

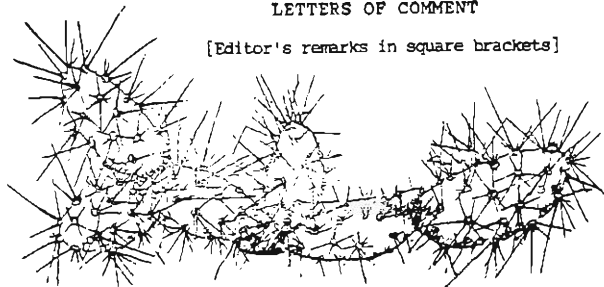
ISSN 1183-2703

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. Whole-numbered issues are sercon, .1 issues are reviewzines, and .5 issues are perzines.

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LETTERS OF COMMENT

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Mark Strickert
Box 59851
Schaumburg, Illinois 60159-0851

1995-9-21

I received a hectograph set in 1973, for a junior high school graduation gift. It consisted of a 9" x 12" x 1/2" metal pan, a bag of gelatin goop, and a set of carbon-paper-like ink sheets. One was supposed to place a piece of paper on the ink side of the ink sheet, then write on the back of the ink sheet, then put the re-

sultant inked-up piece on the gelatin tray. I would cheat and place another sheet behind the inking sheet, so I could re-use the inking sheet several times. Small press runs were not a concern here ... so I could live with the small number of possible clean copies. I saw these kits in office supply stores several times in the 1970s, but when I really needed and wanted one again, they were no longer available. Too bad, for even when I have access to cheap copies, it would be convenient, and good for some low-tech thrills, to have a hectograph available.

FROM: Walt Willis
32 Warren Road
Donaghadee, Northern Ireland BT21 0PD

1995-9-30

In OPUNTIA 25, I was fascinated by the information on hectography. I came into fandom at a time when it was being replaced by mimeography, and myself went straight to letterpress printing, so I managed to avoid it. The more I've learned about it since, the more relieved I am that I never had anything to do with it.

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

1995-9-24

The best artist who worked in the hekto medium was Walter Earl Marconette, who flourished in the late 1930s and early 1940s before gafiating. He produce simple but extremely effective fanzine covers with a full range of colours at a time when too many fanzine artists were imitating prozine illustrations. I fear that time has caused the pigments to fade, and anyone who managed to find his covers wouldn't realize how brilliant and bold they were when new.

[continued next page]

FAPA's original membership limit was 50, not 55. This limit was indeed set because of the potential of hekto duplication. But the very fact that a limit existed was revolutionary in amateur journalism because the mundane apas had never had any restriction on the number of members. The fact that FAPA had a membership limit undoubtedly was the reason why SF fandom apas had much greater activity than mundane apas where nobody could be dropped for lack of pages published per year. In FAPA, if you didn't publish often, you were dropped and had trouble rejoining because demand exceeded membership slots after its first few years.

A comment on fannish ephemera. Much of it will become unavailable in the future because of attrition, unless fans develop a strong interest in collecting such things and are willing to pay money for them. There's much greater incentive to save such things if they could provide some income in the future. I feel convention flyers, progress reports, and other publications that aren't real fanzines should get particular attention by collectors, because many of them contain very good art which never gets rerun in more accessible places.

[Quite true. One thing I've learned from philately is that one should collect the current stuff that no one else is collecting. I keep all the flyers, PRs, and such from the conventions I attend, neatly organized in binders. During the Calgary Olympics, for which I was a volunteer, I went out of my way to collect the documents and materials that no one else saved (except the City of Calgary Archives) and ignored the souvenir stuff on sale everywhere. At work, I collect all the employee newsletters, and so forth.]

I'm puzzled by the identification of that popular St. Jude chain letter. I can't find anything in either of the two versions you reprint that refers to St. Jude.

I don't see anything in these letters that should cause us to assume that Degnas or Degroup was a Catholic missionary. Many Protestant denominations have missions in South America.

[My fault. The Goodenough and Dawkins version did have a salutation to St. Jude, which I omitted. The version I received did not. Many of these versions are titled with something like "An Appeal To St. Jude" or finish with "In The Name of St. Jude", not actually part of the text. I suspect that the reason why this part frequently drops out is that it is not in the main text or because Protestants do not use St. Jude. It was for this reason I assumed Degnas/Degroup was Catholic.]

1995-10-26

OPUNTIA #26 depressed me as soon as I started to read it, because Joseph Major wrote about a topic that has been causing me a lot of trouble. The institution that was to receive my fanzines after my death has lost interest in collecting fanzines. So now I must change my will, as soon as I find some other place where the collection might survive for at least a few years longer than I do.

[Experience of the stamp collecting hobby is that a collection is best sold to other collectors or donated to a museum specializing exclusively in philately, such as the Cardinal Spellman Museum in Boston. If a collection is a sideline for a general museum, it may suffer if a new curator decides he'd rather collect pogs.]

Garth Spencer's historical material is very interesting. A few suggestions on where to find more details on matters that Garth covers ... Gus Willmorth published quite a bit of material about the Canadian SF Association in two issues of his FANTASY ADVERTISER, dated December 1948 and February 1949. Norman G. Browne gave a summary of things as they were in 1953 in Canada's fandom in Bob Silver-

berg's SPACESHIP (April issue of that year). The August 1956 issue of VANDIGO contained material by Reta Grossman about the Insurgents, a group which Garth doesn't seem to have written much about so far. More about the Insurgents could be found in Dean Grennell's GRUE, autumn 1954. Wartime conditions were summarized in the Fall 1942 issue of Laney's THE ACOLYTE, by Nils Helmer Frome.

I don't feel as great despair over the distances in Canada as Garth does as a deterrent to its fandom. It is true that it takes a while and costs much money to attend a convention or visit friends in eastern Canada if you live in Vancouver and vice versa. But this doesn't inhibit the creation and activities of local fan club activities, it's no more expensive to correspond with a fan who lives a few miles or a couple of thousands of miles away, and although I'm not quite the best authority on computers, I don't believe there is any added expense or time lapse involved in network contacts among fans when they're far away. Unless conventions are the sole interest of a Canadian fan, he needn't feel too handicapped as a participant in Canadian fandom. He's certainly better off than USA fans were before most of them owned autos, before air travel was readily available, before long-distance telephone rates came within reach of even low-income fans, and before there were conventions within a few hundred miles of almost every resident of USA. United States fandom thrived and grew rapidly under those conditions.

[Unfortunately the problem in Canfandom is precisely that many fans think it begins and ends with cons.]

FROM: Murray Moore 1995-10-29
377 Manly Street
Midland, Ontario L4R 3E2

In reading the material about the Canadian SF Association, I was struck by the stated ambition of this or-

ganization to be a national organization. The listed Constituent Clubs were in the major centres of Montréal, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Edmonton, and ... Picton? You need either good eyesight or a large magnifying glass to locate Picton on the map.

The Toronto Area Publishing Association (TAPA) mentioned by yourself earlier this year has ceased after 15 years of regular mailings.

FROM: Susan Zuege 1995-10-20
W.63 N.14262 Washington Avenue, Apt. 88
Cedarburg, Wisconsin 53012-3016

The articles on Canadian fandom were very interesting. It seems that most clubs and organizations cycle through periods of strong membership and decline. A general-interest fan club I belong to, the National Fantasy Fan Federation (N3F), was founded in 1941. Right now, the club is very active and publishes two zines, organizes round robins, runs an apa, and sponsors several contests. The current membership is around 280, but in the past it has declined to only 50 people. When the number of members becomes too low, it is difficult to find members willing to hold office or to head bureaus or activities. N3F is now going strong, thanks to a steady flow of new members. It seems such an influx is necessary in order for a club to have a constant supply of enthusiastic people eager to participate in running activities to replace current members who are burned out from all the work or whose interests have changed. If no new people are recruited to replace those who have dropped out, an organization is very likely to flounder or fold.

FROM: Peter Stinson 1995-10-30
209 - 17 Avenue NE
Calgary, Alberta T2E 1L9

The zine history stuff was wonderful. A lot of my background/education is in Canadian art ... it all fits in.

FROM: Michael McKenny
424 Cambridge Street South
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 4H5

1995-10-22

mission requirements, so even skipping marketing news might not be enough to save a fanzine editor from such letters.

Hat's off to Garth Spencer for "Peculiar Institutions". It contains a lot of fascinating info, and he does invite corrections and additions. Among the many things that struck my attention here was the name Myles Bos. He was an early member of APAPLEXY and helped provide a glimpse of B.C. fandom to Ottawa fans in the middle 1980s. He also drew to our attention out here Janet P. Reedman, B.C. writer and editor. She was published in MAPLECADE, and her SILVER APPLE BRANCH, a fantasy magazine which predates BARDIC RUNES, was known and enjoyed here. Indeed, when BARDIC RUNES first appeared in Ottawa, the earliest issues had most of their material contributed by at least five B.C. writers. The primary cause of that was largely Myles Bos.

The Canadian SF Association is a good cure to those who like to imagine they started it all. Robert Bowle-Reed was the son of one of the founders of Ottawa fandom in 1948, and was himself an early member of the Ottawa SF Society in the late 1970s. He had difficulty getting others to believe there had been an earlier OSFS. In 1994, Ottawa fans used the 1952 Canadian Fan Directory to contact two early members of fandom here.

[I used that same directory to locate a Calgary fan, who, as it turned out, lived not far from me. For a directory that is forty years old, it is surprising how many addresses are still valid.]

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

1995-10-20

FROM: Rodney Leighton
RR 3
Pugwash, Nova Scotia B0R 1L0

1995-10-29

While Garth Spencer gets fiction submissions because he had once done market listings in MAPLE LEAF RAG, FOSFAX once received a request for our fiction sub-

[I keep getting promos from a talent agent Stateside for rock bands. But meanwhile, in the Death Shall Not Release Garth Spencer category, here comes Henry Welch.]

FROM: Henry Welch
1525 - 16 Avenue
Grafton, Wisconsin 53024-2017

1995-10-15

I tried out the National Library of Canada's WWW page of the SF exhibit. It contains too many graphics, making it very slow to access, so I suppressed them. The entries were sorted hierarchically by theme, with each category containing a short list of representative Canadian works.

[Henry provided me with a copy of part of the NLC site. Under the title "The Fans and Fanzines" is the following text: "Most magazines in the field are fan magazines (fanzines), inexpensively produced periodicals, published by individuals with a special interest in science fiction and fantasy and occasionally including works of fiction. Among the most famous fanzines of Canadian fantastic fiction are Leslie A. Crutch's LIGHT CANADIAN FANDOM and NEW CANADIAN FANDOM, BCSFANZINE and MAPLE LEAF RAG." I think at least one comma went missing when that got typed in the Web page, not to mention the grammatical implication that Crutch was responsible for all those zines. It should also be BCSFAZINE.]

Good article by Spencer. Garth seems to be forgetting, or preferring to ignore that Canadian SFans are basically individualists. Despite monstrous conventions, it seems

to me that SFans are very much a "I'm doing my thing, when, if, and how I want and I don't give a damn what you think about it" type of people. So, too, are many Canadians, especially Maritimers. Combine the two and SF newszines in Canada are doomed to failure.

FROM: Sheryl Birkhead 1995-10-19
23629 Woodfield Road
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20882

Is there a formal convention organizational setup in Canada (regionals, etc.)?

[The national convention Convention is a travelling roadshow alternating between east and west Canada. In western Canada, NonCon wanders about. The zine CONTRACT is a listing of Canadian cons plus some news. Our fan fund is CUFF (Canadian Unity Fan Fund), which is the subject of some controversy at the moment and is to help fans travel from one side of Canada to the other, usually to the Convention.]

FROM: John Mansfield 1995-11-9
321 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 2B9

To bring the CONTRACT portion of "Peculiar Institutions" up to date ...

The first issue of CONTRACT was created in Edmonton by Bret McDonald. Unfortunately, as soon as he did the #0 issue, he was hit by a series of personal problems. Thus I took over as editor, and have been producing CONTRACT bimonthly for the last seven years.

I was a member of the Canadian Armed Forces regular force and retired in 1990 after 25 years.

My comments on CUFF were the result of knowing what the WorldCon was and could be for Canadian fans and pros alike, and seeing the many opportunities being thrown away. Myself, Lloyd Penney, and Paul Valcour had gone to great lengths at Kitchener (Ontario) to get CUFF turned around to make sure that someone could come to the WorldCon free, then nothing happened. Mind you, the same happened when I tried to get any Canadian SF book dealers to come, or to get a special display of Canadian artists. We put the announcement about CUFF in CONTRACT, which was sent out to every other zine in Canada that we knew of. None reprinted it.

I had hoped that CONTRACT would be considered a newszine now, but maybe its past will make it always special interest.

FROM: Tom Feller 1995-11-21
Box 13626
Jackson, Mississippi 39236

Lloyd and Yvonne Penney's reaction to Can*Con is very similar to my reaction to the World Fantasy Convention (WFC) when it took place in New Orleans last year. As John Mansfield points out in his letter in OPUNTIA #26, the WFC takes the attitude that gamers, costumers, and media fans are not welcome. But even for people who read a lot like me, it didn't offer much. It was oriented toward pros and people who want to become pros.

FROM: Lloyd Penney
412 - 4 Lisa Street
Brampton, Ontario L6T 4B6

1995-12-13

the country to keep people interested. I guess there's just not enough money out there to actually produce and distribute it.

One thing I've been able to do over the years is write to order, and that's what I had to do for the article on Canadian fandom which appeared in the Intersection programme book. I was asked to write an article on Canadian fandom, not concentrating on any province or city, but on national fannish events. In 1994, that meant the WorldCon and the Convention. Some of the things I put in the article were trimmed for space, but otherwise I was told that what I provided was just what was wanted. It would have been great to write about our various fannish cities and cons, and which authors were doing what, but that wasn't what was requested.

Which reminds me; I haven't seen anything about the 1996 Convention, other than the fact it's in Calgary. Any other information you could pass on here?

[The silence is deafening out here, but Convention will be an ordinary ConVersion with an extra track of programming added for the Canlit crowd. This is not an implied criticism, as ConVersion is a reliable con. Write to them at Box 1088, Calgary, Alberta T2P 2K9. Membership is \$30 until March 1, \$35 until July 1, \$40 at the door.]

At ConAdian, those of us involved in the fanzine lounge such as Yvonne, myself, Geri Sullivan, and Don Fitch, agreed that if this was to be the WorldCon, then the world's fan funds should all be beneficiaries of the fanzine sales (if requested by faneds willing to see a portion of their sales donated). This means TAFF, DUFF, GUFF, CUFF, SEFF (Scandinavia-England), FFANZ (Australia-New Zealand), SAFF (South America), and any other fan fund should get a slice of the sales. Yvonne and I will be working the fanzine lounges in Los Angeles and San Antonio, and will probably be in charge of sales for both, so we will try to get CUFF some funding from each of these lounges.

Great article by Garth Spencer. I recently asked Joe Casey about what happened with CANADIAN FAN NETWORK, seeing I had been promised a hard copy of the first issue. (Not all of fandom is on the Net.) Joe told me that he received only two responses to it, and decided that such a venture wasn't worth the time and effort, given the lack of interest. We do need a new fannish newsletter. There's enough happening across

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Carolyn Substitute, Teddy Harvia, Buck Coulson, Harry Andruschak, Franz Miklis, Alexander Vasilkovsky, Garth Spencer, Chuck Connor, Pat Silver

CANADIAN UNITY FAN FUND DEADLINE IS MARCH 31, 1996
by Linda Ross-Mansfield

Nominations are now open to every fan across Canada to attend the 1996 Convention in Calgary as the CUFF representative. Transportation for one person and reasonable funds towards accommodations costs will be provided to the winner. To nominate, you must provide on or before March 31st, 1996, as follows.

- 1) A letter stating your fanish resume, showing at least the 1994 and 1995 accomplishments.
- 2) Agree that you are willing and able to travel to Calgary for the Convention, July 19-21, 1996, and to promote and support fanish connections during the convention.
- 3) Provide letters of sponsorship from three eastern fans and three western fans (these should be sent under separate cover).
- 4) To assist the administrator with ensuring eligibility, the sponsors should also list their fanish affiliations, i.e., fanzine editor, club executive, convention committee, etc.. Please provide address/phone #/e-mail address or method of contact.

Voting ballots will be forwarded to as many fanish contacts as possible. Voting ballots must be in the hands of the Administrator no later than May 31, 1996, so that the winner can be notified and arrangements made.

The winner, in addition to being the CUFF representative at the 1996 Convention, becomes the de-facto administrator in the following year(s) and is expected to raise and administer funds until such time as another fan may be awarded/funded for this honour. If possible, a report on the trip should be published in a fanzine.

It is expected that a financial statement will be published from time to time, to let interested fans know

how close or far the fund is from being awarded. Interested persons may also raise funds for CUFF and forward them to the administrator to further this project. Details from Linda Ross-Mansfield, 333 Lipton Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 2H2.

COMMENT ON CUFF
by Dale Speirs

I am a fanzine fan, not a convention fan, and the fuss about fan funds has historically left me unmoved. I do attend local conventions out of hometown loyalty, and I went to ConAdian in Winnipeg because it was opportunity to visit a WorldCon without the hassle of foreign travel. But because Convention is in Calgary this year, I will unbend enough to run the CUFF details in thiszine.

I also do so for another motive. You read that bit in Linda's report about they'd like a trip report published in a fanzine. I am willing to publish that report in OPUNTIA, so potential candidates take note. I do ask that such a CUFF report have some substance. I am not interested in a catalogue of what you ate in our local restaurants (neither is anyone else), nor do I want a list of names and parties with the regret that you did not take notes about what was said or done. But if you are the among the dwindling few who admits to going to panels and taking notes, if your consuite conversations have some semblance of solidity, then I'd like to run your con report.

This year CUFF would bring an easterner out west, or at least I hope it would. Who will run? Will anyone run? Or should we put CUFF out of its misery and tell Linda and John to take the money and have one hell of a wedding anniversary party?

STILL WAITING FOR THE LEISURE SOCIETY
by Dale Speirs

Automation was supposed to free us from work, but only increased the amount we do. For many people, work is how they define themselves, and they are unable to enjoy leisure for indefinite periods of time. Others, like Ernest Mann of LITTLE FREE PRESS, live cheaply at the margins of society without being a wage slave. For most, leisure time is measured by weekends or vacations.

Witold Rybczynski considers the history of the weekend in his book WAITING FOR THE WEEKEND (Viking, 1991). To measure off weeks at all is rather unusual. Days are obviously the cycle of the sun, months developed from the predictable passage of the moon, and years mark the start of a new set of weather seasons. But there is no logical astronomical cycle to mark the passage of the week. The Jewish Sabbath and its variations adopted by other religions are descendants of earlier 'weeks' up to 14 days long. When the 7-days week became established in Roman times, there were any number of possible influences and reasons why. The mists of history refuse to part long enough for us to see through them. Reformers and revolutionaries constantly tried to change the week and always failed, whether the ten days of the French Revolution, or Stalin's replacement of the week with continuous factory operations and the comrades on rotating shifts of 4 days on and 1 day off. There may be some biological reason why the 7-day cycle has persisted; the human body may have circaseptan rhythms, and we need a day of rest.

Protestants and Bolsheviks alike preferred the masses to toil, and disliked the 'unproductive' time off work. The bosses, of course, can enjoy leisure as being the fruit of their labour but it was a different story for working stiffs. Older societies had more leisure time than we do. Imperial Rome had up to 175 holidays, the

Czars tolerated over 100, and 'primitive' Hopi had half the year in free time. Today, we North Americans are at a historical mean of about 130 days, comprising 53 weekends, about 11 or 12 holidays, and a fortnight vacation. There is no link between economic conditions and leisure. History shows poor societies with lots of time off and rich societies with little free time, but it also shows the exact reverse.

Sunday as an enforced day off dates back to Constantine in the year 321 AD, and spread through Europe over the centuries. The Industrial Revolution brought in a habit for skilled tradesmen to take Monday off as well. Since Monday was not a day of religious obligation, the pubs and race tracks did well. This led to a reform movement to give workers the Saturday afternoon off, in the hope that they would sober up faster knowing they had to be in church tomorrow. Factory owners favoured it because a fixed agreement would reduce absenteeism. It was not practical to fire workers who took Monday off as they pleased, for one would have such a turnover as not to be able to establish an experienced workforce.

Through the first half of the 1900s, movements tried to shorten the workweek. Some were successful; some were not. After WW2, most people had a 5-day work week, albeit many exceptions. Communist countries did not; in Poland, Solidarity's demand for free Saturdays led to the military coup by Jaruzelski. Weekends, length of the work day, vacations, and holidays are not uniform by culture or country even today. The work week has increased over the past few decades but there is dispute over the reason why. It may be the cost of living, but it may also be because of the cost of leisure. More wives are in the workplace, but it is not established if this is because husbands are more poorly educated or because the standard of living is too high. Somebody is buying all those overpriced CDs, and even the poorest household is convinced that television is a necessity, not a luxury.

THE ROLE OF THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP AMONG CHARACTERS IN RECENT WORKS OF CANADIAN SPECULATIVE FICTION
by Paula Johanson

[This is a paper presented at Can*Con 95. Paula can be reached at Box 9, Site 1, R.R. 1, Legal, Alberta, T0G 1L0 or at paula@freenet.edmonton.ab.ca]

The theme of parent-child relationships among characters is prominent in many works of Canadian speculative fiction in English. It is less common in American speculative fiction, and one which is handled very differently by British writers. Canadian authors as varied as Guy Gavriel Kay, Margaret Atwood, and Monica Hughes have been developing well-rounded characters in their works by writing about parent-child relationships. Many Canadian authors are writing stories that depend on these relationships as essential plot elements.

The use of the parent-child relationship in recent writing is not limited to the works of well-known authors. Emerging writers integrate this theme into an astonishing variety of stories. No longer is the SF story of necessity fixated upon a moment in the life of a solitary scientist working in an isolated laboratory, or a lone hero defending a mate from barbarian attack. Since around 1985, a Canadian SF story is more likely to feature a protagonist with a past and a future, and family ties to make that past and future real.

Many of these stories show a change from an earlier assumption which dominated American SF and by extension much of Canadian SF, and which can be stated baldly: "Real adults have children ... somewhere else from their real work, and that isn't part of the real story." The worldview common to recent works can be summarized as the more complex and far more interesting idea that

"Parents' real work includes the raising of their children, and we all tell different stories as we do this."

There are not only more parents and children as characters in the stories, but their relationship is now being explored in different ways. Authors are now exploring more ideas than the traditional Canadian SF themes of the parent defending the child against adversity, or learning interdependence as the child grows. The increasing presence of parent-child relationships in Canadian SF is not merely a matter of the authors writing what they know. Some authors have no children but their stories; no offspring realer than the dream child computer program in Candace Jane Dorsey's "Death of a Dream" from TESSERACTS 4.

Increasingly, writers are creating characters who are parents and children simply because the result is often a strong, interesting story. Recent stories show a parent's concern for a child's sense of wonder ("The Children Do Not Yet Know" by M.A.C. Farrant, ON SPEC V4#2), parents doing the right thing for the wrong reasons ("Phenotype II: On Line" by Paula Johanson, HORIZONS SF, V13#2), or parents stifling children with horror ("Fourth Person Singular" by Dale Sproule, NORTHERN FRIGHTS #2). These complex stories use humour as well, to good result. From frank comedy to a mere leavening of a serious tone, humour keeps this genre from becoming a series of grim manifestos.

There are three consistent themes which become clear after shuffling through shelves of books and stories where parent-child relationships are explored in recent Canadian SF. Alternate methods of conceiving and raising children dominate some stories. The crucial decisions of adolescence are the focus of many stories, that pivotal moment when a growing child emerges from shelter within the family to an adult role. And one of the surprisingly predominant themes is that the parent and child find peace by being together. A mythic wholeness is achieved

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by uniting estranged parent and child, to establish the sanctuary of ordinary family life within the extraordinary speculative story.

It is to be expected that this genre would include stories about alternative methods of conceiving and raising children. Nowadays we live in a world where these SF concepts are common facts in the news media and our family lives. Compared to news articles about child abuse in suburbia and communes, Gary Sandhu's story "The Suffering of the Rock" (HORIZONS SF, V13#2) is grisly but not surprising. In a world where single mothers select sperm donors and 10-year-old Iranian boys are made to clear mine fields, the savagery of Marian L. Hughes "Birth Rite" (ON SPEC V5#2) is intense but not shocking. But in gentle contrast to the grim plethora of nonfiction books and articles on how to Overcome Your Awful Childhood, Bruce Taylor's story "The Coat" (ON SPEC, V4#2) is a good example of how this genre shows hope in alternatives to Things As They Are.

"Little Nicholas Jackson was born into his father's heavy black coat", the story begins. It is soon clear to Nicholas that no matter how ill-fitting the coat may be, and no matter how restricted his life within it must be, his parents' only advice is: "You'll learn to love it as you grow into it for there are no other alternatives that are love-defined in this family for you." Only when Nicholas reaches through all that hampering fabric to touch a friend does he "look down to see a shirt he was wearing beneath suddenly become a blaze of colours." The friend had helped her own father see that he too was wearing a stiff, dark coat which he could take off. The metaphor is beautifully simple and clear. So much seems possible for Nicholas that only moments before was smothered in the layers of his coat.

There are grim visions of misery as well in stories about people raising children. Lesley Choyce, in his story "The Best of Both Worlds" (TESSERACTS 4), shows how one person's Utopia is another's Dystopia, especially when people begin not to want to have children. It would be easy to see only the misery in this story and others, but even a casual scan through recent books and magazines can turn up hopeful references to how positive raising children can be. Catherine MacLeod writes in "Sommelier" (ON SPEC V5#4) of a character's wish to recover memories of raising her children: "I was busy building up my company when my children were small ... They're not resentful -- but I am", says Tess Edmund, influential businesswoman, to a winemaker whose wines are truly "a glass of autumn; a goblet of May; a chalice of birdsong". Tess is in the market for memory, nostalgic for the time when her children were young but she was too busy in boardrooms to spend much time in the nursery. The winemaker has lately been approached as well by a rich and powerful man who buys bitter remembrance of a dead enemy, and a widower grieving the loss of his beloved wife. A wine of memory is blended for each of these customers. In contrast to the dark, toxic brandy of murderous hatred, or the champagne fizzing like faint laughter remembered from a lifetime of love, the wine blended for the wistful mother has "the fragrance and mystery of the four winds. It would be bittersweet. It would leave Tess giddy and breathless, or calm and content." Her children were grown and making lives of their own, and now Tess would have her memories.

Many stories focus on the growing child's struggle to define itself as separate from its parents and family. Mainstream fiction describes this self-determination through cautionary adventures. Earlier Canadian SF told of characters emerging from adolescence through political and ideological examples, as in stories from H.A. Hargreaves NORTH BY 2000, where his young characters were

[continued next page]

bonded to mentors and to pupils, learning Dependence, Independence, and Interdependence. Defining self as separate from parents is done very differently in *OF TWO MINDS*, a recent novel collaboration by Carol Matas and Perry Nodelman. For these new writers, their characters are capable of defining not only themselves, but reality around them.

OF TWO MINDS is the story of Princess Lenora and her perfectly ordinary ability to imagine things real. An ordinary ability, that is, in her home kingdom of Gepeth, where everybody can make things real. And Gepeth is "a good balanced world. A place for everything, and everything in its place", says the Queen to Lenora. "Why can't you just accept it, like everybody else in Gepeth?" But Lenora has some ideas she wants to try out before the marriage her parents have arranged for her with the prince from a neighbouring kingdom. Prince Coren is nobody's dream prince; not only is he skinny, pale, and freckled, he resists using his ability to read minds. Why? Because he's tired of people jumping into his head uninvited, and has resolved not to do it himself, which makes him very odd in his own country.

"What he wanted was a place where the world was real and solid, not some imagined place that existed only in your head. His parents might be content with the magnificent rooms and mansions they imagined they were living in, inside their minds. But Coren himself was just too sensible to blithely ignore the real dust and ruins that he saw all around him in Andilla, the once beautiful buildings that had been abandoned when people decided that mental buildings were better than real ones and mental beds softer than real mattresses ... Gepeth sounded like paradise in comparison to Andilla."

The wedding plans are made, but Lenora isn't ready to be tamed by an arranged marriage. And Coren wants nothing more than to, but that would be telling. What

Coren and Lenora end up deciding has as much to do with ethics and morality as it does with marriage and the responsibilities of their adult strengths.

This is not a recent trend of Canadian fiction in general nor of Canadian fiction for young people. Mainstream fiction is not currently focusing on alternate choices for child characters growing out of the 'nest' of their families. At present, Canadian mainstream fiction for children and young adults is much more conservative than Canadian SF. Where mainstream fiction deals with responsible decisions by growing children, it is to affirm the moral rightness of parental or societal models. In most of the recent novels, if child characters disagree with their parents' morals, it is only to choose societal morals where those are higher. (Must writers be so conservative? I'd give a lot to review the 1995 version of *HUCKLEBERRY FINN*.)

Where Canadian SF before the mid-1980s discussed how growing children develop ethics, it was in the sense of personal survival in a harsh, traumatic world, as in Doris Lessing's *SURVIVORS*. Now the questions are many and varied. Is this where I belong? ("Black Dog", Candace Jane Dorsey, *DARK EARTH DREAMS*) Can my parent accept me as I am? ("Mamasan", Bonnie Blake, *ON SPEC V6#2*) Whose needs fence me in? ("Couples", Eileen Kernaghan, *TESSERACTS 4*) This is clearly a fascinating theme for many writers, to write about the pivotal moment in a life where a child emerges from the protective unity of a parent-child relationship to an adult role.

There is no clearcut division between speculative fiction and mainstream fiction, particularly among books written for children and young adults. Often there are one or more speculative elements crucial to the plot of a mainstream story. For example, in *THE AMAZON INFLUENCE* by Marion Woodson, a teenage boy solves a mystery by applying the methodical analysis his absent father uses. A voodoo rattle sent by the father is a focus of the boy's attention,

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but ultimately the rattle is what Hitchcock called a McGuffin, a distraction rather than the solution.

A mainstream novel which has more speculative elements is *SOMETHING WEIRD IS GOING ON*, by Christie Harris. She tells a story set in contemporary Vancouver, of young Xandra who won't let loneliness for friends and her absent father overwhelm her, but sometimes it's a near thing. Xandra gets the feeling that she's being watched, and her new friend from the Granville Island ferry gets tripped and pushed in odd ways. It reminds her of an old imaginary playmate, and she begins to wonder. Could a poltergeist or a restless ghost have followed her all the way to Vancouver?

"Gran, do you think there are ghosts?" Xandra asks her grandmother, who writes stories and has been hypnotised for past lives regression.

"Yes I do, dear. But that doesn't mean that there are ghosts. But, there certainly are some strange happenings that are hard to explain otherwise."

Harris is a confident writer who can show a girl picking her way through everyday problems as well as telling the difference between ghosts and imagination. But it is the character of the grandmother, and her caring for Xandra, that make this story more than just another ghost thriller for kids. Equally important for Xandra is the realization that her absent father and overworked mother can show their caring for her, when their family unites to watch the fantasy television show her father has written.

That is an example of the third theme which was outlined above: parents and children finding peace by being together. For all the imaginative elements, futuristic settings, and speculative plots in SF stories and novels, the goal for these characters and frequently the resolution of the story lies in the ordinary every-

day family life they desire. The peace and protection of the family seems like a sanctuary, and not an unattainable goal.

Monica Hughes makes this clear in *THE GOLDEN AQUARIANS*, her latest in a series of young adult novels. Aqua is a watery planet where Walt has come to join his father. The Colonel is terraforming Aqua, to dry up land for humans to plant oil-bushes. "To the north the land was like a sore, the kind of sore that doesn't heal properly." Walt finds reasons to believe that the planet should be left in its natural state. "An intelligent being had made and knotted that piece of string. But if there were any intelligent beings on Aqua, his father wouldn't be allowed to terraform the planet."

Walt is sensitive in ways his domineering father does not respect, but he uses his own good sense to make sense of what he learns about Aqua. The environmental focus of the story takes the high moral ground; humans must not terraform a world already inhabited. The resolution Walt finds with his father brings home how important living in the real world is, especially for those who are desperate to change it. The frustration and hope in Walt and his father become peace when they live as a family in a world they do not attempt to remold.

This image of parent and child together achieving a momentary peace is not merely a "You and me against the World" theme of contemporary mainstream fiction. It is astonishing to find this mythic wholeness, this union of parent and child enshrining ordinary family life at the centre of extraordinary speculative fiction stories. Children may be conceived on board spaceships or subject to gene alteration ("Phenotype: Wipe" by Paula Johanson, *HORIZONS SF V12#2*), wanted or scorned ("The Weighmaster of Flood" by Eileen Kernaghan), raised in protection or abuse ("Birth Rite" by Marian L. Hughes, *ON SPEC V5#2*) and used or rejected by the community because of their abilities (*PASSION PLAY* by Sean Stewart) but even in these imaginative stories, many Canadian SF writers enshrine everyday

family life like a Holy Grail. A good parent-child relationship in these stories becomes a mythical bond of the family, as if it were the Alchemical Marriage which Robertson Davies wrote of in BRED IN THE BONE.

This theme was rarely used in Canadian speculative fiction in the past. Where it is used in mainstream fiction, the family peace is only a protective nest within the outside world. But in recent SF stories, the mythic family unity not only makes the characters complete, it connects them with the rest of their world. This theme was made most clear by Sean Stewart in NOBODY'S SON, where Shielder's Mark learned that he needed to be accepted by his father, to know that what he had made of himself was acceptable, and he needed to have a child of his own. The peace and completion he achieved makes mere dragon-slaying seem a petty goal in comparison.

It is no surprise that the Aurora Award winners and nominees for the last three years are dominated by novels and stories in which parent-child relationships are not only essential to the story, but developed more completely than in the simple outline of this paper. Add in stories relying on the connections between grown children and their parents, and it's hard to see where authors have enough time and space left to write about sex, space travel, or science.

Seeing my own writing in light of a trend which encompasses writers as different as Leslie Gadallah and Lesley Choyce makes it clear to me that Canadian SF authors write about parent-child relationships in ways as various as their own diverse natures and experiences.

FINIS

ARE FANS REALLY NERDS?

by Dale Speirs

It has been traditionally taken on faith that fandom is distinct from the general public in appearance. Certainly in the early days of the SF hobby it seems to have been true that fans were gawky teenaged boys with no social graces. It has also been commented on about obesity and, for some strange reason, beards in fandom. But one thing that keeps bothering me is that I've seen no statistics on the matter. This was particularly true in the last few years when comments about the greying of fandom became common. Since we know that society as a whole is aging because of the Baby Boomers, one would expect that SFdom quite naturally also age.

Without any statistics that I've heard of, I decided to compile my own, and compare fandom with the rest of society. I made out a sheet of various 'eyeball' categories on weight, hair, age, and gender. As I was not about to stop people to ask them their age and weight, I did it by the highly unscientific process of watching them from a distance and guessing their approximate range. I figure that errors will cancel each other out to a reasonable approximation of the truth. If I guess someone is older than they really are, then I probably was misled also in the other direction by people who don't look their age.

I used some stats such as those supplied by Statistics Canada and LOCUS. I didn't think of this survey until after ConVersion, so I used BanffCon 95 as the SF group. Comparison groups were: users of Calgary Public Library, the University of Calgary Library, a meeting of the Calgary Philatelic Society, a meeting of the Calgary Aquarium Society, and my 19 employees at work, mostly seasonal staff (landscape maintenance).

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Gender

Statistics Canada	49%M	51%F
1995 LOCUS Survey	70%M	30%F
BanffCon 95	38%M	62%F
Calgary Public Library	65%M	35%F
University of Calgary Library	44%M	56%F
Calgary Philatelic Society	72%M	28%F
Calgary Aquarium Society	67%M	33%F
Parks Dept.	89%M	11%F

Strangely enough, BanffCon seemed to be dominated by females, although that might have been because of the emphasis on fantasy and costuming. But even if males do dominate at other cons, that is nothing to be surprised about, as they also dominate at mundane clubs such as aquarium and philatelic.

Age Distribution

	Under 30	30 to 45	Over 45
Statistics Canada			
- Canada-wide	43%	25%	31%
- Alberta	47%	26%	26%
BanffCon 95	71%	21%	8%
Calgary Public Library	62%	19%	19%
University of Calgary Library	68%	24%	8%
Calgary Philatelic Society	12%	32%	56%
Calgary Aquarium Society	14%	76%	10%
Parks Dept.	58%	26%	16%

SFers are younger than we may think. Interestingly, the closest matches were the two libraries. Fans do read a lot of books. Stamp collectors have always been older people with the time and money to indulge in that hobby.

Weight

	Skinny	Average	Obese
BanffCon 95	13%	58%	29%
Calgary Public Library	15%	62%	23%
University of Calgary Library	20%	68%	12%
Calgary Philatelic Society	20%	76%	4%
Calgary Aquarium Society	0%	86%	14%
Parks Dept.	11%	68%	21%

Oops! Looks like SFers do tend to eat well more than the others. However, we're not entirely the worst, as two groups were near. When guessing this category, I went by body shape in relation to height. A mild potbelly, about 1 or 2 cm of gut hanging out over the belt, was considered as average. A nine-months-pregnant-look potbelly was definitely overweight.

Facial hair

	Clean shaven	Beard or mustache
BanffCon 95	22%	78%
Calgary Public Library	71%	29%
University of Calgary Library	64%	36%
Calgary Philatelic Society	78%	22%
Calgary Aquarium Society	57%	43%
Parks Dept.	82%	18%

Another stereotype confirmed about fans. I would note that the Parks Dept. total was skewed by the fact that most of our workers are seasonal. Had I restricted to permanent employees, the ratio would have been 50% to 50% or more in favour of beards, since permanent employees work outside in winter and usually have beards for protection.

Hair Length

	Short hair	Long hair
BanffCon 95	67%	33%
Calgary Public Library	76%	24%
University of Calgary Library	56%	44%
Calgary Philatelic Society	92%	8%
Calgary Aquarium Society	81%	19%
Parks Dept.	95%	5%

This count included both male and female, whereas the facial hair count was obviously only men. Although SFers tend to be shaggier than average, they are not conspicuously so. Again, had I restricted the Parks count to permanent employees, there would have been a higher percentage of longhairs. I didn't count ponytails as a specific item, but they seem to be common among male SF fans. In fact, as a digression, one of the things that struck me at ConAdian in 1994 was the large number of ponytailed men, something I'd not noticed until then.

Summary

This survey, as I mentioned, is not the most scientific, but I think it gives a reasonable first approximation. I used a single sheet observation form, ticking

off the categories as I went. I tried to be inconspicuous as possible, standing at the rear of a meeting, or watching from a distance as people entered a library. A few glanced curiously at me as they went by, but I tried to look as if I was jotting down notes about something, and in no case did anyone get a view of the form.

The historical accounts of SF seem agreed that early fandom was mostly geeks and nerds. SF was a misfit literature written for misfits. When the Trekkies invaded in the 1960s, the gender balance came closer to the general population. As far as weight and hair are concerned, I suspect they will always be at variance with the general public. Book reading does not work up much of a sweat. If SFers are younger than most, they are more likely to be able to grow hair without fear of conforming to company dress codes.

Some things seem to go together, which I did not track as this was too much extra work. Beards and obesity seemed to go together. Perhaps to hide the extra chins? As far as long hair goes, this seemed to correlate a bit with age. Not surprisingly, since older men are more likely to be bald, although I have seen not a few chrome domes who still managed to grow out a ponytail.

I did one observation form per group, which was about 25 to 30 people. A miniscule sample to be sure. Calgary is about 800,000 people. The Statistics Canada data were based on the most recent census of 1991, when Canada had a population of 27,296,870 and Alberta had 2,545,570.

It would be interesting to see some surveys from other fannish centres. As always, it is important to compare with non-SF groups, as statistical analysis in isolation is meaningless.