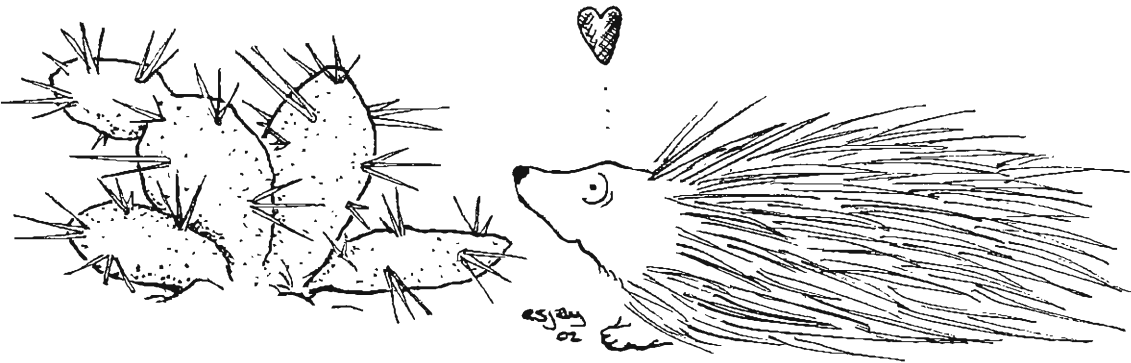


OPUNTIA

51.1A

"upon the fretful porpentine..." (HAMLET I.)



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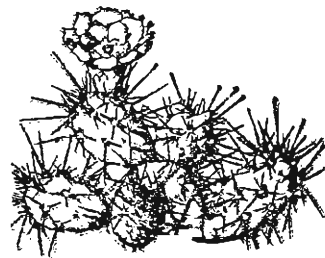
OPUNTIA is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage outside USA and I don't collect them.

Whole-numbered OPUNTIA's are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, and x.5 issues are perzines.

COVER ART CREDIT: Steve Jeffery, 44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon OX5 2XA, England

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Diane Bertrand, Roman Castenholz, Angela and Peter Netmail, Scott Crow, John Held Jr, Steve Jeffery, Christoph Meyer, Michael Waite, Chester Cuthbert, Obvious Front, John Losen, Jose Roberto Sechi, Terry Jeeves, Mark Sonnenfeld, Simon Dddd, Anna Banana, Joseph Nicholas, E.B. Frohvet, Teddy Harvia, Ruggero Maggi

**LETTERS
TO THE
EDITOR**
[Editor's
remarks
in square
brackets]



FROM: Lloyd Penney
1706 - 24 Eva Road
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

2002-02-21

Interesting to hear of a zine get-together in Medicine Hat. That's some reassurance that the printed zine is not yet dead, and that presentation of a physical zine gets to more people than does creation of a Web site. Getting together to talk about zines is the best way to network and strengthen ties. The Internet and associated features, like Webrings, groups, and Usenet might have at one time done the same thing, but are often reduced to feuds, personal attacks, and flaming. As useful as the Net can be, I'll take paper zines for the concentration of superior content.

[I think the Internet will be useful for ephemeral material and news, but Web sites will be lost in the cacophony of billions of Web sites. The Papernet is archival, but the Internet is not. Also,

as authorities and corporations improve their ability to monitor the Internet, people with controversial material or using copyrighted material will discover that a paper zine is much harder for Big Brother to detect and suppress, whereas Internet site detection is automated.]

2002-03-09

I understand pro authors getting upset over the hijacking of their characters for adventures they didn't write. Creative people like Gene Roddenberry knew that fandom provided him and Star Trek with publicity you couldn't buy. He used fandom to make his creation an amazing success, and the fans used his creation to enjoy other adventures and build a community of similar interests. I don't disagree with the way a court would interpret this use of someone else's intellectual property, but use or abuse may determine the creator's response. George Lucas took control of, and eventually shut down anything to do with Star Wars fandom, and the only place where an organized Star Wars fandom survived was Australia.

[It may be that the different responses were due to Roddenberry needing every bit of help he could get to stay in business, but Lucas was a success at first release. Once Star Trek was revived, Roddenberry was locked in and couldn't suddenly turn on his fans without being hypocritical, whereas Lucas knows Star Wars will be a success regardless of the fanatic population.]

Sad as it sounds, the mediacons I'm familiar with will do exactly the same thing [as the Australian one which charged \$25 per autograph from a bit-part actor]. The convention and actors charge for what they think they can get away with, and they get away with an awful lot. Many people who come to these conventions can spend more than a thousand dollars on room, food, preferential seating, special events, autographs, souvenirs, and anything else the convention committee thinks they can charge. And, all those charges are cheerfully paid. I still wonder.

[Media conventions are like drug trafficking. If the addicts are there, then the dealers will supply them. I blame the fans who pay \$25 for a photo, not the actors or conventions. If the actors can get the money, who can blame them?]

FROM: Tiziana Baracchi
Via Cavallotti, 83-B
30171 Venezia-Mestre, Italy

2002-03-20

For centuries the painter filled canvas with everyday more unnatural colours to reproduce reality. Trees and landscapes, noble people or poor children with their paintings are made with good or better ability. Some appeared to be able artisans; others to be artists.

Certainly the most lucky painters passed into the history of art, but sometimes they were not the best. In the 20th century the Futurist wave gave a turn to the history of art, above all in the mood to do art. Lucio Fontana cut the canvas, giving the possibility to go on the other side.

For us, artists at the end of the century but all of the new millennium, the most important thing is the Idea. We are not interested to put ourselves to test with skill between canvas and colours. We consider some great masters of the past to be insurmountable.

All things have been painted. We want to do something else. We love to communicate. Nowadays it is the objective of humanity. We are already on the other side. Yesterday is the past and it is already tomorrow. The past is culture, the present is feeling, the future is idea.

FROM: Carolyn Clowes 2002-02-19
547 Dover Road
Louisville, Kentucky 40206

Regarding my comments on fan fiction, I managed to upset at least one of your readers, who wrote to me. “ ... *most fans don't have their own ideas*” was the phrase that gave offense. I never

meant to imply that fans are bereft of thought or incapable of writing good stories. I wrote a Star Trek novel; if that isn't fan fiction what is? I meant that fans who write fan fiction are mostly content to play with characters created by someone else because they love them. Most do it for their own amusement, not for money or to rip off an author's work. I think that's okay. Not everyone must be attempting the Great SF Novel. Sometimes people write stuff just for fun.

FROM: Harry Warner Jr 2002-04-02
423 Summit Avenue
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

Mike Gunderloy probably deserves most of the blame for the way the mundane world appropriated the term fanzine. In his FACTSHEET FIVE, he consistently referred to anything he reviewed as a fanzine. I know of nobody who had done so earlier.

It seems foolish to worry about the next ten thousand years, when much thought should be given to the next ten years or next century. Try to plan for longer periods of time and your decisions are almost certain to be ruined by natural and manmade overthrows of how it's been done in recent centuries.

MAIL ART LISTINGS.

The Love: (Leticia Tonon, via Sechi, Av. Remolo Tonon 337, Santa Gertrudes SP - 13510-000, Brazil) Size A6 (10.5 cm x 14.8 cm), technique free, no jury, no return, documentation to all. Deadline May 31, 2002.

Make Your Own Euro: (Angela and Peter Netmail, Box 2644, 32383 Minden, Deutschland) About our new money, the European euro. Size is postcard, A6 only, strictly. Technique free, in colour. Exhibition during our Euro Art Festival, September 11 to 16 at Mail Art Mekka Minden's Culture Centre BUZ. Free colour catalogue to every participant in 2003. Deadline is August 31, 2002.

Pied Pipers Of Today: (Christa Behmenburg, Max Planck Str. 64, D 85375 Neufahrn, Deutschland) For a documentation and exhibition of cartoons, caricatures, photographs, paintings, collages, etc. of the Pied Piper I need contributions from artists all over the world. The exhibition will take place in the old town of Hamelin and afterwards in Berlin, in 2003. All techniques. Size: postcard. No return, no jury. Each contributor will get documentation. Deadline: end of 2002.

Alchemy Tarot: (Alain Valet, 50 rue Scheuer, 6700 Arlon, Belgium) Size and technic free. No deadline. All participation

will be illustrated in next issue of SOL E LUNA, sent free to all participants.

Insects: (Yves Monissen, 11 Avenue Bon Air, 1332 Genval, Belgium) Insects and garbage cans, no butterflies. No deadline, maximum size 16 x 23 cm.

Arthole: (Boog, Box 1313, Lawrence, Kansas 66044) @RtH*Le is a new correspondence assembling magazine. To participate, send 5 to 20 copies of your two-dimensional (more or less) graphic work, 5.5" x 8.5" (A5) in size. The size of your @RtH*Le will depend on the number of works you send, based on an arcane formula known only to the publisher. Please allow 2 cm (3/4") on short side; two-sided is good. Each copy of @RtH*Le will be unique. It will include mail art news and information, artistamps, original works from other artists around the world, personal correspondence (usually), and whatever else the publisher feels like including.

Brain Cell Fractal: (Ryosuke Cohen, 3-76-I-A-613, Yagumokitacho, Moriguchi-City, Osaka 570, Japan) Send 150 stickers or some other type of small mail art image. These are collated into a collage on an 11" x 17" poster, and a copy sent back to each contributor, along with a list of names and addresses of those participating.

World Storage (Daer Pozo Ramirez, Jose Marti 78, Buenaventura, Holguin, 82 600 Cuba) I'd like to ask you for examples of your play for World Storage and I also invite you to display your work in my country. Here you have a friend.

Hot August Night III: (Owen Plummer, #17 - 1455 West 8th Avenue, Vancouver, British Columbia V6H 1C9) A tribute to Neil Diamond. Send art, any media or technique. Deadline July 15, 2002. Documentation and exhibition at Lucky's Comics (Vancouver).

Comforters: (Lois Klassen, Box 74540, Vancouver, British Columbia V6K 4P4) Send me quilt squares (6" x 6") to be used on the top of comforters that I am making for displaced people (refugees). The comforters, also known as blankets or quilts, will be distributed by the Mennonite Central Committee, the Red Cross, and the Red Crescent societies. The squares can incorporate artwork but they must be washable and durable; poly-cotton is the best material. Send as many as you want because each comforter needs 130! I will return photos and periodical documentation about the project.

Erik Satie: (Jean Hugues, 46 Rue de Gesvres, 60000 Beauvais, France) Do you like his music? That French composer was born in Honfleur in 1866. He worked with the greatest; Picasso, Picabia, Braque, Cocteau, Rene Clair. He influenced artists as

prestigious as Debussy, Ravel, or Stravinsky. In his most famous creations, you can find 'Les Gymnopedies', 'Les Gnossiennes'. Please send me your mail art in A4 sheet size (21 cm x 30 cm), Any technique allowed.

Think Here: (Jose Roberto Sechi, Av. M29, N° 2183, Jd. Sao Joao, Rio Claro SP - 13505 - 410, Brazil) Mail art magazine. Drawing, design, painting, engraving, gluing, rubber stamp, writing, poetry, visual poetry, photograph, etc.. In black and white, please, maximum 13 cm x 8 cm (horizontal format). Theme free, no return, no jury, no deadline, documentation to every 18 participants.

Stampzine: (Picasso. Gaglione, 5033 North Mozart Street, Chicago, Illinois 60625) STAMPZINE is edited and published by Picasso Gaglione and friends. It is an assembling collection of rubber stamp art, featuring the handstamped works of international artists. To contribute, send 75 handstamped copies of 8.5 x 11 rubber stamp artwork. All contributors will receive a free copy.

The Tree Of Poetry: (dott.ssa Tiziana Baracchi, Via Cavallotti, 83-B, 30171 Venezia-Mestre, Italy) The Tree of Poetry is a very uncommon species of plant; it is an American maple which is in Venezia-Mestre in 83/B Cavallotti Street, Itinerari '80 Centre. Giancarlo Da Lio dedicated this tree to poetry in a lot of artistic

Below its fronds, sheets with verses, in plastic envelopes to preserve from rain, hang down. The poets read their lines in the shade of the tree. Painters and sculptors put their works on walls and grass. Itinerari '80 is an artistic movement; from different trends many excellent artists gather strength around Giancarlo Da Lio. Moreover, as well as they work, they must manage their work making use of everything and everywhere. Well, it is necessary to show works not only in the official galleries, but above all in the alternative art spaces: where people go and come, on the road, in the shops, in the gardens too; so the Tree of Poetry was born and is growing. Do you want to send your mail art or mail poesy?

Photo Exchange: (Scott Garinger, Box 321, El Segundo, California 90245-0321) Will trade photographs, any subject.

Collage d'aujourd'hui: (Dianne Bertrand, Art terre, 9109 Deschambault, Saint Leonard, Quebec, H1R 2C6) Mail art collage.

Artist Trading Cards: (Chuck Stake, 736 - 5 Street NW, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1P9, Canada) ATCs are works of art created on 64 mm x 89 mm card stock. They are the same size as hockey trading cards, but the similarity stops here. Cards may depict anything, be 2-D or 3-D, they may be original, a series, an edition, or a multiple. Cards are signed on the back by the artist

and, if necessary, an edition number is included. ATCs are paintings, drawings, collages, photographs, rubberstamp works, mixed-media, etchings, found images, recycled works of art, assemblages, etcetera. The only stipulation is that the card fits in the standard plastic sheets that hockey cards are normally stored within.

World Wide Party #9 (Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7) Founded by Benoit Girard and Franz Miklis, the World Wide Party is held on June 21st every year. At 21h00 local time, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of the Papernet around the world. The idea is to get a wave of fellowship circling the planet. Now more than ever for 2002. Let Dale know how you celebrated, whether by publishing a zine, doing mail art, creating an artist trading card, or whatever. Documentation to all (must be photocopyable in black-and-white).



ZINE LISTINGS

by Dale Speirs

[The Usual means \$2 or \$3 cash (\$5 overseas), trade for your zine, or letter of comment on a previous issue. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas (the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount) or mint USA stamps (which are not valid for postage outside USA). US\$ banknotes are acceptable around the world.]

The readers of OPUNTIA are a mix of SF fans and mail artists. I get comments from SFers claiming they don't understand these mail artists, which puzzles me since SF fans are supposed to be resistant to future shock and readily adaptable to new ways of thinking. SF zine publishers are a part of the Papernet, and one would think that decorating the envelopes they mail their zines in would be an almost universal practice. But very few do it. In the converse, some mail artists make condescending remarks about fandom, which they fail to recognize is a subculture devoted to the sense of wonder. Why can't we all just get along? Or at least read each other's zines more often in the hope of learning something new?

Kairan #4 (US\$2 or 2IRC's from Gianni Simone, 3-3-23 Nagatsuta, Midori-ku, Yokohama-shi, 226-0027 Kanagawa-ken, Japan) Mail art zine with 52 pages in card cover, digest size, published in English by an Italian living in Japan. The issue is divided into two parts. The front half discusses the mail art

concept of 'doc to all', that is, documenting contributions received for a mail art project and sending a copy to each contributor. The back half discusses mail art in the Balkans war zone. -8-

K. Frank Jensen discusses what mail art documentation is all about. It is a receipt for contribution, and allows contributors to see how the project went and how it looks overall. It is an integral part of mail art, not an after-thought. (This reminds me of a similar situation in SF fandom, where winners of fan funds are expected to publish trip reports after. Some do, some don't.) Neglect of documentation shows the project initiator is more interested in gaining than giving. Documentation should have details and purpose of the project, contributor names and addresses to allow networking, and illustration of contributions so others can decide if they want to contact the artist. There is a divide between mail artists who want quantity and those who want quality. The latter requires limiting response, usually by invitation-only requests, which upsets the excluded who think projects should be open to all. In a following essay, Guido Vermeulen takes an opposite stance. Most mail art documentations are limited to a list of names and addresses, useful for newbies to build up contacts but not much else. Vermeulen feels documentation is an independent work of art. He produces his only when he has resources to do a good quality job.

Elsewhere, David Baptiste Chirot defends the use of found objects in mail art, writing that “ ... *waste materials refuse to cease functioning as communication.*”. Joachim Hanke, in a review of a mail art project, mentions the problem of networking versus content. Mail artists are debating whether the essential part of mail art is the sending of messages (that is, the network is more important than the message) or that content matters (the quality of the message is important).

Reed Altemus discusses copy art and points out that one of first principles of mail art was to avoid the art gallery/auction room insistence on valuing objects as originals. Photocopied or other mass-produced mail art avoids the tendency to collect art for greed. Copy art is not valuable in itself as an artifact. Therefore the mail artist cannot hide behind the value system of limited editions or a single original work but must prove a message in the copy art. Recently some mail artists have put out calls for mail art but specify “No photocopies”, which negates the democratic intent of mail art.

Gianni Simone discusses difficulties in mail art reaching different cultures. Mail art is a hobby of developed countries (as is science fiction fandom), since people in Africa, Asia, and certain parts of Latin America and eastern Europe are too busy trying to survive. Mail art also has developed independent networks that seldom overlap because of language difficulties.

The second half of this issue of KAIRAN is a compilation of replies and mail art from the Balkans in response to a questionnaire sent by Gianni Simone. Only 25% of his correspondents replied. Several had to choose between food and postage. Others have no stable address because it is unsafe for dissidents to stay in one place for any length of time. Mail was intercepted by censors or stolen in transit. The regret of most of these mail artists is their isolation from the rest of the world and lack of contacts.

In the Balkans, mail artists have dwindled in the face of difficulties that make our complaints about our North American way of life trivial. One mail artist has not been heard of since he forgot himself and spoke Croatian within the hearing of some Serbs. In Serbia, a mail artist writes about trying to keep an untreated bullet wound in the neck secret, because no employer will keep a sick worker and there is no social assistance. Balkaners try to do mail art where the act of sending or receiving mail can put an artist on a secret police surveillance list. Another artist discovers that friends (one a university professor) are now snipers for the other side.

For The Clerisy V9#45 (The Usual from Brant Kresovich, Box 404, Getzville, New York 14068-0404) Assorted book reviews, zine listings, and letters of comment.

Bibliozine #67 and #68 (Mail art Usual from John Held Jr, Box 410837, San Francisco, California 94141) Single-sheet review zine. The editor is currently in the process of cataloguing about 4,000 mail art periodicals in a gallery collection, brave man that he is. (I am currently doing a subject index of Canadian zines so I know what it's like.) These issues shows a necessarily tiny selection of some of the zines he is cataloguing. We need more subject indexes and catalogues for zines to ensure that the wealth of information and history they contain is not lost.

Erg #157 (The Usual from Terry Jeeves, 56 Red Scar Drive, Scarborough, North Yorkshire YO12 5RQ, England) An essay on SF prophecies that never made it, pub renovations, the ill-fated Avro Arrow aircraft, and letters of comment.

Probe #114 and #115 (The Usual from Science Fiction South Africa, Box 781401, Sandton 2146, South Africa) Clubzine with lots of short stories, as well as reviews, news, and letters of comment.

Torcon 3 Progress Report #2 (Details from Torcon 3, Box 3, Station A, Toronto, Ontario M5W 1A2) Canada will be hosting the 61st annual World Science Fiction Convention in 2003 at Toronto. It will only be the fourth time Canada has held the event, having had it in Toronto in 1948 and 1973, and Winnipeg in 1994. This progress report has various details on what is to be

done, as well as membership statistics. As at January 31, 2002, the convention has 2,422 paid memberships, of which 370 are Canadians, 1,933 are Americans, and the rest overseas. A membership survey says, to select a few items at random, that 45% are arriving by air, and 79% have no interest in tickets to the Toronto Blue Jays baseball game.

Plokta V7#1 (The Usual from Alison Scott, 24 St. Mary Road, Walthamstow, London E17 9RG, England) A Lord of the Rings parody, some personal accounts, and letters of comment.

The Royal Swiss Navy Gazette #7 (The Usual from Garth Spencer, Box 15335, Vancouver, British Columbia V6B 5B1) Perzine, with accounts of life as an unemployed, convention reports, letters of comment, and miscellaneous musings.

OSFS Statement #292 (The Usual from Ottawa Science Fiction Society, 456 Gladstone Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1R 5N8) Newly-revived SF clubzine that has made lightening strides in quality since the new editor took over. Not just better repro (with photos throughout) but better content. Issue #292 celebrates the 25th anniversary of the club with extensive reminiscences from those who were there back when. A solid contribution to Canfanhistory.

The Knarley Knaws #92 (The Usual from Henry Welch, 1525 - 16 Avenue, Grafton, Wisconsin 53024-2017) Genzine with various personal accounts, Rodney Leighton worrying about the definition of "The Usual", and lots of letters of comment.

Memphen #272 to #277 (The Usual from Memphis SF Association, Box 820534, Memphis, Tennessee 38182-0534) SF clubzine, with news and notes, convention reports, a few reviews, and miscellaneous.

Trap Door #21 (US\$5 or The Usual from Robert Lichtman, Box 30, Glen Ellen, California 95442) Accounts of how SF author Chris Priest was sidetracked from writing by running a software business, early SF fan Joel Nydahl writes about how he returned to fandom years later and discovered he was famous, a mildly amusing short story about how Arnie Katz is a hoax, and various other items. Lots of letters of comment.

Twenty-Eight Pages Loving Bound With Twine #3 (The Usual from Christoph Meyer, Box 106, Danville, Ohio 43014) Mostly taken up by an account of the editor's wife giving birth and some poorly-drawn cartoons about natural gas.

No Award #11 (The Usual from Marty Cantor, 11825 Gilmore Street #105, North Hollywood, California 91606) A consideration of silly story titles, a personal report by a fan who was called out

in the National Guard during the Los Angeles riots a few years ago (all the police and military made the 7-11 convenience stores their headquarters), some Los Angeles fanhistory, and letters of comment.

Free Press Death Ship #1 (The Usual from Violet Jones, Box 55336, Hayward, California 94545) Reviewzine, with lots of zine listings, letters of comment, and practical advice for zinesters such as an explanation of the different types of printing methods and how to correspond with prisoners. An excellent resource.

Independent Small Pub. (The Usual from Mark Sonnenfeld, 45-08 Old Millstone Drive, East Windsor, New Jersey 08520) Chapbook of free-association text à la James Joyce, but less readable.

Joie De Vivre (The Usual from Yvonne Rowse, Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane, Trimpey, Worcs. DY12 1NP, England) One-shot for the SF convention Corflu 2002. Starts off, logically enough, with a convention report, followed by various personal essays.

The Fossil #314 (US\$15 per year from The Fossils Inc., c/o Gary Bossler, 145 Genoa Avenue SW, Massillon, Ohio 44646) Clubzine of veteran amateur publishers, with news and notes of the apa world.

Ethel The Aardvark #100 and #101 (The Usual from Melbourne Science Fiction Club, Box 212, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 3005, Australia) SF clubzine with news and notes of Australian SF fandom, reviews, photos of goings-on, and letters of comment.

Twink #25 (The Usual from E.B. Frohvet, 4716 Dorsey Hall Drive #506, Ellicott City, Maryland 21042) SF genzine with awards lists, literary and film reviews, convention reports, and letters of comment.

Vanamonde #438 to 452 (The Usual from John Hertz, 236 South Coronado Street #409, Los Angeles, California 90057) Single-sheet weekly apazine with a wide variety of short topics.

The New Port News #202 (The Usual from Ned Brooks, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720) Apazine with brief commentary on a wide variety of subjects.

File 770 #141 (US\$8 for five issues from Mike Glycer, 705 Valley View Avenue, Monrovia, California 91016) Newszine of SF fandom, with news and notes, convention reports, people in the news, and letters of comment.

Muuna Takeena #8 (Zine trade from Timo Palonen, Oritie 4 C 24, FIN-01200 Vantaa, Finland Suomi) In English. Reviewzine

of hundreds of zines and alternative music, much of it from Europe. A good source of new trades for those who want to expand their exchange lists from the same two dozen SF zines we all trade with.

Musea #108 and #109 (The Usual from Tom Hendricks, 4000 Hawthorne #5, Dallas, Texas 75219) News, notes, and commentary about the avant garde and miscellany. #109 floats a proposal to publicize independent artists via a Website.

The Secret Life Of Pascal Lenoir #4 (Mail art Usual from Pascal Lenoir, 11 Ruelle de Champagne, 60680 Grand Fresnoy, France) Nicely produced collage art from old engravings.

The Thought #129 (The Usual from Ronald Tobin, Box 10760, Glendale, Arizona 85318-0760) Alternative political thought and commentary and book reviews. Better quality essays than one sees in most other zines of this kind.

Southern Fandom Confederation Bulletin V7#12 (The Usual from Julie Wall, 470 Ridge Road, Birmingham, Alabama 35206-2816) SF clubzine with convention reports, news, zine listings, and letters of comment. There is a rather strange open letter complaining about conventions with a 'no weapons' policy for costumers, which suggests a decline in young fans is because weapons are not allowed to be displayed in public.

Tortoise #13 (The Usual from Sue Jones, Flat 5, 32/33 Castle Street, Shrewsbury, SY1 2BQ, England) Essays on quitting a stressful job, a storytelling group, school teaching in Victorian times and now, some zine reviews, and letters of comment.

Dddd #37 and #43 (The Usual from Simon Dddd, Marleys, Minstead, Lyndhurst, Hants. SO43 7FY, England) Musiczine with lots of rants and essays interspersed between the music reviews.

ALTERNATIVE A-BOMBS

by Dale Speirs

The comedian Redd Fox once defined World War Three as where they lock up the guards and release the prisoners. When I was a schoolboy in Red Deer, 100 km north of Calgary, I was taught that if there was a World War Three, then American and Russian missiles would be intercepting each other directly overhead us in Alberta.

What Never Was.

Alternative nuclear bombs have been popular enough in science fiction. I've picked up a few items here and there on this subject, not to be confused with future fiction such as post-apocalypse,

which was one of the most common themes of science fiction during the Cold War.

Queen Victoria's Bomb by Ronald Clark (Jonathan Cape, 1967) is an 1886 manuscript by Professor Franklin Huxtable. He starts off by explaining where his idealism comes from; he saw too many crippled soldiers of the Napoleonic wars begging in the streets of London. It affected him so deeply that he resolved to invent a device so monstrous that it would end all wars.

Huxtable began his task as a Cambridge undergraduate in 1833, helped by his faithful servitor ex-Sergeant Dobbin. Nothing much seemed to happen, but in later life, while on vacation with his wife Amelia in Cornwall, he collected some geological specimens. One sample fogged some photographic plates of his, and gave him the idea of refining that ore to produce a powerful source of energy. By now he had inherited an independent income, and could afford to spend the long hours trying to purify the pitchblende. One day while watching beach currents at the seaside sort out sand and gravel by size, he thought of magnetism as a way to separate the different fractions of the ore.

Success at last, with two pieces of pure substance to be clapped together to create an explosion like none seen. As is the case with much science and technology, the real problems are not technical; they are political and socioeconomic.

Huxtable believes he can end all wars with his terrible Bomb. Gaining the ear of the Prime Minister was relatively easy, but the bureaucratic obstacles were fierce. There was also the matter of where to test the Bomb, for Britain is too small and crowded. India is settled on as a place where the test explosion can be done in secrecy. There are various alarms and excursions en route, but eventually the test bed is set up in remote Jubila plateau. The two halves are on trolley cars, run together by remote-control clockwork to meet and produce the critical mass.

The British soldiers ordered by the Prime Minister to aid Huxtable are only expecting a big explosion, and have no reference point for the actual flash, shock wave, and ground tremors. They are convinced that by incredible coincidence, just as the test device was to detonate, a meteorite hit. Only Huxtable knows what it really was.

At this point, we are only a third of the way through the novel. Huxtable returns to England. He gains an audience before Queen Victoria and Prince Albert where he tries to convince them of its ability to end war by its mere existence. Prince Albert is more cognizant of the moral responsibilities thrust upon them by the Bomb. The royal couple persuade Huxtable to suppress knowledge of the Bomb, keeping it only to themselves, the Prime Minister, and the Duke of Wellington.

When the Crimean War begins, Huxtable is champing at the bit to use the Bomb on those dastardly Russians. The poor fellow is constantly frustrated by the incompetence and stupidity of the British officers, bureaucratic delays, and disbelieving Army officers. The end comes when the cargo ship carrying half the fissile mass is wrecked in a storm in the harbour.

Years later, another proposal appears. Prince Albert suggests to Abraham Lincoln that the Bomb could be used to quickly end the War Between The States. Lincoln replies in a letter that: “ ... *experience teaches us that it is unwise for men to threaten either one another, or nations, unless they are prepared to implement their threats. ... the weapon of manifold destruction which you describe, whatever the ends to which it is put, must harbour within itself the seeds of evil.*”

Huxtable is repeatedly frustrated over the years. The Prince of Wales learns by accident about the Bomb and tries out his mother on the chance of using it to deliver Denmark from the Prussians. (The Prince's wife was Danish.) Later the Franco-German war of 1870 and the Zulu War slip past Huxtable, still unable to demonstrate his peacemaker by destroying an entire army or city in one blow. Always something to prevent a demonstration of how heaven could be achieved on Earth by a visitation from hell.

The Strange Case Of Mrs. Hudson's Cat by Colin Bruce (Addison-Wesley, 1997) is a collection of Sherlock Holmes pastiches. Each case is used to illustrate some aspect of physics, mostly quantum and relativistic. Professors Challenger, Summerlee, and Illingworth come in and out of the cases, as their on-going scientific feuds over whether light is a particle or a wave recapitulate our timeline's struggle with the idea that God plays dice.

At a public lecture attended by Holmes and Watson, for example: *"Heated words were exchanged. Eventually Challenger seized an ornamental sword which hung on the wall, shouted that it was Ockham's razor, and pursued Illingworth from the platform with it. It was a field day for the reporters present."*

"Ah yes, William of Ockham's principle of logical parsimony: do not introduce additional hypotheses beyond the minimum necessary to explain the facts. That medieval English theologian would have made a good detective", Holmes mused."

The cases build on each other. As each one is solved, the newly elicited principle of physics is used as an axiom on which to progress to the next case. In one of the earlier cases, we are first introduced to Dr. Illingworth in "The Case Of The Sabotaged Scientist". He is doing work at the British Museum which requires long-exposure photographic plates through telescopes.

The starfield photos, alas, came out fogged. Who sabotaged them? After an all-night vigil by Dr. Watson, it is determined that the plate was left next to an African idol. Watson was sitting between the idol and the plate, and his skeletal form shows up in the photo. From this, Holmes deduces X-rays and radioactive elements.

After that case, the idol drops out of sight for the next few stories, to then re-surface in "The Case Of The Energetic Anarchist". Herein, Watson's opening commentary on how plagues spread is neatly matched to an anarchist threat to destroy London with a 100,000 ton explosion. This is laughed off by both Holmes and Scotland Yard, for no one could smuggle that amount of guncotton into the city without being noticed.

As the day's events progress, it has been learned by British Museum staff that the matching half of the idol has been found, of all places, at a seaside resort. Interesting but trivial to the Victorians, to whom 'critical mass' is a nonsense phrase. Holmes and Watson have called upon Professors Challenger and Summerlee, who are arguing the veracity of energy and mass being the same thing. Just as they deduce that $E = mc^2$, Holmes realizes that if such is true, then the idol's radiation will increase like a plague if matched with its missing half. A mad rush to the seaside then ensues, trying to stop the British Museum assistant from putting together the two halves.

The rush fails. There is a pillar of light, a shock wave, and a mushroom cloud. A resort beach thereupon cratered is explained to the press as the unfortunate result of a munitions boat running aground. Again, Queen Victoria has no Bomb.

Hitler's Bomb by Chris Scott (McClelland and Stewart, 1983) takes place in late World War Two.

"I knew this man once; call him Brown. He was from Tube Alloys, which was sort of like our version of the Manhattan Project ... [Brown] was the recipient of one of Churchill's 'prayers'. This one went something like this: 'Pray tell me, what is the likelihood of German atomic bombs raining down on London?'. That shows you how ignorant we were, you see."

"You mean Churchill used the plural?"

"Exactly. One bomb would have been enough. We had no real idea of what we were dealing with."

The novel begins with Carlo Peat discussing with Harold 'Kim' Philby about informant Bandersnatch's report in late 1944 on a Nazi research lab, which, combined with the defections of German scientists Hugo and Katherina (his daughter) Weber, bring disquieting news. The Nazis are not only working on an atomic bomb, they are going straight to a fusion bomb as soon as

they figure out how to make a fission bomb. This is a spy novel more than an alternative history.

Hitler intends using the bomb on London, but his scientists want it used against the Russians, for the better reason to avoid the division of Germany they know is coming. The Germans are still wishfully thinking of a separate peace with the Anglo-Saxons, believing that Britain and the USA feel the same way about the Bolsheviks as they do. A pitiful delusion.

A daring British commando raid launches into Germany to take out the bomb construction. The raiders find themselves landing in the middle of a battle between units of the Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht versus Waffen SS. It began as a bureaucratic disagreement, and developed into 88s of the former against tanks of the latter, struggling for control of the bomb factory.

The commando team fails, and a German bomber with one atomic bomb speeds off to London. It makes it to England but is shot down before it can drop its cargo. As we then learn in the epilogue, the bomb project was a hoax by German Communists who had infiltrated the Nazi high command. The traitors wanted Germany to hold out as long as possible so its ruination would be that much more complete. The bomb had everything but plutonium. Hitler and his minions had hope but nothing else.