaks and variations in text. On the matter of text mutation, I shall return to the subject shortly.

I ran a computer database search but was not able to come up with many references. One hit was in the journal DEVIANT BEHAVIOR (1988, pp 241-257), with an article by Jacqueline Boles and Lyn Myers entitled "Chain Letters: Players and Their Accounts". This was a study of 534 letters and 129 participants. Most of the latter were middle class or lower, about 3/4 were male, and half of respondents lived in small towns. Boles and Myers also enquired into the motives of participants. Most knew that chain letters asking for money are illegal (the St. Jude letter is not, because it doesn't ask for material benefit and operates anonymously). They rationalized it as being no different than playing the stock market or the government pension plans (which are essentially a legal Ponzi scheme). Chain letters were felt to allow the underdog a chance to get in on the easy money.

On the next page are two versions of the St. Jude letter, one copied from Goodenough and Dawkins, and the other a version that was slipped under my car windshield while it was parked in my driveway.

St. Jude #1 (Goodenough and Dawkins)

With Love All Things Are Possible

This paper has been sent to you for Luck. The original is in New England. It has been sent around the world. The Luck has been sent to you. You will receive good luck within 4 days of receiving this letter pending in turn you send it on. This is no joke. You will receive good luck in the mail. Send no money. Send copies to people you think need good luck. Do not send money cause faith has no price. Do not keep this letter. It must leave your hands within 96 hrs. An A.R.P. officer Joe Elliot received \$40,000,000. George Welch lost his wife 5 days after this letter. He failed to circulate the letter. However before her death he received \$7,775,000. Please send copies and see what happens after 4 days. The chain comes from Venezuela and was written by Saul Anthony Degmas, a missionary from S. America. Since that copy must tour the World. You must make 20 copies and send them to friends and associates after a few days you will get a surprise. This is love even if you are not superstitious. Do Note the following: Contonare Dias received this letter in 1903. He asked his Sec'y to make copies and send them out. A few days later he won a lottery of 20 million dollars. Carl Dobbitt, an office employee received the letter + forgot it had to leave his hands within 96 hrs. He lost his job. After finding the letter again he made copies and mailed 20 copies. A few days later he got a better job. Dolan Fairchild received the letter and not believing he threw it away. 9 days later he died. In 1987 the letter was received by a young woman in Calif. It was faded and hardly readable. She promised herself she would retype the letter and send it on but, she put it aside to do later. She was plagued with various problems, including expensive car problems. This letter did not leave her hands in 96 hrs. She finally typed the letter as promised and got a new car. Remember send no money. Do not ignore this — it works.

St. Jude #2 (Speirs)

[no title]

Kiss someone you love when you get this letter and make magic. With love all things are possible. This letter has been sent to you for good luck. The original is in New England. It has been around the world nine times. The luck has been sent to you. You will receive good luck within four days of receiving this letter provided you send it out. This is no joke. Send no money, as fate has no price. Do not keep this letter. It must leave you hands within 96 hours. An R.A.H. officer received \$470,000. Joe Elliot received \$10,000 and lost it because he broke the chain. While in the Philippines, Gene Walch lost his wife 6 days after receiving the letter. He had failed to circulate the letter. However, before her death he received \$7,775,000. Please send 20 copies and see what happens in 4 days. The chain comes from Venezuela and was written by Sayl Anthony Degroup, a missionary from South America. Since the copy must tour the world, you must make 20 copies and send them to friends and associates. After a few days, you will get a surprise. This is true even if you are not superstitious. Do note the following: Constantine Dian received the chain in 1953. He asked his secretary to make 20 copies and send them out. A few days later, he won the lottery of \$2,000,000. Carl Badditt, an office employee, received the letter and forgot it had to leave his hands within 96 hours. He lost his job. Delan Fairchild received the letter and not believing, threw the letter away. Nine days later, he died. In 1987, the letter received by a young woman in California. It was very faded and barely readable. She promised herself she would retype the letter and send it on, but she put it aside to do later. She was plagued with various problems, expensive car repairs. The letter did not leave her hand within 96 hour. She finally typed the letter as promised and got a new car. Remember, send no money. Do not ignore this letter. (It works.)

On reading a chain letter, it becomes obvious why the letter doesn't propagate to all persons. It is self-selecting to less observant people who don't think on the internal contradictions. The St. Jude letter is sent anonymously, yet reports on the fates of specific individuals. How would anyone know? There is also the question of the fates themselves. Winning millions of dollars or death may or may not be due to the letter. More likely it is due to random chance. The only way to determine this would be to get a list of names and compare their proportion of success or tragedy with those who did not get the letter.

It would be interesting to compare a time series of St. Jude chain letters to see if the text is growing or shrinking. I suspect that before the advent of easy methods of copying there was natural selection to keep the text as short as possible to reduce the work. In our modern times of photocopiers and scanners, I would expect to see a gradual lengthening of the text, but to no more than one full 8½ x 11 side, since a multi-page text creates extra work. Since genuinely received letters are difficult to locate, this study would not be easy.

Like biological viruses of DNA or computer viruses of electronic bits, the chain letter virus accumulates errors. Typographical errors would be self-correcting over time if blatantly obvious, but names and amounts of money would mutate over the years. In the two versions of the St. Jude letter above, one can see how the mutations have not affected the dispersal of the letters. Some of the mutations are obvious slips of the finger. The letters 'u' and 'y' are adjacent to each other on the typewriter keyboard, and thus 'Saul' becomes 'Sayl'. Abbreviations are used in one letter, but expanded in another. Consider the chart at right.

St. Jude #1

An A.R.P. officer Joe Elliot received \$40,000,000.

George Welch lost his wife 5 days after this letter.

Saul Anthony Degnas

Contonare Dias received this letter in 1903.  
[won \$20,000,000]

Carl Dobbitt

Dolan Fairchild

St. Jude #2

An R.A.H. officer received \$470,000. Joe Elliot received \$10,000 and lost it because he broke the chain.

Gene Walch lost his wife 6 days after receiving the letter.

Sayl Anthony Degroup

Constantine Dian received the chain in 1953.  
[won \$2,000,000]

Carl Badditt

Delan Fairchild

I don't know what an A.R.P. officer is, but the R.A.H. variant is obviously a typo for R.A.F.. Note how some of the sentences in the two letters have been re-arranged and alter the meaning. Was or was not Joe Elliot an officer? The altered meanings, however, do not affect the ability of the St. Jude virus to propagate. Many of the variations appear to be from the days of hand-copying letters, witness the many confusions of 'd' and 'b', 'e' with 'o', and other difficulties in reading someone else's handwriting. The same applies to the dollar values of all those fabulous lotteries.

[continued next page]

The missionary Saul Anthony Degnas/Sayl Anthony Degroup was identified as from Venezuela. I phoned the Calgary Catholic archives about this chap, to see if they could trace him. Sister Leona ran a database search but was unable to locate him. However, this may have been because he was not prominent in some way, only an ordinary missionary who lived and died in obscurity. Sister Leona told me she needed to know what Order he was in to track him down any further. Thus ended that search.

Goodenough and Dawkins concluded their article stating that they had no intention of launching experimental chain letters into the general population to test the rates of mutations or limits of human gullibility. I find it hard to see how one could do this with anonymous letters anyway; it would be almost impossible to track the spread of these letters in a scientifically rigorous manner. Pyramid chain letters would be a bit easier to track, but they are illegal.

I got to thinking about how one would experiment with chain letters, and decided to try a shot in the dark. There is no point in simply sending off another chain letter that will propagate generally. We already know the basic details of how such letters work. What I decided to do was to launch a chain letter that would be self-limiting in a specific environment but would spread like any other elsewhere. That specific environment was Canada; I therefore sent out the chain letter in the next column. The letter was mailed on 1995-6-9. Addresses were chosen at random from telephone books in the public library. They were Helena, Montana; Phoenix, Arizona; Tampa, Florida; Fairbanks, Alaska; and San Diego, California. One letter went to each place to a random address. Is the sample size too small? I don't know. Will the letter re-appear years down the road in mutated form? It would be most interesting to know. Will the mutated forms then be able to propagate in Canada, whereas the original will not?

This letter has been sent to you for good luck. The original is in Canada. You will receive good luck within seven days if you make at least two copies of this letter and pass it on anonymously. Do not send money or attach your name to it. True charity is anonymous. Do not keep this letter but send it to someone else. This is true even if you are not superstitious. Louis Riel did not send on his copy and died. A Mountie in the Arctic sent copies out and was miraculously saved in a blizzard. Please send out copies and see what happens in seven days. This letter must circle the world, so send it to your friends in foreign places. John Diefenbaker received this letter in 1957 and sent out copies. Seven days later he had spectacular good luck. Joe Clark ignored the letter and lost all his luggage. Send as many copies as you want but at least two. Do not delay. Remember, don't send money; this is not a fraud letter. Do not ignore this letter; it works.

This chain letter is laughable to Canadians, and should fail to propagate in Canada. Louis Riel was the founder of Manitoba and later executed for treason. Diefenbaker ended 22 years of Liberal power when his Tories won the 1957 federal election. Prime Minister Joe Clark never could overcome an embarrassing incident when his luggage went astray on a world tour. Outside Canada, most who might receive this letter will not know who these people are, while a Canadian would be immediately suspicious. I expect that if typographical mutations accumulate, over time the text might change enough to allow the letter to circulate in Canada. Say, for example, 'Lewis Real' or 'Joe Diefenbachia' or 'John Clark'.