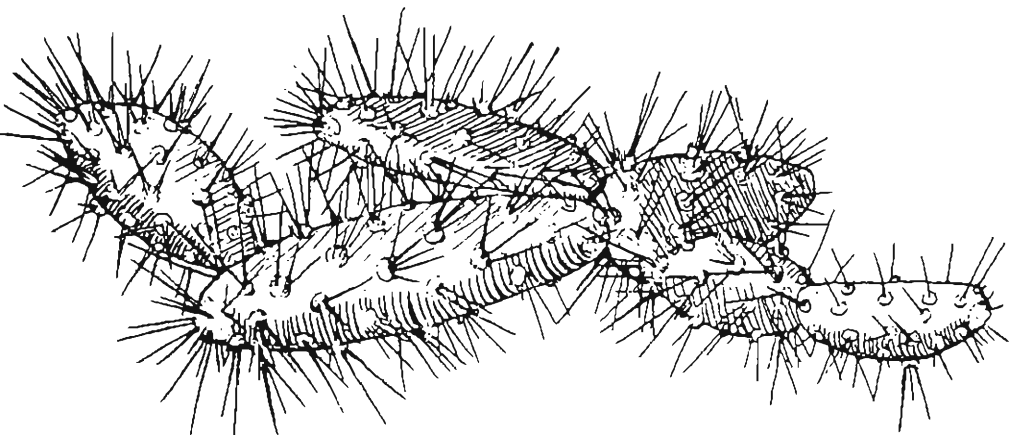


OPUNTIA

35.5



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ART CREDIT: The cover depicts Opuntia curassavica by an unknown artist from the book THE CACTACEAE by N.L. Britton and J.N. Rose.

WORLD WIDE PARTY #5 will be held on June 21st, at 21h00 your local time. Raise a glass on the hour and day (it doesn't have to be alcoholic; I prefer Coca Cola myself) and salute your fannish friends around the world. The idea is to get a wave circling the planet of fannish celebrations. Have a party, do a one-shot zine (I'd like a copy), or celebrate in some other manner. Don't forget to write me an account of how you celebrated.

The founder of the World Wide Party is Benoit Girard, of Cap Rouge, Québec, with a strong assist from Franz Miklis of Nussdorf, Austria. The WWP was originally for SF fans, but there is no reason why mail artists and zine publishers can't join in on the fun.

Remember always that you are part of something bigger in the Papernet. Celebrate the friendships and events you know from your connections with the wider world.

Off to the monthly meeting tonight of the Calgary Regional Group of the British North America Philatelic Society. BNAPS is an international society of stamp collectors interested in Canada and pre-Confederation colonies and Dominions. They have small regional groups such as ours, although few meet more than a few times a year; the Calgary group is the oldest of continual existence and the only one to meet monthly.

The programme tonight was given by Ed Harris on the history of the mails on the Canadian prairies and Arctic areas around Hudson Bay. Starting with the fur trade of the late 1600s and moving on to Lord Selkirk's Red River Settlement where Winnipeg now is, he finished up with an account of the first post offices established on the prairies in the 1880s. Ed mentioned that the American privateer Jone Paul Jones once raided Selkirk's estate on a Scottish island. We had to congratulate Ed for managing to work Jones into a history of the Canadian prairies and making it seem a logical part of it.

But before the programme started, the buzz of conversation in the room was about the impending postal strike. The Canadian Union Of Postal Workers has been without a contract for months, and negotiations are not going well. Today they gave notice that they might walk off the job at midnight tonight. There was a humorous suggestion that the Calgary BNAPSers issue strike-post local stamps to sell to collectors. The stamps would be validated by driving a batch of letters franked with them from some member's house in south Calgary to someone else's house in north Calgary. This would make them legitimate local post stamps, as opposed to cinderella stamps never genuinely used. But no one volunteered to do the job; we all have enough on our list of things to do.

It's been a few years since the posties last went out on strike. The timing of this one will cripple Canada Post just as the Christmas rush starts.

The posties keep extending the deadlines by a day at a time, but still no settlement. Mail volume has dropped 50% in one day after the first strike threat was made. This had the advantage for CUPW of hurting Canada Post management while the posties still got paid. Normally Canada Post handles 50 million items a day, increasing to 100 million a day in the Christmas rush. I've had no Canadian mail when I go down to the main post office to pick up my mail, but the American mail is still coming through.

I had been holding my outgoing letters pending strike action, but as it seems another day or two before the posties walk out, I took a chance and dropped my mail in a letterbox on my way to work in the morning. Officially the letterbox is supposed to be cleared at 09h00, but I know from past observation that the truck doesn't come by until 11h30. All I need is one day for the letters to clear the Calgary Mail Processing Plant and be exchanged into the American system.

Alas, I didn't get it. During the small hours of the morning, negotiators got into a fistfight, and one of the Canada Post management is now facing assault charges. The posties walked off the job at 15h00.

My incoming mail is sorted into the box number by 11h00, but I went home straight from work rather than cross a picket line to get the final mail. After supper, I drove downtown and got my mail; the posties only picket the retail offices during regular hours. The CMPP runs 24 hours a day normally, so that is where most of the action will be, but it is up in the far northeast corner of Calgary in the airport industrial district.

The last mail had American zines from Geri Sullivan and Paul Olson, plus junk mail from Canadian bulk mailers. That'll be it for awhile.

The strike continues. Drove downtown to drop off OPUNTIA #35 to the printers; who knows when it will finally wend its way through the mails. Drove past the post office on a chance, but the pickets were strolling about. Drove to the telephone company and paid my monthly bill in person. Normally I pay it by mail because it's so much trouble finding a parking space downtown. Fortunately my utility and heating bills are paid by electronic fund transfer, so I don't need to worry about them. If the strike continues, I'll have to go to my bank to find out how much I owe on my credit card.

After paying the phone bill, I walked across the street to the Salvation Army mission. I donate to their fund each year, again normally by mail. I waited in their thrift shop while a little old lady debated buying a 99¢ scarf. She asked the shopgirl for a discount, who told her 79¢ was as low as she could go. I would guess the scarf would be \$5-\$10 in a department store, although I haven't worn one for decades. (Scarves are not permitted at work, as they might get caught in machinery or while climbing a tree.) The lady said she would have to think about it, and stepped aside so I could hand my cheque to the shopgirl.

While mail-order businesses will suffer, Greyhound and other couriers are hiring staff to handle the diverted parcels. The proverb that it is an ill wind that blows nobody good was never better demonstrated than today when the Calgary Police Service announced that they are suspending camera-radar operations for two weeks and cancelling last week's speeding tickets because there is no way to deliver them to the vehicle owners. If the strike lasts for more than two weeks, they will re-start the camera-radars and use private couriers to deliver the tickets. At the moment, couriers are scarce, not just because of the strike but because of the Christmas rush.

Postal negotiations have been slow over the past week and back-to-work legislation is eventually expected. The Minister Responsible for Canada Post, Alfonso Gagliano huffed and puffed, and the posties puffed and huffed back at him. The Christmas mail is pretty much a write-off for those who had packages to send to Aunt Susan in Kazakhstan. At work, we have been advised that couriers now have a one-day backlog for deliveries that are normally made within two hours.

Posties usually volunteer each December to reply to letters sent to Santa Claus at the North Pole, postal code HO HO HO. Some strikers in small towns will do this still, but Calgary posties indicate it is out of the question; the city is too big and the strikers are needed on the lines.

I went downtown to pick up OPUNTIA #35 at the printers and saw the pickets still patrolling where my box number is. After the printers, I went to the bank to get my credit card balances and pay them off. Traffic in the city is getting visibly worse by the day. On the Crowchild Trail freeway, I got stuck behind yet another car with Saskatchewan licence plates. Bring back the death penalty for people who stop in a merging lane, say I.

WAVING THE BIG STICK

1997-12-1

The Minister of Labour brought down back-to-work legislation to the House of Commons today. The Liberal government invoked closure, which bypasses the normal three readings of a bill and lengthy debate. The law is expected to receive Royal Assent by Thursday and force the posties back on Friday. CUPW has called for civil disobedience, but any worker who does not return will be assessed \$1000 per day.

The posties have lost enough pay, and just before their Christmas bills become due, that most are expected to comply. The Reform party, which is Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, will support the legislation. In fact, they had been calling for it from day one of the strike, not too surprising for a right-wing party. The NDP (labour-socialist) will naturally oppose the bill. So will the Bloc Québécois, not because they support unions but just to annoy the federalists.

THE PAST IS PROLOGUE

Previous postal strikes are as follows.

- 1919 - one month (part of the Winnipeg General Strike)
- 1924 - two weeks
- 1965 - 8 days (15 days in Montréal)
- 1968 - 22 days
- 1970 - 15 weeks
- 1974 - 15 days
- 1975 - rotating strikes February 18 to March 28,
42 days nationally beginning October 2
- 1978 - 3 days (inside workers) September
3 days (letter carriers) October
- 1980 - rotating strikes September and October
- 1981 - 42 days (after this strike, the post office was converted from a government department into a Crown Corporation, equivalent to a British quango)
- 1987 - 18 days (letter carriers) June
16 days (inside workers) September
- 1988 - August and September (technicians and supervisors)
The mail is slowed but not stopped.
- 1991 - rotating strikes in August, 1 day nationally in October. At about this time, all the postal unions had been forced to merge into one union.

It's been a mild winter, quite a contrast to last year when a howling blizzard arrived early and never went away. So far we have had only a few skiffs of dry snow that quickly disappeared in the afternoon sun. Temperatures have been unseasonably mild, no lower than -15°C at night and daytime highs around freezing.

Tonight is the first night that a once-in-a-century alignment of the planets and the moon. They are seen just after sunset in the southwestern sky, although many are not visible to the naked eye. The crescent moon and Venus were easy enough to spot, and I found Jupiter with no trouble once the star chart showed me where to look. I'm pretty certain I saw Mars, but it was low on the horizon so I wasn't 100% certain with all the twinkling. The others I could not see. It seems like once a year lately there has been some kind of astronomical event to rouse the sense of wonder in me, the kind I once had when I first began to read SF as a young lad in rural central Alberta.

HI HO, HI HO, IT'S BACK TO WORK THEY GO 1997-12-5

The posties were back at work yesterday noon, but I didn't bother to check my box number, as there was no way any letters would come through that quick. Today I got one Ukrainian philatelic magazine and two pieces of junk mail, one of them from Canada Post.

Last night at sunset I tried for another look at the planetary alignment but alas, an ice fog came up just in time to screen the view and did not disappear until the show was over.

The back-to-work legislation ordered Canada Post and the union to go to binding arbitration, rather than imposing a settlement on them. The posties announced that they will not check mail for postage due.

I mailed OPUNTIA #35 today, entrusting it to the combined crush of the strike backlog and the Christmas rush. I've found from past experience that the posties seldom if ever check mail that is only slightly overweight. CUPW says the citizenry can mail everything free until the end of December, their way of compensating for the disruption. Management, of course, has different ideas. I put stamps on.

CAN'T HARDLY SAW FOR ALL THE NOISE

1997-12-8

We started our winter pruning a few weeks ago. Today we were on the north side of Heritage Drive, a main drag that runs from the Bow River to Glenmore Reservoir. The traffic noise was considerable, especially as we were working past intersections where cars were starting up from the traffic lights. When we completed that site and moved on to a residential park I thought we'd have a bit of quiet.

No such luck though. The job at hand was to clear back a shrub bed at the north end of the park. During the summer, one of my mower operators had complained that it was difficult to get the mowing machine through between the shrub bed and the fence. I put the park on the winter pruning list. As we started, there was a racket from two blue jays in a poplar looming above the shrub bed. They moved across the back alley to the trees on the other side, but their calls still came through loud and clear. I spotted a squirrel sitting in a poplar branch crotch and thought the blue jays might be after it. But they moved up and down the ranks of trees with no apparent regard for the squirrel. It was difficult to localize the blue jay calls but they could be spotted by the showers of hoar frost shaken off the branch every time they landed. Couldn't hardly think where to make the next pruning cut on the shrubs, the noise was so loud from the blue jays.

As I looked up at a shrub branch to decide the next cut, a chickadee zipped into the shrub and sat on a branch about a metre away. It chirped a few times, then zoomed past me into the house yard adjacent. It was then that I saw what the blue jays were going on about; there was a bird feeder just above my head within arm's reach. The chickadee blurred into the feeder, grabbed a seed, and whirred away back into the shrubs, zigzagging through the close-packed twigs like a Star Wars fighter inbound to the Death Star.

It was a beautiful sunny day with mild temperatures at the -10°C mark. One annoyance with the constant showers of hoar frost from last night's ice fog as we cut through a branch. Prior to making the cut, the branch is given a good whap to shake off the snow but it always seemed to drift down across us no matter where one stood, just as cigarette smoke always seems to drift to where the non-smoker is sitting. I'm used to my beard icing up but this was the first time my ponytail iced up as well.

WHAT THE WELL-DRESSED PRUNER WEARS

Tree pruning requires assorted safety equipment, winter pruning adds bulky clothing, and in cold weather (-15°C or lower) we often look like samurai. The best winter clothing for any purpose, not just pruning, is layers of light clothing, not single-pieces such as a snowmobile suit. One can then add or remove clothing during the day to keep warm without sweating. With a few heavy pieces of clothing, physical labour soon results in sweating, with no way to cool off. Sweating is the greatest danger of winter work because it reduces the insulative value of the clothing. Working in clammy cold clothes makes the day seem endless.

Starting from the ground up, we wear waterproof felt-lined boots with fibreglass safety toes. Fibreglass because a steel-toed boot radiates too much heat, and

one must have foot protection against dropped branches or tools. Felt liners these days are no longer actually made of felt but are a three-layered sandwich of wool with spacesuit material in the middle, the kind that reflects body heat. I used to work with a labourer who was Russian; he told me they used to line their boots with birch chips, which kept them quite warm.

Long underwear, of course. Denim jeans, which trap body heat better than other kinds of pants, and do not tear as easily when scraped against tree bark while climbing. Dress shirts, not wool or lumberjack shirts, because the latter are too itchy and the steel snap buttons radiate heat. A sweatshirt or vest, and a hoodless parka. No hood because we wear hard hats with face shields and ear muffs. Bald pruners usually wear a baseball cap under their hard hat, whereas longhairs like me undo our ponytails and let our hair down for insulation. On really cold days (-20°C), one might add a pair of overalls.

Leather gloves are okay down to about -10°C , below which one must wear down-filled mittens. This is important because pruning involves claspings saws or branches, and heat is radiated at the point of claspings. You'll notice I keep mentioning heat radiation, which is the greatest problem when one is in contact with the ground or solid object such as a branch or pruning tool.

Half of body heat is radiated out of the head. The male pruners are mostly bearded (some wives won't have them, as a result of which the henpecked hubby suffers at work) and often longhaired. Ponytails have always been popular because one can tie the hair back in summer and let it down in winter. Hoods restrict vision too much, even if they were workable with hard hats. The face shields snap onto the hard hats and protect against kickback of a branch. They come in two styles, a clear plastic that block the winds but tends to fog up below -20°C , and a black plastic mesh that doesn't fog up but lets the wind in through the screen.

One must always remember to lift the faceshield before coughing or sneezing. Forget, and you will have a disgusting cleanup job that must be done before the mucus aerosol freezes and blocks your vision.

There are ear muffs that attach to hard hats, but these add weight to the hat, and most of us use ear plugs instead for chainsaw work. Chainsaws require safety pants, a type of chaps like cowboys used to wear, except that the safety pants are made of plastic fibre mats, not leather. If the chainsaw kicks back and hits the pants, the fibres snarl themselves in the chainsaw and jam the blade.

If we are working along roads, we must wear fluorescent glow vests. These are made of dayglo plastic, with a fine mesh rather than solid fabric. The mesh ventilates in summer, and stays more flexible in the winter cold. The vests are bright orange with a big yellow X across the back, to give drivers something to aim for. One rule of roadwork is to hold a shovel or pole saw with the sharp edge sticking out to the road. Drivers will instinctively swerve away, not wanting to scrape the paint on their car. Nevermind the worker.

Polarized sunglasses are essential on sunny days if there is snow on the ground. The reflection of light off snow quickly gives one a headache, especially if combined with the fumes of roadside traffic. Even with sunglasses it is difficult to prune because the winter sun is always low on the horizon, and one always seems to be looking straight at the sun in any direction except due north. This makes branches flat and two-dimensional black lines. A tree, of course, must be shaped in three dimensions. The best light is an overcast day with no snow on the ground (or at least not fresh white snow), as this diffuses light and puts three-dimensional shading on the branches.

During the postal strike, I had the nagging feeling that I was overlooking some bill payment, but could never remember what it might be. Today I got my credit card statement from the Hudson's Bay Company, and smacked myself figuratively in the forehead. Due date was the day after tomorrow, so fortunately I won't be in arrears. It was only for the grand amount of \$8.82 so the interest penalty wouldn't have been that much anyway.

The mail call included a Canada Post stamp catalogue and a postcard from them. The other mail is a trickle, but Canada Post looks after its own, and gets its stuff past the resentful posties with no problems, apparently. The postcard, English one side and French the other, showed a red street letterbox and announced "We're back at our post." Then follows what I thought a rather diplomatic text, which I won't quote in full but which begins: "Dear customer, as you know, Canada Post has not been able to deliver your mail recently."

I'M DREAMING OF A BROWN CHRISTMAS

1997-12-15

Certainly a change from last winter. No snow for the last fortnight, and even the ice fogs have disappeared. Across southeastern Alberta the prairies are on fire and a number of farmsteads and villages have been taken out by grassland fires. None in Calgary yet, which usually has its grass fires in spring. As I was coming out of my maintenance depot building, I saw a jackrabbit loping across the back lawn, its pure white fur sticking out like an ambulatory neon sign against the kahki grass. It certainly must make easier hunting for the coyotes. Even our annual winter plague of mice invading the garage has not materialized yet. The deer herd that lives in the next park over the escarpment from my depot is browsing every freeway boulevard in sight.

THUNDERFLURRIES

1997-12-18

As I left for work this morning, there was a slight skiff of snow on the ground. By the time I pulled into the depot fifteen minutes later at 06H00, it had started to snow. So far this was all very routine. But a half-hour later, while it was still snowing, it also began to hail. I have never seen hail in winter, much less in the middle of a snowfall. Hail usually occurs in July and August after we get a few hot days of 25°C, which sets up standing convection cells that develop into thunderstorms and hail. The meteorologists at Environment Canada called it a freak of nature, and coined the term 'thunderflurries'.

Calgarians are obsessed with weather because of the frequent and fast changes, within minutes or hours. The basic problem is that this area is where polar fronts coming from the Arctic collide with maritime fronts coming over the Rocky Mountains from the Pacific Ocean. Anything can happen and does.

The thunderflurries didn't dump that much snow, only about 5 cm in an hour, then gave way to clear blue skies for the rest of the day. The hail, however, occurred just as the morning rush hour began. Calgary drivers, like Canadians everywhere, deal with winter by denial, and continued to drive as if they could stop in one car length from 80 km/hr. This produced the usual multicar pileups ("But Constable, the road was slippery!") and not a few light-in-the-rear vans and pickups hit the ditches.

As I looked out my office window at the hail, I saw our local jackrabbit bounding across the front yard, this time much better camouflaged. It stopped below the window, eyed me for a moment, then bounded off on its business. I could barely see across the street, just enough to see the vague shadows of cars looping the loop through the intersection.

THIS JUST IN ...

My mail includes a variety of philatelic junk mail, such as a show announcement from the Denver, Colorado, stamp clubs that they will be hosting their annual ROMPEX show on the weekend of May 15 to 17, 1998. I won't be there but if you're in the neighbourhood you might want to see one of the meetings on Sunday morning. The Auraria Postal History, Railroad Paraphernalia, Chowder, and Marching Society will be hosting its annual breakfast. I am not making this up; the APHRPCMS really does exist.

A BIRD IN HAND

1998-1-10

I came out of my bedroom in the basement this morning. I ducked as a starling fluttered across the room. Almost two years ago to the week I had the same problem with a sparrow that had somehow gotten into the house. I had suspected that it might have come down the chimney flue and made it past the gas burner without getting fried. Now I knew this was the case, for I often see starlings clustered around the chimney top, warming themselves in the cold from the exhaust heat.

I chased the starling ineffectively for a few minutes, but it ducked into a ceiling vent and into a crawlspace. This looked like a long job, so I got dressed, taped up a piece of paper to cover the vent, and eventually got the bird out by shining a flashlight into the vent. The next few minutes were spent trying to herd it to the staircase. I opened the back door at the top and went back down to chase the bird the final distance. It had in the meantime disappeared, but I finally found it in the fossil laboratory, banging around in the dark. With a few false starts, I finally got it out and up the stairs. It zoomed up and out into the daylight. If this sort of thing becomes a regular nuisance, I suppose I shall have to spend money getting the chimney re-done.

I went back upstairs and settled down to reading fanzines. I was on BUMPER SNUFKIN when I heard a faint bang from the basement that sounded exactly like a starling hitting a window. I convinced myself that it was just some piece of metal expanding on the furnace or perhaps a water pipe. I finally put down the fanzine and went downstairs to check. Yes, there was a starling there again. I couldn't tell if it was the same one, but the drill to remove it went much faster this time. Five minutes later I was back upstairs continuing on with BUMPER SNUFKIN. Maureen Kincaid Speller, the editor of that zine, will henceforth be always associated in my mind with starlings. One more such incident with birds and I shall definitely buy a piece of wire netting to put over the furnace chimney vent.

MY CHEQUE IS IN THE MAIL (NUDGE, NUDGE, WINK, WINK)

Some strange results of the postal strike are still trickling in. I noticed the Calgary Public Library got their copy of CANADIAN PHILATELIST on December 12. I was about to write the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada by the beginning of January when my copy had not yet arrived, but it finally showed up January 5. The Gunns sent a Christmas card from Australia postmarked December 12 and an arrival bar code of December 18. (All mail incoming to a Canadian mail processing plant is sprayed with an orange bar code on the back of the envelope along the bottom edge with the date.) I finally got it on January 7.

The grand prize winner was FILE 770, a newszine from Sierra Madre, California. It was handstamped October 8 at Pasadena, but had none of the usual bar codes of either the USPS or Canada Post. I got it January 6, but that is not what astonished me about it. It was delivered to my street address, not the box number on the label.

HOW DO YOU PRONOUNCE 'VOGT'?

1998-1-26

I received today an announcement from the small-press magazine PRAIRIE FIRE that they are holding an SF story contest. Winners will be announced at KeyCon 1998 and their stories published in PRAIRIE FIRE's Summer 1998 issue. Authors are paid for publication, and ConAdian is putting up prizes of \$350 (1st), \$250 (2nd), and \$150 (3rd). Authors must be Canadian citizens or landed immigrant. No entry fee is charged but there is a limit of one entry, maximum 3000 words.

The story must not have your name on it; enclose a cover sheet with your name, address, telephone number, and the title of your entry. SASE required for return of entry and contest results notification. No simultaneous or previously published/broadcast entries.

PRAIRIE FIRE published a special issue for ConAdian, as attendees of the 1994 WorldCon in Winnipeg may recall. A subtitle to this contest on the flyer announcing it is: "In honour of A.E. van Vogt, Manitoba's first SF author" and the judge is Robert Sawyer.

Deadline is February 28th, which doesn't leave much time after you get this issue; entries must be postmarked by that date. Send to: Prairie Fire, 423 - 100 Arthur St., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 1H3.

PRAIRIE FIRE is a general fiction magazine sold at the newsagents, and carries the occasional SF story. It is trade paperback size with colour cover, and runs about 250 pages.



Although printed zines will be with us for a while longer, and will never die out completely, just as letterpress books are still made, I cannot doubt that soon we will mostly be on the Internet. My thoughts on this were triggered by my recent purchase of a CD player, forced by the fact that cassettes are no longer carried by most stores here for the music I am interested in. I am still deferring buying a home computer because the car is more essential but will eventually get one five or ten years down the road. I am not a neo-Luddite in this regard, as I have state-of-the-art computers at work. I lurk on the Web and Usenet via the University of Calgary Library catalogue terminals. If you get a hit on your SF site on Sunday mornings from the U of C Library, it was probably me, as I am the only one there at 10h00 Mountain Time. Mind you, I am only on for about 15 minutes, as the information content of the Usenet is very low, and Web sites are generally updated less frequently than the average paper zine is published.

I see no immediate rush to get home access, partly because of the old ~~why-buy-the-cow-when-you-get-the-milk-for-free~~ laziness, and partly because the price of laptops is starting to fall and in a couple of years will be much cheaper. (I won't have a desktop simply because they take up too much space.) When I bought my first pocket calculator in 1971, I paid \$100 in 1971 currency for four functions plus a % key. Two years later, I bought a Hewlett-Packard HP-35 scientific pocket calculator for \$295 when I started at the University of Alberta. Now they are sold for \$10 and often used as giveaway premiums. Cellphones were \$100 a month plus usage fees when they came to Calgary a few years ago; now the phone itself is free and the basic service is less than \$30 a month. I expect that laptops will go the same route within a decade.

I got to thinking what an Internet version of OPUNTIA would be like. "Zine trade" is a meaningless term on the Internet, so to get OPUNTIA, readers would have to respond by e-mail. Such responses would have to have a reasonable amount of content. Frivolous or trivial e-mail in the style of Usenet would not be acceptable. I certainly would not have OPUNTIA as an open Web site for anyone to look at. It would be a password controlled Web site, a listserver, or a BBS, where continued access after the initial trial period would depend on response. Loccers would be pleased though, that I could run their letters more fully and more often with the extra room.

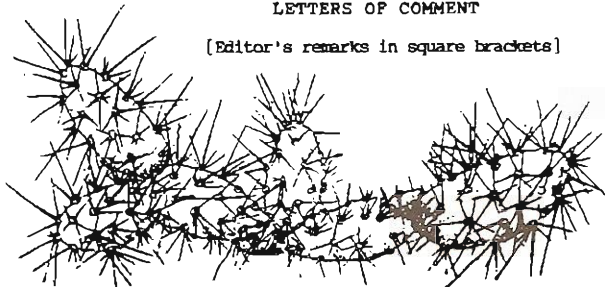
The Internet OPUNTIA would actually have less than the paper version, which would still exist as the definitive archival version. Paper is always compatible, whereas the hot software of today is unreadable ten years from now. The written word would continue to take precedence on both the electronic and paper OPUNTIA's. Art is not efficient as storing meaning; words take up less space and pack more meaning into the same number of bytes. No dancing cartoon characters.

I would not link to other Web sites. I've never understood why anyone would put so much work into a site and then immediately offer the visitor the egress. If there is something on another Web site I admire, I would review it or summarize it on my site, not offer readers a jumping-off point. The Web OPUNTIA would be a cul-de-sac on the Information Superhighway. You drive into it and the only way out is to go to the end to turn around.

The paper OPUNTIA would have articles and essays with amendments as a result of locs and updates to the electronic version, which would then be deleted. We know that paper can last for centuries. Electronic media are susceptible to fading and the problem of finding a machine that can read it. For that reason, paper zines will never die.

LETTERS OF COMMENT

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Steve Green 1998-1-5
33 Scott Road
Olton, Solihull B92 7LO, England

Pray tell, what Birmingham bid? [for a WorldCon] True, it's one of the few British cities, perhaps the only one, with the necessary combination of conference space and hotel rooms, but I'm unaware of any active local support whatsoever. On a purely selfish level, having a WorldCon seven miles up the road offers considerable economic advantages, but I hope the putative 2005 U.K. bid isn't under any illusion that a Birmingham site brings with it any kind of Ground Zero infrastructure.

FROM: Carolyn Clowes 1997-11-25
5911 West Pay Drive NW
Depauw, Indiana 47115

I like the X-Y graph method of distinguishing hard SF from fantasy. It could also be applied to defining sci-fi, which I think is really fantasy with techno trappings such as transporters, shape-shifters, and all those convenient impossibilities of physics as we

know it. Of course, faster-than-light travel is too, but how else would SF writers get around?

FROM: Joseph Major 1997-12-16
1409 Christy Avenue
Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040

Dan Fox, who used to contribute articles on unusual radio stations to POSFAX, told us a story about a TV station holding a live call-in programme to see what shows people liked an wanted. A substantial number of the callers wanted a name that meant nothing to Dan: "I'd like Elvira and Dr. Scott.", "Can I have TREK and Dr. Scott?", "I would like to see THE ROCKFORD FILES and Dr. Scott." But an equally representative faction loathed Dr. Scott. Dan resolved to stay up and see this Dr. Scott. But when it came time for the good Doctor, the station manager appeared instead. He explained that they would not show Dr. Scott. If necessary, they would replace his show with reruns of RAWHIDE, but they would not show him. This intrigued Dan. After searching, he found a station in Indianapolis that ran Dr. Scott. So finally he got to see this popular figure. Ghod!

According to Dan (and other people who have seen him) Dr. Scott is an honest, up-front, non-deceptive evangelist. He wants money. For example, reading a letter from a viewer: "Here's a letter from [wherever]. Didn't send any money." During a dry spell in contributions, he gets up and announces that he will not be speaking until contributions start flowing. As he leaves the set, the band breaks into a gospel number. Dr. Scott rushes back on. "They don't give, they don't deserve any music!" Band stops.

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Teddy Harvia, Sheryl Birkhead, Harry Andruschak, Buck Coulson, Chester Cuthbert, the Gunns, Henry Welch, Joseph Nicholas, Janet Kagan, Janine Stinson

For I dipt into the future,
 far as Two Thousand and Three,
 Saw the vision of WorldCon,
 and all the wonder that would be.

Saw Toronto fill with fandom,
 argosies of magic tales,
 Slans of the Great Lone Land,
 dropping down with fannish hails.

Heard the panel rooms fill with shouting,
 and there rained many fanzines,
 From the nations' airy SMOFs,
 Grappling with media fans and those between.

Far along from the World Wide Party
 of the fans rushing warm,
 With the standards of their factions,
 TAFF and CUFF and DUFF plunging through the storm.

Till Cancun and Berlin throbbed no longer,
 and their flags were furled,
 In the Parliament of WSFS,
 the convention of the World.

There the common sense of fans
 shall celebrate Toronto in awe,
 And the kindly fandom shall rest,
 lapped in universal law.

So we triumphed in Toronto,
 sweeping opposition aside,
 Left us with WorldCon,
 and left us with victorious eye.



To support Toronto's bid to host the 2003 World
 Science Fiction Convention, send C\$20.03 or US\$15 to:
 Toronto in '03
 Box 3, Station A
 Toronto, Ontario
 M5W 1A2