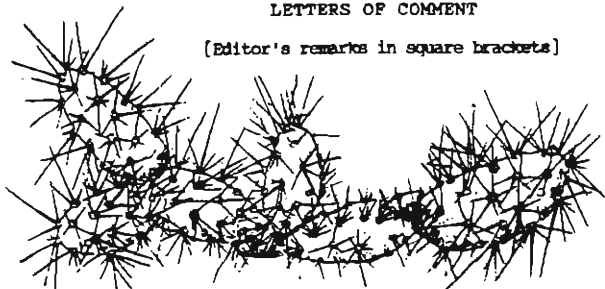


OPUNTIA

33.1



[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



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ART CREDIT: The cover is by an unknown artist for the 1701 book DISSERTATIO PHYSICA DE COCHINILLA, by Frederic Friedel, and which was reprinted in a 1907 issue of POPULAR SCIENCE MONTHLY (volume 71, page 220) from whence I got it. It shows an opuntia with cochineal insects on it, from which were made a dye. The bumpy things along the ground are enlargements of various life stages of the insects. The vase-shaped things on the plant are fruits.

TORONTO IN 2003: Toronto is bidding for the WorldCon in 2003. The Torcon 3 bid committee is up and doing and can be reached at: Toronto in '03
Box 3, Stn A
Toronto, Ontario
Canada, M5W 1A2

Pre-supporting memberships are C\$20.03/US\$15, payable to "Toronto in '03".

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

1997-4-12

I was struck by the wrongness of lumping fanzines produced from SF fan origins and the bulk of amateur publications that do not have their distant roots in a hobby. I believe most of the latter lack the freedom of the press that the former traditionally have enjoyed. There must be squillions of rock zines just now. Would any of them publish an article arguing the authenticity of the Landowska harpsichord recordings because she used instruments more advanced in construction details than those available to baroque composers? Or would an underground zine relent from its attack on authority to print a long article praising Nixon, Reagan, and Bush as the best three USA presidents of the century? I don't think it ever occurs to the editors of that sort of zines to publish anything that deviates from their particular orientation and is guaranteed to offend the readers. Almost from the start, SF fanzines have published whatever the editors felt like publishing, whether it confirmed or disputed the majority opinion among its readership or the editor's own opinions.

FROM: Buck Coulson
2677W-SOON
Hartford City, Indiana 47348

1997-3-31

ZINE LISTINGS
by Dale Speirs

Academics are always interested in finding something new (but not too new) for a thesis. The more analyses of fandom and fanzines that are published, the more academics will rush to join the crowd, until the field is saturated and the search for something even newer begins.



I ALSO HEARD FROM: Geri Sullivan, Rodney Leighton, John Held Jr, Robert Lichtman, Bruce Barbarasch, Tommy Ferguson, Brian Davis, Sheryl Birkhead, Ian Gunn, Chester Cuthbert, and somebody whose signature I couldn't make out and who didn't put a return address on the letter

WARP #41 (The Usual from Montréal SF&F Association, Box 1186, Place du Parc, Montréal, Québec H2W 2P4) Media clubzine; this ish makes much ado about the revised STAR WARS movies. Also news and notes about Canfandom.

PHILOSOFY #5 (The Usual from Alexander Slate, 8603 Shallow Ridge, San Antonio, Texas 78239-4022) For the deeper mind. Continues a look at death and war from an SF point of view, seriously considered in both articles and locs.

DRIFT #86 (The Usual from C.F. Kennedy, Box 40, 90 Shuter Street, Toronto, Ontario M5B 2K6) Fictionzine, mostly short stories and a short-short or two. The one I liked was Cameron Straughan's variation on a theme by Einstein, where height and time are the same.

ON SPEC #28 (\$6 from On Spec, Box 4727, Edmonton, Alberta T6E 5G6) Canada's SF prozine. Certainly one of the best when it comes to cover art. This issue is on the theme of Canadian geography, and fluctuates between parodies at the one extreme and gloomy stuff at the other end, with little in the golden mean. Many of the authors obviously had fun trotting out all those Canuck clichés and making them do surrealistic tricks.

ATTITUDE #10 (The Usual from Michael Abbott, 102 William Smith Close, Cambridge CB1 3QF, England) Both a zine and an SF convention. This ish discusses the con, the possibility of another British WorldCon, car chases in Gibraltar, Alpha females versus Beta males in fandom, and the usual reviews and con reports.

FOR THE CLERISY #20 (The Usual from Brant Kresovich, Riga Business School, Skolas 11, LV-1010 Riga, Latvia) The life of an American expatriate in Latvia, with tips and notes on how to survive culture shock.

SIDEBAR #1 (The Usual from Ken Forman and Arnie Katz, Box 95941, Las Vegas, Nevada 89193-5941) No progress can be expected in the struggle to save American forests as long as the pulp-and-paper industry must work overtime to supply Las Vegas fandom's myriads of fanzines. The latest title starts off with Forman musing on fandom and the possibility of holding a convention at the Hoover Dam (where he works). Then a playlet on fanzine reviews, a rather unusual concept for stage drama, but what the hey.

POSFAX #185 (The Usual from Falls of the Ohio SF & F Association, Box 37281, Louisville, Kentucky 40233-7281) Nominally a clubzine but the 72 pages of micro-print would not suggest that to a casual reader. Lots of detailed book reviews, con reports, political slagging, and at-the-top-of-their-lungs letter writers. An evening's reading, and while this zine is best known for its politics, it should be noted that it carries a lot of SF-related material.

OBSCURE #39 (US\$1 from Jim Romensko, 45 South Albert Street, #1, St. Paul, Minnesota 55105) Reviewzine of the calmer, second look, discussing only a few zines or events related, rather than cram in hundreds. This issue is a miscellany due to a recent lull in zinedom scandals: "It almost makes you miss Robert DuPree".

LOSERS ARE COOL #3 (The Usual from Robert Howington, 4405 Bellaire Drive South, #220, Fort Worth, Texas 76109-5103) Not really. Lots of clippings and photos that are obviously intended to shock or be cutting-edge but are only a day late and a dollar short. This stuff has been done by so many zines that it has lost all impact except to a newbie. (Which reminds me to ask whatever happened to Crad Kilodney?) I did find the rant about being a federal government worker of particular interest since I am a municipal government worker and can relate to the abuse that we get from citizens.

ERG #137 (The Usual from Terry Jeeves, 56 Red Scar Drive, Scarborough, Yorkshire YO12 5RQ, England) A look at SF in Britain during the 1930s, various reviews and locs, and a continuing series on old or obscure SF prozines.

GOTH, SHMOTH #4 (The Usual from Paul Olson, Box 3472, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55403) Starting off with an illustrated tour of his abode, soon to be re-arranged by his new spouse. Also a bit of fiction and comments on goings-on in zinedom.

MUUNA TAKEENA #3 (The Usual from Timo Palonen, Hepokuja 6 B 26, FIN-01200 Vantaa, Suomi Finland) My mother's family is Finnish, so I've always had a soft spot for zines from that country. Unfortunately I never learned much Suomalais, so I can't read them; however this one, a reviewzine, is in English. The title, I think, means something along the lines of 'variable security' or 'changable guarantee', something oxymoronic like that. In any event, this zine reviews music and zines mostly from Europe, so it is a useful node to connect to the European Papernet. Also includes an interesting de-toured comic strip.

8-TRACK MIND #91 (US\$2 from Russ Forster, Box 14402, Chicago, Illinois 60614-0402) Very nicely produced digest with card cover. The highlight of this issue is an interview with Sam Auld, an electronics engineer with Bill Lear of Learjet fame. When not working on aircraft electronics such as transceivers and automatic direction finders, Auld was assisting Lear to develop the 8-track cartridge. This was a response of Lear to the 4-track; he wanted something better and sturdier. Lear developed the first mass-production car radios in the 1920s with his company now called Motorola, and he wanted to do the same with recorded tapes. A tremendous amount of work went into this project, and Auld emphasizes the teamwork involved. There were many obstacles involved in getting a product to market that could take rough handling and the widest temperature extremes.

PLOKTA #6 (The Usual from Alison Scott, 42 Tower Hamlets Road, Walthamstow, London E17 4RH, England) The weddings and babies issue pretty much sums up this perzine. One editor off to Tasmania to marry and the other marvelling at her newborn daughter. Best photo scanning in zinedom.

ETHEL THE AARDVARK #72 (The Usual from Melbourne SF Club, Box 212, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 3005, Australia) Clubzine with the usual news and reviews, personal essays and reports, and letters.

FIXED LINK #1 (The Usual from Brian Davis, 45 Charm Court, Fredericton, New Brunswick E3B 7J6) Fandom in the Maritime provinces has traditionally been a mystery to come-from-aways. Certainly in the years I've been trying, I've never had a response to any letter or zine trade sent, so to get this SF zine unsolicited was quite pleasing; I hope it is the start of a trend. The title of this zine is quite appropriate ("fixed link" was the political code term for the new bridge connecting Prince Edward Island to the mainland at New Brunswick; the saga of how Confederation Bridge finally came to be built would take up a book). This issue has a bit of Maritimes news, convention listings, Aurora Award notes, and oddments.

MASTHEAD V10#3 (\$3.95 from North Island Sound Ltd., 1606 Sedlescomb Drive, Unit 8, Mississauga, Ontario L4X 1M6) Glossy trade magazine sold at newsagents. I like to buy the annual review of Canadian periodical launches and crashes. 1996 was a good year with one of the widest margins between new magazines started up (90) and closures (34, with another 7 MIA or walking wounded). One has to wonder about the optimism of some publishers whose titles are listed in the startups. URBAN MOZAIK, aimed at 20 to 45 year olds who live in large cities and are interested in multiculturalism, might make a good zine but I doubt they'll survive long charging \$2500 for a one-time full-page ad. DIVORCE seems to be having trouble selling at newsagents, especially in small towns.

THYME #114/AUSTRALIAN SF NEWS #74/ARTYCHOKE #19 (The Usual from Alan Stewart, Box 222, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 3005, Australia) Three zines in one. THYME covers news and notes of Australian fandom, plus photos and interviews. ASFN is a misnomer as it is actually a reviewzine covering SF books. ARTYCHOKE is my favourite, as it runs the continuing saga of the Space-Time Buccaneers, a well-drawn comic with a tangled plot line that still makes more sense than most.

BUSSWARBLE #33 (The Usual from Michael Hailstone, 14 Cecil Road, Blackheath, New South Wales 2785, Australia) Perzine with a mixture of storytelling, travel accounts and economics. This time around a look at globalism and its effects on culture. Economic warfare by another name, really.

SOUTHERN FANDOM CONFEDERATION BULLETIN V6#8 (The Usual from Tom Feller, Box 13626, Jackson, Mississippi 39236-3626) Clubzine of federated SF clubs in southern USA. News and notes, con reports and listings, club listings and locs.

BANANA WINGS #6 (The Usual from Claire Brialey, 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey CRO 7HA, England) A genzine starting off with musings on the monarchy and British politics, chitchat on Attitude the Con, a Yank in Croydon, fears about the dumbing-down of fanzines, British trains, protest marches, and locs.

BROKEN PENCIL #5 (\$4.95 from Broken Pencil, Box 203, Station P, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2S7) Slick-cover reviewzine sold at newsagents. Canadian zines grouped by geography, which makes no sense as zinedom is international by theme, not local by region. Nonetheless I am always glad to see each new issue on the stands, as it is one of the few methods by which a non-ziner can be introduced to life in the photocopier zone. Reprints of articles from zines provide the solid content, while the zine listings are more useful in the short term.

PLEXIFORM #1 (The Usual from Clare Pepper, RR#1, Douglas, Ontario KOJ ISO) Life as a punker in a rural area, and while I'm not a punk rocker, I can certainly emphasize with the problems of rural conformism. She has produced a good read for a first issue; thoughts on tolerance, the sense of community, self-image, and how to make life more interesting.

AMUSING YOURSELF TO DEATH JR. #1 (Only available for zine fair distribution, from Ruel Gaviola, Box 91934, Santa Barbara, California 93190-1934) A reviewzine of zines. This first issue was produced for the Calgary Zine Fair. Gaviola will produce issues for any zine fair, con, or similar event; just give sufficient notice.

JOURNAL OF DECADENT ACTION #7 (The Usual from BM Decadence, London WC1N 3XX, England) The headline story is Phone-In-Sick Day, called for April 7, so a bit old by the time I got this. Most of this issue discusses inflation and politics. The Buy-Nothing Day, alas, on November 30, was a failure, mainly because it had been called for the height of the Christmas shopping season. This zine advocates voting Labour in the recent British election because they are most likely to induce inflation. The editors are strong advocates of an inflationary policy; I rather agree with them.

KNOW NEWS V5#2 (The Usual from Scott Crow, Box 1948, Fair Oaks, California 95628-1948) Fictionzine, with a few miscellaneous reviews as well.

FILE 770 #116 (US\$8 for five issues from Mike Glycer, Box 1056, Sierra Madre, California 91025) Newszine of SF fandom, mostly conventions and WorldCon bids.

LONDON PSYCHOGEOGRAPHICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER #17 (The Usual from LPA (ELS), Box 15, 138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS, England) Articles on why HRH Prince William has the Mark of the Beast, leylines and how Thor's Hammer mutated into the Communist emblem.

PROPER BOSKONIAN #40 (The Usual from New England Science Fiction Association, Box 809, Framingham, Massachusetts 017010203) 52-page clubzine with the usual reviews and news, along with an installment of Space-Time Buccaneers. This issue is mostly taken up with a 28-page report of a trip to Japan, with excruciating detail of train schedules, food outlets, and temples seen.

WILD HEIRS #19 (The Usual from Arnie Katz, 330 South Decatur, Suite 152, Las Vegas, Nevada 89107) Musings and accounts of fanzine fandom, faanfictions, personal accounts, and letters. A 'thin' issue, only 44 pages.

TRAP DOOR #17 (The Usual from Robert Lichtman, Box 30, Glen Ellen, California 95442) Personal accounts and memories of SF fandom, obsolete technology, and lots of letters. This issue has Lichtman's statistical survey of zines received (I really must do the same thing next year). He now has ten years of data showing the state of zinedom, or at least a good approximation in absence of any other. 1996 was an average year for the 1990s, which had recovered from the slump of the late 1980s.

FACTSHEET FIVE #61 (US\$6 from Factsheet Five, Box 170099, San Francisco, California 94117-0099) Reviewzine of thousands of listings dated between June 1996 and January 1997 and published May 1997, making this an historical purview more than anything else. In light of this, one of the headlined articles "Missing in action: In search of zine publishers" is almost self-referential rather than expository. FF, like BROKEN PENCIL, has its faults, but as both are sold at newsagents they both serve to approach newbies to the zine scene who would otherwise not be aware of the hobby. If FF could just get its frequency up to where the zine listings are useful, then it would be worth buying.

RALPH #45 (The Usual from Ralph Alfonso, Box 505, 1288 Broughton Street, Vancouver, British Columbia V6G 2B5) Monthly tiny-type sheet of topical poems, news of the Canuck music industry, and club life.

THE REVOLUTION IS NOT A MASONIC AFFAIR (£2 from Unpopular Books, Box 15, 138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS, England) This chapbook by Boris Nicolaevsky discusses the First International and how Karl Marx maneuvered against a pseudo-Masonic order that tried to control it. The Lodge of Philadelphians was a leftist group mixed up in revolutionary politics under the guise of Freemasonry. This double dose of conspiracy theory during the 1800s makes for interesting reading, and reminds me of nothing so much as 1930s SF fandom. Was Sam Moskowitz a Mason by any chance?

FAPA #239 (Details from Robert Lichtman, Box 30, Glen Ellen, California 95442) This is the May 1997 mailing of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. An apa is a collective of zine editors who send a bundle of their zine to a central mailer, who then collates the zines into sets and sends back a set to each participant. FAPA celebrates its 60th year this year but is by no means the oldest apa, as there are others that date from the 1800s. It is nominally for SF fans but the topic is not obligatory. There are certain requirements to join FAPA; send an SASE to the address above for details. The maximum membership in FAPA is 68, but they currently have several openings. Two of them, alas, are due to death, including Sam Moskowitz who was one of the founders of SF fandom back in the 1930s. The current FAPA bundle has 37 contributions, a good couple of hours reading. Many of these zines are by the great names of zinedom but don't feel shy about joining. Tis well recommended.

BRAIN CELL #389 (Mail art contribution to Ryosuke Cohen, 3-76-1-A-613, Yagumokitacho, Moriguchi - City, Osaka 570, Japan) A mail art assembling on a large 11 x 17 poster. Send in your rubber stamp work, stickers, etcetera, and you'll get back a colour poster with all the contributions on it.

ADVENTURES OF AN UNEMPLOYED ENTOMOLOGIST #8 (US\$2 or zine trade from Box 3026, Worcester, Massachusetts 01613-3026) Exactly what the title suggests, with job interview sagas, attending professional conferences, a visit to her old home town (the house is gone), and bug hunting in cool weather.

TOMMYWORLD #11 (The Usual from Tommy Ferguson, 768 Manning Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6G 2W6) Perzine of a recent immigrant to Canada from Ulster. Not surprising that the Irish clichés and The Troubles continue to haunt him a bit even on this side of the water.

MOSHASSUCK REVIEW May 1997 (Zine trade from Ken Faig Jr, 2311 Swainwood Drive, Gelnview, Illinois 60025-2741) Apazine devoted to Lovecraft and his circle. This issue looks at the recent movie "The Whole Wide World" which depicts the love affair between Robert E. Howard (who created Conan the Barbarian) and Novalyne Price. Also, French comics on Lovecraft.

CONTRACT V9#3 (The Usual from John Mansfield, 321 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 2B9) Newszine of Canadian fandom, with emphasis on conventions. Listings and brief commentary, and thoughts about specific aspects of con-running.

KNARLEY KNEWS #63 (The Usual from Henry Welch, 1525 -16 Avenue, Grafton, Wisconsin 53024-2017) Genzine, with articles on the trouble with renters, a Grand Tour on a bicycle, and getting 55 credit card applications in one year.

APPARATCHIK #78 (The Usual from Andy Hooper, 4228 Francis Avenue North #103, Seattle, Washington 98103) Tri-weekly SF fanzine with news and notes about fandom. In this issue is a bit about the history of Corflu, a convention for fanzine fans, also memorials on recently deceased fans such as Sam Moskowitz.

Faanfiction is a staple of many self-referential fanzines, but not too common as commercially published novels. The most recent have been Sharyn McCrumb's two shots at SF fans, all the more devastating for being accurate in the portrayal of their characters, albeit far wrong on the interpretation of why fans do and behave the way they do. I've accumulated a few other paperbacks about SF fandom, usually placed at conventions.

But there are other fandoms and hobbies which were put into novels, and other undergrounds documented as fiction. Nevil Shute's last novel TRUSTEE FROM THE TOOLROOM (Ballantine, 1967) takes his experience and life as an engineer and distills it into the mild-mannered Keith Stewart, a Briton who ekes out a poor but happy existence as a builder of miniature models such as steam engines and clocks, supplemented by his wife's earnings as a shop clerk. Keith's sister and her husband have decided to get away from it all by going on a sailing cruise around the world, eventually intending to settle in the exotic locale of Vancouver Island. They leave their daughter with Keith and his wife for what is meant to be only six months. The events of the story take place in post-war Britain when currency controls were still in effect. As it was highly illegal to take large sums of money out of the country, they convert their savings into diamonds and hide the stones in the ship's hull, Keith assisting with the installation.

But the ship comes to grief in a cyclone, wrecking on a reef near Tahiti, they being drowned. Keith has no choice but to go to Tahiti and try to recover the gems without anyone being the wiser. His rationale is easy to explain to everyone; he wants to see a proper gravestone installed and recover what personal effects he can from the worthless hull lying on the reef. This

he must do despite being as poor as a church mouse. In his day job, he works for MINIATURE MECHANIC, writing how-to articles for scale modelists and answering the letters from faithful readers. It is from those readers that he finds his way across the planet, bumming a ride on a cargo plane from a flight crew who know him as a BNF. Getting as far as Honolulu, he then manages to get most of the remaining distance before being stopped by French authorities. But he is rescued from Tahiti by fannish connections who are not only loyal readers of MINIATURE MECHANIC but millionaires with spare yachts lying at idle. The network of connection between Keith Stewart and the millionaires is a demonstration of the six-degrees theory, the idea that each of us are no more than six people from anyone else on this planet. As one scale modeller connects with some other modeller, Keith finds his greatest resource is not the pitifully small sum of money he has, but the great number of names he knows. The subscription list of MINIATURE MECHANIC turns out to be more useful than his bank book. He had never ventured out of England in his life, yet had friends in every country. He was poor folk, yet met and talked with millionaires as a social equal and often a superior.

BETTER DEAD THAN RED by Stanley Reynolds (Ballantine, 1966) is a satirical novel about the underground of the American lunatic right. Franklin Lear is a factory owner who sold the family business to a multinational megacorporation because his company was too small to withstand the competition. Lear's hometown has a main street like many other towns, where local stores have faded away and been replaced by shopping malls. Brooding on this, Lear decides to do something useful with his early retirement, and takes up the cause of anti-Communism, founding the John Henry Drake Inc. society, named after a local martyr. (Can you say Birch?). As a detractor of Lear comments: "... he has seen the Republic go from a nation of independent businessmen to a nation of clerks. But if Lear had

[continued next page]

struck out at government, his friends in the American Legion might think he was an anarchist. ... If he struck out at business, big or small, his fellow Rotarians might think he was against free enterprise. ... Communism on the other hand is big, like Entey Inc., which took over his business. In the dusk with the light behind it, Lear cannot tell the difference."

Lear goes off on a speaking tour in his station wagon, with a mimeograph in the back and his ne'er-do-well nephew Nick Drummer assisting him. By way of the six degrees of connection, Lear enters the 1960s world of the ultraright underground, passing through a culture of segregationists, newspaper editors, people with unfortunate surnames like Bastard ("a good Barbarian name"), and millionaires with their own nukes and Deathhead Brigades. Each tells their story of how and why they came to be as they are, in the marginal right-wing of politics, in an underground as disorganized and fratricidal as that of the leftists.

The characters in this novel are well-drawn, even if too stereotypical. One can appreciate the logic that drives them, even if disagreeing with their intent. It has been remarked that the extreme left meets the extreme right if extended far enough, and I am inclined to agree. As many small businessmen and farmers detest the megacorporations as do Beat poets and university professors. Underground zine publishers who advocate Marxism (yes, they are still here; Communism is by no means dead, the XUSSR notwithstanding) are as much businessmen as the hardware store merchant who circulates a newsletter warning of the Apocalypse.

William Marshall's novel SCI FI (Holt Rinehart Winston 1981) confirms Sharyn McCrumb's worst suspicions of costume fans in his police procedural about murder and mayhem at the All-Asia Science Fiction and Horror Movie Congress. The mayhem is caused by drunken media fans running amok in the streets of Hong Kong; the murder is caused by The Spaceman, who incinerates people with a ray gun.

The fans are background scenery though, for the Spaceman is in the employ of the Yakuza, who want to steal the unreleased new films brought to the Congress. From the stolen reels, they can produce pirated videos for re-sale on the black market. The Spaceman is wearing a firefighter suit and carrying a flame-thrower, the better to burn his way to freedom after heisting the films out of the hotel safe. The novel is cluttered with various subplots, and in the fine tradition of mysteries almost everyone comes under suspicion.

While the novel is a good read for a rainy Sunday, it treats the SF setting merely as a Hitchcockian MacGuffin, a plot device to move the story along. Fandom gets no serious thought here, if indeed the costumed idiots can be considered fans. One gets the impression that the author's research on SF fandom was confined to reading newspaper stories about SF cons. You know the kind: "ALIENS BEAM INTO TOWN" or "SCI-FI MEETING IS OUT OF THIS WORLD".

MURDERCON by Richard Purtill (Doubleday, 1982) is set at a San Diego SF convention. Athena Pierce is a middle-aged philosophy professor attending the con as a degafted SF reader. She meets up with a graduate student named Dorothy Dodd, an obnoxious personality on the con committee who is swiftly dispatched by the end of the second chapter, and not a moment too soon for those who knew her. It turns out that she was blackmailing a new SF author named Joe Finster, who had plagiarized an unpublished Stanley Weinbaum story and won a Nebula and a Hugo for it. As per usual in a mystery novel, it is not long before the body count increases and various suspects are introduced and dismissed. The fandom depicted in the background is not as nerdish as McCrumb's vision. The author gets a few details wrong; he refers to fan pubing instead of fan pubbing, which brings up a disturbing picture in one's mind about the fanzine lounge. But getting back to the plot, Athena spends a lot of her time assisting the police detective, getting into Nancy Drew escapades, and generally just moving the

story along by provoking the characters. Don Wollheim appears in the novel via long-distance telephone. One suspect turns out not to be guilty of the murder but is arrested as a white slaver, he apparently having an idea that an SF con is a good place to collect for his harem. The mystery as a whole is fair-to-middling.

Like SCI FI, this novel is a tourist's view of an SF convention. The scenery and characters are described as if they were local flora and fauna. One gets the impression that it could just as easily been set at an accountant convention.

"The Fantasy People" is a short story that appeared in the literary anthology NEW WORLD WRITING #9 (Mentor, 1956). Written by David Allen Ish, then a 18-year-old university student, it reads pretty much like any literary press publication then or now. Too much dialogue in short snappy Hemingway sentences, lots of angst and gloom, and characters whom the reader would like to slap around just from the sheer annoyance of their behaviour. However, Ish does get right the style of SF cons, starting with the constant flow of people greeting each other "It's been a year!" and ignoring the panels. Ish's characters are boys (not men any more than he was) out hunting girls in a futile hope of getting laid. Ahem ...

Ron Goulart is best known to SFdom for his light comedies, but he is also involved with comics. He has done a couple of novels about comics, being murder mysteries that use the hobby as a background. A GRAVEYARD OF MY OWN (Walker, 1985) has as its hero a cartoonist who has gone legitimate and now does book covers instead of comics. He discovers that a group of cartoonists are being murdered one by one, each death made to look accidental. He must not only solve the murders but convince the police that they are indeed murders. In one chapter, Goulart describes a comics con in deadly accurate style: "There were roughly two dozen tables around the motel ballroom. Most of them were piled with comic books, boxes of comic books, paperbacks and

assorted magazines. ... Forty or so people, most of them plump young men, were browsing and socializing amid the rows of tables."

Xenogenic friends of Harlan Ellison abound. Bert, the hero, had quit comics because he was fed up with them, and was now doing better work on book covers. He has this conversation with the chairman of the comics con:

"I hope you won't mind my telling you that you're making a bad mistake."

"How so?"

"Quitting Maximus [comics publisher]", the chubby young man explained. "That was a dumb move, Mr. Kurrie. THE HUMAN BEAST was, let's face it, your finest hour. It defined the parameters of your talent. Can I be frank with you?"

"Fire away."

"The paperback covers you're trying to do, the few I've seen so far, are pure crap."

Nodding, Bert said, "It's always nice to get the man in the street's view of —"

"Need the money, I suppose? That's why you're attempting to crack the book market."

"Yeah, I have a lot of vices", confided Bert. "Couldn't support them on the Maximus wages."

The autograph session wasn't much better. Bert Kurrie received requests to sign paper cups and pizza boxes since "I can't afford to buy any of your comics."

GRAVEYARD is obviously written by someone who has seen the ugly side of fandom at close range. Goulart is not as annoying as Sharyn McCrumb, who also described fans accurately but then went on to impose her personal philosophy on top of the character descriptions, a clash that makes her books unrealistic as a whole and more of a psychological study of herself. With books such as SCI FI, one can shrug the descriptions of fans off as a misdescription by a tourist, but Ish, McCrumb, Goulart, Shute, and Reynolds would be good authors to use for a course on SF fandom.

STREET SLEEPER by Geoff Nicholson (Sceptre, 1994) belongs to that very specialized genre of Volkswagen Beetle fiction. I've always had a soft spot for this car; my father drove them in the 1960s, I drove one in the 1970s and 1980s, and my brother drives them still yet. This humorous novel is about a English librarian named Barry Osgathorpe who decides he can't look another library card in the face. He chucks his job, his fiancé, changes his name to Ishmael, buys an old Beetle, and takes to the motorway. The adventures he has along the way are not unexpected. He meets up with a young woman, tangles with her angry father (a Tory M.P., of course), picks up disciples along the way, is caught up in a Molotov-cocktail fight with the local Hunt (who ride to Range Rovers instead of using horses and hounds), and ends up a media celebrity. Written in the style of Tom Sharpe, if you've ever read any of his vicious comedies. As the novel progresses, there are flashbacks to the story of how the VW Beetle came to be, from its humble origins as a People's Car to its revival after the war as a cheap import into North America and subsequent canonization as a cult car.

SELF-DISCOVERY by Vladimir Savchenko (Macmillan 1979) is a mildly amusing novel about the scientist Krivoshein, who clones himself not once but several times. The clones vary in resemblance to the original, not just in appearance but in personality. Krivoshein had built a computer connected to a tank filled with a soup of organic chemicals from which to build a clone. With a Monomakh's Crown (that headset thingy that reads the brainwaves), he sets about ordering the computer to duplicate himself and discovers, as anyone who uses a computer knows, that giving precise instructions is not easy. But the false starts are overcome, leading to a duplicate of Krivoshein, another that is inferior to him, and a third that is superior. They agree between

themselves that it is safer for each to live in a different city. This is not only because fellow staff at the research institute are suspicious about why Krivoshein appears to be in two places at once, but because the death of a botched clone in the lab has police under the impression that Krivoshein is dead. This novel has the usual philosophical discussions one might expect, of the "What hath God wrought?" kind, but they can easily be skipped. Hollywood or New York publishers would have made this into a race against time to keep the government from twisting the discovery to evil ends, but the author adopts a more realistic course. The other researchers at the institute are too busy with office politics, jockeying for promotion or bigger budgets for their specialties, to notice what is going on. The Krivoshein clones plan improvements in their work, but are distracted by such problems as what happens when the girlfriend of the original likes one of the clones better and how to keep their work secret. The resolution is "All for one, and one for all!"; they will build a new world without the old world noticing.

THE AGE OF IMPROV by Rick Salutin (HarperCollins, 1995) is a near-future novel about Canadian political life. A retired hockey player is now Governor-General, there is a King instead of the eternal Queen, but some things do not change: "... Canadian drivers always ride in the passing lane. They don't acknowledge any difference. They settle there, you can see from the back of their heads how complacent they are. ... You could honk, but no one honks on the highway."

Matthew Deans is a television personality with a mission that includes improvisational theatre and politics. Many would say the two were the same, and it would be difficult to prove them wrong in an era when actors are political and politicians are always acting a part. The Prime Minister has called an election, and away they go.

The election is an extrapolated version of current reality. The turnover in political parties continues, the one that began in 1993 when the Tories went from a strong majority government to two seats, the separatists became the Official Opposition, and the Reform party caught the next wave just after its birth and went from nothing to the replacement for the Tories. Now Matthew Deans is in an election where few candidates have campaign headquarters because it is cheaper to use cellphones and e-mail out of vans: "It was a desktop election.". The party leaders are not in the same studio for televised debates, and few were in studios at all; their combined presence was done with electronic smoke and mirrors. Unfortunately an unknown hacker manages to insert himself into the debate and ask questions the candidates would rather not have to answer. It is agreed afterwards on the Late News that virtual debates still need some work.

Detournement catches on, the revenge of radio stations against television. Viewers are encouraged to mute the sound on their TV sets when The National comes on, and turn up the radio, which will supply the missing talk on the evening news. Improv actors do the dialogue. Elsewhere, the Governor-General dies of a heart attack the day before the election in a charity hockey game. A Canadian reporter in the States manages to trick the American President into talking about annexation, thus ensuring the reporter a ticket home from his posting and a good story to boot. '54/40' may be the name of an old rock band to Americans, but in Canada it still sows alarm.

The election produces a hung Parliament, and after the major political parties are unable to form a majority government, Matthew Deans and other independents find themselves governing because they hold the balance of power. Matthew and his cabinet barely have time for self-congratulation when they face the question that all successful revolutionaries must: "Now what do we do?".

As the new Prime Minister, Matthew discovers that improv theatre is the only methodology he has for running a country. Trouble is, the USA government interprets this as a sign of weakness, since improv actors can only react to audience suggestions. Matthew finds himself reacting to an American ultimatum to abrogate the Free Trade Agreement. Québec takes the opportunity to go for independence.

Matthew decides to do the honourable thing and call a referendum. Trouble is, he can't think of what question to ask on the ballot. Perhaps making it an essay question? He finally comes up with "Do you believe our human solidarity is the basis for our behaviour toward each other?". This leaves the pundits and opposition groups in a quandry; no one ever asked people to vote on philosophy before. The vote was 62% yes, and the polling stations had to stay open longer because so many voters were using the ballot as essay answers, taking time to write in their thoughts even though they knew it would spoil the ballot.

After the referendum, Matthew's fragile coalition falls apart, and he is replaced by a new government. One which, however, has taken note of the voting and is not going to run the country for the benefit of business only. He goes off overseas on a meandering trip through France as he makes his way to Africa to visit an old revolutionary left over from the Sixties. His final fate is to return home and end up doing Shakespeare, the very antithesis of improv.

THE AGE OF IMPROV is a steady read, but is slightly dated by current events, one hazard of near-future novels. It will become less readable with time, as the true events it pre-supposes a knowledge of are forgotten. But it emphasizes the point of cycles in life and politics. The leftists had their way in the 1960s and 1970s. The Tory reaction since then will eventually fade and die in its turn. What goes around, comes around.

EINSTEIN'S DREAMS by Alan Lightman (Warner Books, 1993) was mentioned by Robert Sabella in his zine GRADIENT, and sounded interesting enough that I went looking for it in local bookstores. I couldn't find it in the SF section, so on a hunch I checked the general fiction shelves and there it was. The book is called a novel, but is really a series of disconnected vignettes dated in the first half of 1905. A patent clerk in Berne, Switzerland, is working on a theory that will shake up the world directly and indirectly. Einstein's dreams are transcribed, each dream showing the consequence of what would happen if time behaved in a certain manner. As an example, if time was slower with altitude, people would live on mountaintops if they could, just to gain a longer lifespan. They would build their houses on stilts to gain every little increment, and would go into the valleys only if no other choice. The series of thought experiments that make up this book do not have a plot. There is no in-depth characterization or mood pieces. Lightman (and what an appropriate name for the author, who is an MIT physicist!) conducts a series of thought experiments that are the epitome of the phrase 'sense of wonder' in its best meaning. Well recommended.

SOLARIS by Stanislaw Lem (Berkley, 1971) is a story that I saw as a film before reading the novel. As with 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, the film made more sense in combination with the book. The film, Russian-made, was much too lengthy with too many lingering mood shots. I began looking for the book afterwards, but although Lem's other novels are common enough in Calgary bookstores, I had to search a few years to find SOLARIS, and even then had to settle for a tattered paperback.

The plot is about an investigator sent to see if a research station on the planet Solaris should be kept open. The planet is mantled by a semi-sentient ocean, but numerous attempts to establish communication with the colloidal ocean have been unsuccessful. Solaris

responds to communication attempts by recreating duplicates of what it senses, crude at first, then frighteningly accurate. Trouble is, Solaris reads minds and in making duplicates cannot always distinguish between fact and imagination of the minds it reads. Scientists on the research station wake up to find 'Guests', such as a long-dead wife, who do not know why they are there. The Solaris organism has bogged the scientists down in phenomenology but brought them no closer to communicating with it. The ocean responds in an obviously sentient matter, yet no useful information is exchanged, if indeed Solaris even is aware of the humans. The Guests are driving the scientists to insanity. The conclusion is unresolved as it might be in real life, so ANALOG fans who want a clear-cut ending should skip this book. But I found much like real life on Earth; we never quite have a final answer.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
PRESENTS
RUSSIAN - GEORGIAN
FESTIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY CINEMA
SOLARIS
Feb. 11, 1994 # 012
-regular -discount
LOCATION: Science Theatre 148
TIME: 8:00 p.m.
PROCEEDS GO FOR ORPHANAGES IN FORMER S.U.

Trekkies are not the first people to fixate on a given thing and make it the centre of their life. Obsessions are part of human history, and fandom is only a small lunatic fringe. Obscure and powerless obsessions do no real harm. Obsessions of the powerful may damage or destroy nations, witness Adolf Hitler and the Jews, or central government banks and money supply. PROJECT GRIZZLY (National Film Board of Canada, 1996) is a movie about one minor obsession, laughable to us and the director who made this documentary, but serious enough to Troy Hurtubise of North Bay, Ontario. Years back, Troy was backpacking in the Alberta Rockies when he had a close encounter with a grizzly bear, which miraculously did not attack him though they were only a few metres apart. Troy spent the last decade since trying to perfect a grizzly-proof armoured suit so he can return to study grizzlies at really, really close quarters. The film traces the progress of his suits, up to Ursus Mark VI, made of multiple layers of high-impact plastic, titanium, and insulation. The major part of the movie, and the funniest, shows Troy as the suit is tested and refined. None of this wimpy lab research stuff, even if he could afford it (Troy owns a scrap-metal yard which later went into bankruptcy) but real-life testing. Logs are swung down onto him in his suit from a height to simulate the impact of a grizzly paw. A truck drives into him at 50 km/hr; he is thrown off the Niagara escarpment, and 9 mm rounds are shot into the suit at point-blank range. That latter bit sounds strange, as Troy himself admits not many bears carry rifles, but he is determined to test the suit beyond any reasonable doubt. Troy had a biker gang beat him with baseball bats, on the grounds that a grizzly probably wouldn't just take one swipe at him; the suit passes the test and the bikers are left visibly winded and with broken bats.

And so to the Alberta Rockies, with a long trail ride on horseback up to the high country where grizzlies live. The suit, a giant exoskeleton cum spacesuit, is airlifted by helicopter, being too big to move readily

by horse. Camp is set up near the treeline. While the scouts are out searching for a test grizzly, Troy gives the suit a field test. No grizzly shows up, which is just as well, because the suit is discovered to be too clumsy. Troy can barely take two steps without falling and then lying helpless on the ground, waiting for the team members to come up and lift him to his feet. The suit is abandoned in the Rockies, and Troy returned to Ontario to build a new suit "with at least 85% flexibility".

So much for the plot of this documentary. What is as interesting is trying to discern Troy's motivations and psychological makeup. He mentions his wife only in passing and we never see her in the film. But he is a mama's boy; she shows up frequently. He calls grizzly bears "The Old Man". He calls his father "The Old Man" and admits he wants to live up to his expectations. And often enough in the film, he makes Freudian slips, mixing up the two when talking to the interviewer about The Old Man. Troy yearns to be a mountain man in the Alberta wilds, but he has a wife and kids and a small business to think of in Ontario. His obsession with grizzlies is a way out, a way of hope that there can be more important things in his life than the price of scrap metal and payroll taxes.

FANDOM RIDES WEST

Lee Hoffman was a well-known SF fan from the 1950s. She also wrote western novels, so I decided to mosey over to a bookstore and get a copy of one of her books. I hadn't previously noticed that few bookstores, new or used, carried westerns, rather surprising for Cowtown. But finally I found one, THE LEGEND OF BLACKJACK SAM (Ace, 1966). This is a mildly humorous story about a drifter named Bo Johnson (or Jackson: "Maw wasn't none too clear on that.") who is mistaken for the famous gunfighter Blackjack Sam. The townsfolk won't let him go until he clears out the bad guys. As Bo has no gun-fighting skills, it is dumb luck that gets him out of one scrape and into the next.

If you'd like an introduction to modern Canadian culture, then a good start would be MONDO CANUCK (Prentice Hall, 1996). This book goes from eh? to zed in about 235 pages. The emphasis is almost entirely on television and radio, since those are the two dominant factors in Canadian culture.

Canadian performing arts range from the Cancon (Canadian content compulsory) to the infiltrators (William Shatner and Jim Carrey). Some of the material in this book is every bit as unknown to me as it might be to a Brit or American, since I haven't watched television since I went off to university in 1973. But much is quite familiar: Don Messer's Jubilee (Nova Scotia's answer to Lawrence Welk), Hinterland Who's Who (public service announcements by the Canadian Wildlife Service that chronicle a day in the life of a moose), and Chez Hélène (a kid's programme to teach French).

Ah yes, Chez Hélène. Madame Hélène Baillargeon with her friends Susie The Mouse (a puppet) and Madeline Kronby (a beautiful teenager who was the object of a million schoolboy fantasies). The language switched back and forth between English and French, and nothing was said once; if you were too busy gazing at Madeline the sentence or word would be repeated again for you to catch next time around. I don't remember learning much French from the show but I was a faithful viewer.

William Shatner and Jim Carrey are two exports from our country that give us no end of embarrassment, and would probably constitute just cause for the Americans to restart the War of 1812. Shatner's spit-the-words-out-one-by-one style of speaking is, we learn from this book, the result of a traumatic incident in his early career when he was the understudy for a Shakespearean actor. The actor booked off ill one night, leaving Shatner to go on in his place. Trouble was, our Bill hadn't yet learned the part, and had to force out the words one by one as they came up from memory.

Front Page Challenge was a panel show which fossilized terminally in 1995 after 38 years on the air, mostly with the same cast. It was a Twenty Questions show; a quiet, dignified contest to stump the four panelists as they tried to guess the name of the mystery guest and a recent event associated with that person. After time was called or the guest guessed, the panel would interview him/her. It was the type of show your parents watched on the TV set upstairs while you were watching Laugh In downstairs in the rumpus room. Countless guests came and went, but all the FPC staff agreed that the worst-behaved was Randolph Churchill. He went on in 1958, arriving at the studio fully drunk and late. After groping every female fanny in range, he then refused to go on unless more booze was brought for him. He behaved so badly during the show that the panel moderator had a bleeding ulcer.

Much of this book is given over to singers and bands of the initial Cancon period. The Guess Who, Anne Murray, all the usual suspects, and continuing down to Brian Adams. Leslie Nielsen, of Forbidden Planet fame and later of slapstick movie infamy, is noted also for his brother Erik, a humourless man who rose in politics to Deputy Prime Minister.

Many Canadians have gone south of the border because the market here is too small to support much of an entertainment industry. It is a time-honoured tradition; the Hardy Boys books were written by a Canuck, Leslie McFarlane, under the pseudonym Franklin W. Dixon, and when Sylvester Stallone grunts in those Rambo movies, he is grunting from a Canadian novelist's book. Lorne Greene was the Voice of Doom on the CBC evening news before he saddled up and rode down to the Bonanza. Who can forget Amer-ca's Sweetheart, Mary Pickford, late of Toronto?

Icons seen in this book but which go without saying: Hockey Night In Canada, Pierre Berton, the Dionne quintuplets, Pierre Trudeau, and the R.C.M.P..

AN ELECTRONIC ROAD MOVIE

The 1995 American documentary SYNTHETIC PLEASURES is a look at how technology is jerking us into a WIRED-type world. No new revelations, no new angles in philosophy by the talking heads interviewed, and no new ground in subject matter. The film is about 75% computer simulations, so one can ignore the babble of people going on about virtual reality, plastic surgery as performance art, drugs, smart drinks, nanotechnology, and all the other stuff you've read about for the last decade. But the film made some good points that bear repeating.

The basic theme of this documentary is how all the new things rushing on us are an outgrowth of the human urge to control their environment. Unhappy with the one you are in now? Move into cyberspace! Of course, as the movie mentions, you may be in trouble if the power is knocked out. SYNTHETIC PLEASURES starts off by looking at the two world leaders in virtual reality today, who are Japan and Las Vegas. Land too expensive for affordable golf? Then play in a multi-tier course. If you prefer, you can also ski on an indoor slope or go surfing at an indoor ocean with good curls and shark-free heated seawater. And why bother with the chance of being killed by Muslim terrorists in Egypt. See the pyramids in Las Vegas, not to mention a volcano that explodes on schedule. Bugsy would have been amazed.

Virtual reality gets a look-in, although this movie is somewhat dated, and VR has progressed considerably. It is not at all farfetched when the suggestion is made that most people's first exposure to VR was the Gulf War, where they showed film of planes zooming around and cruise missiles homing in on targets, but no messy bodies. Much like a video game, if you can forget the real persons who died when the screen went blank.

Not too much babbling about cyberspace, although I was surprised that the director let slip one talking head's

comment that cyberspace was a new thing, where people did not meet in a physical place but out somewhere in a communication system. This is something we do when we use a telephone. The Papernet, the exchange of zines, preceded the Internet by 150 years in creating virtual communities arranged by interest, not geography. Nor was the Papernet the first; the introduction of cheap postage and a postal system that could be used by all instead of just the wealthy and the government created a slow-motion network.

SYNTHETIC PLEASURES will date rapidly, as do all documentaries of that type, but it is a pleasant (pardon the pun) interlude with excellent animation sequences.

CALGARY ZINE FAIR #1

1997-5-4

As far as I know the event at the Banff Trail Community Hall on May 4 was the first zine fair (plus punk bands) in Calgary. It was originally advertised for April 12 at the Multicultural Centre but when I went down there the place was locked and deserted. A postcard dated as April 29 eventually reached me advising the new venue and start time of 14h30. I arrived on the dot to find the building locked up and people standing about waiting for something to happen. Eventually angry phone calls were made and someone hustled out to get a key. I got tired of standing idly about the front steps and handed out a few freebie zines to the thrashers, punks, and occasional zinester. As the band arrived and unloaded their instruments on the front lawn, I did some zine trading. I suggested to the band that they set up on the patio deck behind the hall, but someone finally came round with a key and opened the building. If this were an SF con, Garth Spencer would have had ten pages on why organization and doublechecking the booking is a good idea. But I trust future zine fairs will go better from experience. I'd like to see them catch on here.