

# OPUNTIA

## 56.1

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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, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]

FROM: Chester Cuthbert  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

2004-09-23

I let a local dealer have a dozen cartons of books because he had researched them carefully, but he paid me no more than one-third of his selling price for them. His argument that the costs of operating two shops in Winnipeg prevented him from paying more did not persuade me to continue business with him and I told him so. I have two grandchildren who have access to the Web, so I am going to donate books to them. Even though they must learn from the Web how to profit, I'm sure they will net more than I would from the dealer. And it is all in the family.

[I don't think the dealer was being unreasonable. In my early days as a professional horticulturist, I worked in retail garden centres. The rule of thumb was that the retail selling price of a tree or bedding plant was three times the wholesale cost. If we paid \$1 for a flat of petunias, we sold it for \$3. This was a fair margin to cover overhead such as rent, utilities, staff wages, shrinkage (dead plants or shoplifting), and taxes.]

[My major hobby is philately. If you sell your collection to a stamp dealer, he will only pay about one-third of catalogue value, for the same reasons. If you sell it yourself by mail order, you have to subtract from your sale price the cost of advertising, listing on eBay, claims for damaged goods or non-delivery, and pay yourself a living wage for the hours of work you put in. Suddenly that 3x markup doesn't seem so extreme. To stay in business as dealers, your grandchildren will eventually have to buy on the open market, when they may find that buying new stock is actually the most difficult part of dealing in collectibles.]

FROM: Rykandar Korra'ti 2004-09-23  
5605 NE 184 Street  
Kenmore, Washington 98028

[Re: Norwescon 27 science fiction convention Fanzine Lending Library] The Library was built originally with the intent of using it in conjunction with the quiet hospitality room, and I think it's well suited for it. Norwescon simply doesn't have enough fanzine fans as members to really do justice to a real fan lounge. I just kind of hope that fanzine fandom will have a presence, a face of sorts, shown to the rest of fandom. And hey, given the history of the fandom, what way is better than print? Of course, the 'print' part of that is somewhat belied by the number of zines now distributed as PDF, HTML, or text files, zines that I make into

print editions for display. Since we didn't have a specific secondary draw in the room this year, and since the number of art zines has continued to drop (thanks, I think, to the ubiquity of the Web) I pulled a lot of heavily-art-driven zines out of the backstock. That seemed to make a difference. In 2003, I thought the readership was kind of sparse. 2004 had less of that kind of feeling. I still think the most heavily read zines were those with attractive graphics catching the eye, but I did regularly see people starting with an art zine and then moving to more print-heavy publications. So I'll be making sure to rotate in older art zines next year.

FROM: Steve Jeffey 2004-?-?  
44 White Way  
Kidlington, Oxfordshire OX5 2XA, England

A friend is floating the idea of a book on serial fantasy and why it is currently so popular, both with readers and publishers. One problem is that the readership is predominantly a consumer one. Few genre fantasy fans seem to take much interest in arguing and debating their chosen reading in the way that SF fans do. Fantasy magazines seem to be slanted towards fiction and artwork rather than criticism and review, and there are almost no fan-based publications. I know only of one apa in the UK which is specifically geared to discussion of fantasy literature.

FROM: John Hertz

2004-12-11

236 South Coronado Street, #409  
Los Angeles, California 90057

I ran the Fanzine Lounge at Noreascon IV, then this year's Loscon; one big, one small. It wasn't so bad. Besides, how will they know us if we don't appear?

FROM: Lloyd Penney

2004-10-05

1706 - 24 Eva Road  
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

How many institutions who might accept your zine collection will smile, accept boxes and boxes of stuff from you, and simply pack it away in a storage room or eventually junk it?

[My will specifies "for their unconditional use or disposal", which means they can sell it and use the money for other purposes. That is what the Red Deer Museum did with my mother's plate collection when she died.]

**I ALSO HEARD FROM:** Julie Jefferies, Jorg Seifert, Terry Jeeves, John Held Jr, Sylvano Pertone, Phlox Icona, Lois Klassen, Jose Roberto Sechi, Billy McKay, Ken Faig Jr, Ficus, Joseph Nicholas, KRin Pender-Gunn, Jim Hayes, DeWitt Young

## ZINE LISTINGS

by Dale Speirs

[The Usual means \$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.]

[SF means science fiction. An apazine is a zine for an amateur press association distro, a perzine is a personal zine, sercon is serious-constructive]

**The Fossil #322 and #323** (US\$15 per year from The Fossils Inc., c/o Stan Oliner, 1278 Dexter Street, Denver, Colorado 80220) Issue #322 marks the 100th anniversary of this group, which is a social club of zinesters from various apas. Besides their get-togethers, they also administer the Library of Amateur Journalism, founded 1916. #323 is mostly taken up with the recent transfer of the Library to the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

**Fantasy Commentator #57** (US\$12 plus \$3 postage from A. Langley Searles, 48 Highland Circle, Bronxville, New York 10708-5909) Special 174-page, square-bound issue devoted to commentary on Fritz Leiber. Lovecraft fans will be interested in Leiber's correspondence with HPL.

**Probe #124 and #125** (The Usual from Science Fiction South Africa, Box 781401, Sandton 2146, South Africa) Clubzine with high proportion of short fiction. Also assorted reviews and letters of comment. #125 has an extended commentary on whether South Africa has the capability to host a Worldcon.

**Shouting At The Postman #53** (Mail art Usual from Ken Miller, Box 101, Newtown, Pennsylvania 18940-0101) This issue is the annual Cult Figure issue. Once a year, Miller sends out copies of a found photo and invites mail art responses, which are compiled in this zine.

**Twenty-Eight Pages Lovingly Bound With Twine #10** (The Usual from Christoph Meyer, Box 106, Danville, Ohio 43014) Perzine with articles on birdwatching while printing zine covers, some poetry, why Taco Bell should provide employees with a dental plan, building a bookcase (what?, no IKEA?), and raising baby.

**The New Port News #218** (The Usual from Ned Brooks, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720) Apazine with comments on a wide variety of subjects.

**Pouet-cafee #9** (The Usual from Christine Douville, Box 59019, Montréal, Québec H2S 3P5) Poetry zine, also literary zine listings. Lovingly bound with twine.

**Southern Fandom Confederation Bulletin V8#7**

(The Usual from R.B. Cleary, 138 Bibb Drive, Madison, Alabama 35758-1064) SF clubzine with news, convention listings and reports, zine reviews, and letters of comment.

**FOSFAX #210** (US\$4 from Falls of the Ohio SF and Fantasy Association, Box 37281, Louisville, Kentucky 40233-7281) Lots of book reviews and commentary in 58 pages of microprint; a full evening's read, not a quick skim. Strong emphasis on history and alternative history. Also American politics and letters of comment.

**Hat #48 to #54** (The Usual from Ross Priddle, 21 Valleyview Drive SW, Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 7K5) Single-sheet collage zine.

**Banana Wings #20** (The Usual from Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7ES, England) Lamentation about the loss of Mars probe Beagle, bookselling at conventions, musings about zines, Irish religiosity, and letters of comment.

**Musea #136 and #137** (The Usual from Tom Hendricks, 4000 Hawthorne #5, Dallas, Texas 75219) #136 has a wide variety of comments and quotes, with emphasis on the arts, but also ranging from newsgroup Nazis to relative morality. #137 is taken up by a Christmas short story.

**Alphabet Obsession #115** (The Usual from Jae Leslie Adams, 621 Spruce Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53715) This issue has an account of a calligraphy convention. I find this has some interesting comparisons with SF and philatelic conventions.

**Bildstörung #10** (Mail art Usual from Roman Castenholz, Triftstrasse 47, 53919 Weilerswist, Deutschland) Mail art compendium of drawings and text, in German.

**The Thought #141 to #143** (The Usual from Ronald Tobin, Box 10760, Glendale, Arizona 85318-0760) Political and economics commentary from a philosophical point of view, especially libertarian, anarchist, etcetera. Some of the letters of comment tend to be too much "You said, I said, did not, did too".

**Xerography Debt #15** (US\$3 from Davida Gypsy Breier, Box 963, Havre de Grace, Maryland 21078) Reviewzine with multiple reviewers reviewing multiple zines. Okay, it's difficult to write a capsule comment about this title that doesn't sound like a palindrome. Also some articles on zine history.

**Low Hug #10** (US\$3 from A.j. Michel, PMB 1057, 112 Muir Avenue, Hazelton, Pennsylvania 18201) Commentary on zinedom, on-line dating, and identity politics, but mostly a variety of articles by as many authors on their favourite obsolete technology.

**Leeking Ink #29** (US\$3 from Davida Gypsy Breier, Box 963, Havre de Grace, Maryland 21078) Perzine about taking up yoga, buying an old car, a vacation in the Bahamas, Baltimore movies, and taking trapeze lessons.

**MarkTime #72** (The Usual from Mark Strickert, 9050 Carron Drive #273, Pico Rivera, California 90660) This issue is a single-sheet letter substitute catching up on Strickert's many travels and life in the public transit business.

**For The Clersiy #58 and #59** (The Usual from Brant Kresovich, Box 404, Getzville, New York 14068-0404) #58 has reviews of older books worth being reminded about, an hilarious account of a modern book-burning by a church stymied by local environmental bureaucrats, zine reviews, and letters of comment. #59 is the sex issue, with a look at erotica in bestsellers and foreign fiction.

**Trap Door #23** (The Usual from Robert Lichtman, Box 30, Glen Ellen, California 95442) Genzine with personal stories from various writers, SF fannish accounts, and letters of comment.

**Vanamonde #558 to 572** (The Usual from John Hertz, 236 South Coronado Street #409, Los Angeles, California 90057) Single-sheet weekly zine with comments on various topics.

**Chunga #8** (The Usual from Randy Byers, 1013 North 36 Street, Seattle, Washington 98103) Genzine with articles on SF conventions, creating a Las Vegas zinedom out of nothing, and letters of comment.

**It Goes On The Shelf #26** (The Usual from Ned Brooks, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720) Lots of reviews of older books that deserve renewed attention, as well as some that should never have been printed in the first instance.

**Word Watchers (2004 Fall and 2005 Winter)** (The Usual from Jeanette Handling, 2405 Sanford Avenue, Alton, Illinois 62002) Devoted to etymology, particularly new words and phrases popping up in our modern times.

**Moz #2** (The Usual from Murray Moore, 1065 Henley Road, Mississauga, Ontario L4Y 1C8) Apazine. This issue is taken up completely by a report on Corflu Blackjack, a zinester's convention in Las Vegas.

**So It Goes #16** (The Usual from Tim Marion, c/o Kleinbard, 266 East Broadway, Apt. 1201B, New York, New York 10002) The last issue appeared in November 1977, which explains why all the letters of comment are dated early 1978. This issue is about the Rocky Horror Picture Show fandom, where there was as much weirdness going on in the audience as up on the screen.

**The Knarley Knews #108 and #109**

(The Usual from Henry Welch, 1525 - 16 Avenue, Grafton, Wisconsin 53024-2017) Genzine with assorted topics, convention reports, reviews, and letters of comment.

**Alexiad V3#5 and #6** (The Usual from Lisa and Joseph Major, 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040) Lots of book reviews, some convention reports, and letters of comment.

**Meta #1** (The Usual from Geneva Melzack, 5 Brooklands Avenue, Withington, Manchester M20 1JE, England) A new sercon zine from the self-styled Third Row Fandom. Articles include a review of China Mieville novels, Philip K. Dick, the end of Buffy fandom, and "What is fandom?".

**Soter Dwan #43** (The Usual from Donny Smith, 915 West Second Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47403) Letterzine on various topics, as well as comment on soterology (yes, there really is such a topic).

**Warp #59** (The Usual from Montréal SF and Fantasy Association, Box 1186, Place du Parc, Montréal, Québec H2X 4A7) SF clubzine with news and notes on club activities and the SF scene in general, as well as reviews and convention reports. Also continuing series on Norse mythology and the predecessors to Tarzan.

**Murderous Signs #10** (The Usual from Grant Wilkins, Box 20517, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 1A3) Literary zine with poetry and an interesting reprint of a 1931 essay on modernist poetry.

**Sugar Needle #26** (The Usual from Phlox Icona, 1174 Briarcliff Road #2, Atlanta, Georgia 30306) A zine devoted to weird candy from around the world. This issue's cover shows a lollipop shaped like a human eye, anatomically correct yet. Some people will eat anything.

**Tortoise #19** (The Usual from Sue Jones, Flat 5, 32/33 Castle Street, Shrewsbury SY1 2BQ, England) Most of this issue is a trip report about a recent trip to Tasmania, along with various reviews and letters of comment.

**Statement #321 to #326** (The Usual from Ottawa SF Society, 18 Norice Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2G 2X5) SF clubzine with news and notes, reviews, and brief commentaries.

## **SEEN IN THE LITERATURE**

noticed by Dale Speirs

Anonymous (2004 December) **W. Robert Gibson Collection Of Speculative Fiction: Update On activities.** INFOSERVE (University of Calgary newsletter) 11(2):5

Bob Gibson was a Calgary SF collector who passed away in 2001 at age 92, leaving behind a collection of about 50,000 books and periodicals. These have been donated by his son to the University of Calgary Library, and the collection is being actively worked on. One librarian, Mary Hemmings, has already done a paper on women in WEIRD TALES, and is currently working on "SF and the anticipation of war: 1919-1939".

Gibson's greatest accomplishment, which sets his collection apart from others donated to various libraries, is that he spent decades scouring general magazines for SF stories. He then cut them out and bound them into homemade anthologies, sorted by periodical title, and drew illustrated tables of content for them. Nobody could replicate this work today. American fans might scan SATURDAY EVENING POST, but they would not have access to runs of Canadian periodicals such as MACLEAN'S or STAR WEEKLY. BLUE BOOK and ARGOSY are well enough known, but how many people have heard of TOP-NOTCH? During the summer of 2004, Andrew Forte catalogued 580 of Gibson's compilations and scanned the covers Gibson made for them. Work is still in progress and there are plans to put more material on the university's Web site. For now, go to [www.ucalgary.ca](http://www.ucalgary.ca) and use "Gibson compilation" in the search engine.

## ADD AND PASS MEANS ADDICTION AND PASSIVITY

by Monty Cantsin

[Editor's note: For those not familiar with mail art, its equivalent of spam is the add-and-pass-on sheet. This is a sheet of paper with the originator's name and address and an initial piece of artwork on it. The recipient is asked to add a bit of art and their name and address, send a photocopy to the originator, and pass the original sheet on to someone else. At first, this sort of thing was interesting, but now there is such a flood of the stuff that many people, myself included, pass it on without doing anything or else just toss it. Add-and-pass sheets are a subset of a certain group of mail artists for whom the hobby is not mail art, but collecting as many correspondents and addresses as possible, regardless of the quality of work. Monty Cantsin is a collective pseudonym used by mail artists; this article was sent on to me by Jim Hayes of Marietta, Georgia.]

I receive add-and-pass sheets in the mail all the time. To those fortunately ignorant, an add-and-pass sheet is a piece of paper filled with rubber stamps, stickers, and clippings. At the bottom of the page is a list of addresses to show the providence of said piece of paper. It has been here and it has been there. This compulsive passivity is the pseudo-activity of merely pasting a photo or stamping a stamp on a pre-arranged sheet. The addiction is manifested in the need to return to the post office to perpetuate this fraud disguised (and often praised) as 'creativity'.

What does it matter that one add-and-pass sheet is mailed? The sheet is devoid of any personality or ideas beyond a linked hyper-

monotony. No ideas, no entrees, no communication -8-  
about who the sender is, only an advertisement for self that indicates egotism as these future baton-wielding cultural policemen trot from mailbox to post office. Add-and-pass sheets are determined to continue the status quo by turning a cultural form based on communication into an advertisement of the alleged gifts shining forth from the name of the 'artist'. These people are right-wing counter strategists designed to infiltrate the network by their suggestive passivity. Oh this is what I have to say (my name and address); I say pass on this Very Important statement to you, who have been chosen. Do not think; tape address here, rubber stamp there, shove in envelope, send.

The tyranny is adding and passing. Add-and-pass is shorthand for addiction and passivity. Those who live by add-and-pass shall die by add-and-pass, that is, addiction and passivity. Correspondence art is the exchange of ideas through the State-sponsored medium of postal awareness, of postal ubiquity. Correspondence art is about corresponding. It is about tessellation, the link-up of ideas and images. Mail art is exactly that, mail. Mail is/are/was physical assemblages being exchanged. Male art is phallic dominance, the erection of a pyramid of stamps spurting its cosmic identity. You've been stained ...

I throw all add-and-pass sheets into the garbage can thoughtfully provided by my local post office. I never correspond with anyone



who sends an add-and-pass sheet. I never contact anyone who has ever been part of an add-and-pass sheet, as they are obviously collaborators determined to destroy all aspects of freedom. I urge all correspondence artists to boycott all who participate in the vile detritus that is add-and-pass. Let those scum have their own network where they can cosily kiss and exchange their addresses.

## MAIL ART LISTINGS

**The Clown On The Motorbike:** (Netmailart, Box 2644, D 32383 Minden, Deutschland) Theme is "The clown on the motorbike". Maximum size 70 cm x 100 cm; write your address on the back. Technique: free. Exhibition in Mail Art Mekka Minden; catalogue to every participant. Deadline is 2005-03-31.

**Postcard Mail Art Project:** (dott.ssa Tiziana Baracchi, Via Cavallotti, 83-B, 30171 Venezia-Mestre, Italy) Technique: free. Size: 15 cm x 10 cm. No deadline.

**A Surreal Community:** (Surreal Community Mail Art Project, Surreal Café, 79 Fifth Avenue, Brooklyn, New York 11217) Send in flat works up to 5.5" x 8.5" or A5, through March 31, 2005. Your work will be hung based primarily on space and time considerations. Your art must meet minimally acceptable taste

criteria suitable for a public restaurant. No returns, documentation will be irregular.

**The Penguin:** (Jeroen ter Welle, Boeninlaan 393, 1102 TL Amsterdam, Nederlands) Theme on the penguin, size A6 (14.8 x 10.5 cm). Send 16 originals or copies, documentation to every 15 contributors. No deadline.

**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.

**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.

**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 performances. 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?

**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.

**Collage d'aujourd'hui:**

**-10-**

(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.

**Water Is Life:** (Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2E7) Send me a set of 20 identical or nearly so ATCs with your name and mailing address printed on the back and enough room on the front for me to add a 6.7 cm x 2.5 cm label. I will take them out to a lake or stream somewhere in Alberta and dip them into the water. Your ATCs will then be compiled into an assembling zine called NOPALEA and one copy sent to you. I won't be dipping the ATCs until spring 2005. On-going until freeze-up in late September 2005.

## BOOK REVIEWS

by Dale Speirs

I generally don't review current bestsellers, on the grounds that there will be plenty of reviews elsewhere. Rather, I try to do lesser known books and older books that deserve renewed attention. I seem to be reading a lot of alternative history lately.

**ReVisions** (edited by Julie Czerneda and Isaac Szpindel, published by DAW, New York, 2004, mass market paperback) is yet another alternative history anthology, albeit with a twist. Instead of trotting out the usual World War Two or Persians beat the Greeks divergences, these stories look at what might have happened had scientific discoveries been made or publicized earlier than our timeline. Each story is followed by an author's afterword explaining the divergence, an explanation that is sometimes not necessary, but sometimes definitely so. The cover art is quite good; a Blue Boy wearing an astronaut's suit.

"The Resonance Of Light" by Geoffrey Landis has Tesla inventing the ruby laser 50 years before our timeline when he notices that a concentrated beam of light causes a ruby gem to sparkle unusually. However, he is more concerned about the impending war in Europe that threatens to destroy his native Serbia. He decides the best method of averting the war is to use an electrical death ray on the Czar of Russia, the idea being that

the uproar of the assassination will distract Russia from mobilizing. The beam misses twice, so his female companion snatches up the ruby laser and uses it to blind the Czar. Rasputin declares the mysterious red light a sign of God's displeasure at the Czar. The Russian army is never mobilized, Serbia is swallowed whole by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Europe settles back into peace. Although the story reads well, it is a Tom Swift type of sciencefiction story, where the gadget is used for an action adventure instead of considering the ramifications of lasers and charged-particle beams.

"Out Of China" by Julie Czernada begins in Yunnan, China, in 1301 AD, when the Mongol regime made it wise for one Confucian scholar to become a recluse. He uses his enforced idleness to determine why rats spread the black plague (unlike the Europeans, the Chinese knew the rats were responsible but never discovered the actual mechanism of transmission). He discovers the plague is spread by fleas. This knowledge makes its way to Europe, setting off changes in pest control, water treatment, and public health. China becomes a world power using biological warfare agents, but the result is a static world divided into paranoid countries maintaining severe quarantines against each other that cripple trade. Czernada considers the sociological aspects and comes up with a plausible divergence in which the fear of disease slows technological change to a crawl. Biology is

more advanced, but circa 2003, the idea of a heavier-than-air flying machine is only just starting to be considered.

“Site Fourteen” by Laura Anne Gilman supposes that President John Kennedy mobilizes a crash programme in exploring the ocean deeps, not the space race that we saw. Site 14 is a ocean bottom colony that fails catastrophically, killing everyone in it. This really isn’t much of an alternative history, since by changing only a few sentences it could have better been written as a future Earth story (and probably was, somewhere in the back issues of ANALOG). Gilman is not good at writing dialogue; the characters did too much joshing with each other in situations where they would hardly say more than “Morning, Sam. Good morning, Ralph.”.

“Silent Leonardo” by Kage Baker has Leonardo da Vinci getting an agent who advises him to give up his painting and concentrate on his machines, the ones that were never built in our timeline. He builds war machines for ambitious Italian dukes, kickstarting steam technology and hang-gliders.

The middle of the story is a Tom Swifitian battle of war machines, but at the end there is a consideration of the greater hazards the dukes faced. The steam plough displaces thousands of peasants, and nobility has to think what to do with all those rioters in the streets demanding jobs.

“A Call From The Wild” by Doranna Durgin has -12-  
cowboys herding sheep instead of cattle, and using llamas to guard the flocks. The divergence here, which the reader has to wait for the afterword to know what it was, is that humans never domesticated dogs. Woke up one mornin’ on the old Chisholm Trail, baaa. Not to mention bad.

“Axial Axioms” by James Alan Gardner is a mish-mash of philosophical and religious epigrams, supposedly based on a mathematical age of reason erupting circa 600 to 400 BC. This story is written in a New Wave style that reads like something out of DANGEROUS VISIONS or ENGLAND SWINGS SF. It is not enough to have an story idea; one must write it as a narrative.

“The Terminal Solution” by Robin Bailey has Dr. Joseph Bell, the real-life prototype of Sherlock Holmes, studying a new disease imported into Europe from Africa in the late 1880s. The author names it African Invasive Disease, kindly telegraphing the divergence to the reader. The disease is running unchecked in a world that has yet to use antiseptic surgery, where opiates by the hypodermic needle are legal (and the needles re-used by countless addicts), and viruses are unknown. If AIDS had arrived 125 years earlier than our timeline, it would have been worse than the plagues. This is a good alternative history story, but it doesn’t actually match the theme of the anthology, since there are no scientific discovery divergences involved.

“The Ashbazu Effect” by John McDaid looks at how the invention of printing on clay tablets with carved cylinders would have affected the life of a scribe in Sumeria. The scribe, left unemployed because it was cheaper to carve a text on a cylinder than to pay copyists, tries to sell AH fiction. He is unsuccessful; Sumerians do not want to read about a world where Sargon conquered them. The scribe falls in with a printer who is experimenting with moveable type on papyrus. Together they speculate what the future might bring if texts were quick and easy to reproduce.

“A Word For Heathens” by Peter Watts begins the day after Trajan’s funeral. The science of magnetism has been developed that is not only used for mundane technology but for behavioural modification by wearing helmets with strong magnets. Pausing for the obligatory handwaving to make this change happen, the author then takes us into a theocratic dictatorship where soldiers of God destroy heretics. The soldiers are under the influence of the magnets which convince them they are one with God. The heretics can be picked out by scanning their brains as they walk through a specially prepared corridor.

“A Ghost Story” by Jihane Noskateb is a future story of the 2100s, in which time-traveling archaeologists discover an artifact called the hyperoctahedron, recovered from the Pythagorean academy in ancient Greece. The divergence is said to be that the ancient

Greeks developed an advanced technology. Too much mysticism and hand-waving in this story to make it believable.

“The Executioner’s Apprentice” by Kay Kenyon posits a technological Mayan society that uses DNA analysis to determine who should be sacrificed at the temple altar. A bloodthirsty religion and an absolute monarchy use practical eugenics to create a warrior society. But would advanced techies still practice human sacrifice?

“Swimming Upstream In The Wells Of The Desert” by Mike Resnick and Susan Matthews postulates a world where cold fusion became a reality in 1989 and the influence of the Arabic oil-producing countries withers away. The Islamic states of central Asia are forbidden to use cold fusion, but technology cannot be suppressed and the techies are scheming to build cold fusion plants.

“Unwirer” by Cory Doctorow and Charles Stross supposes that Congress heeded the Hollywood studios back in the late 1990s and put severe restrictions on the Internet. Meanwhile, the rest of the world goes wireless and surpasses the USA in technology. American hackers, desperate to get access to uncensored ISPs and freedom of information, use satellite dishes to connect across the border with Canadian and Mexican ISPs.

“When The Morning Stars Sang Together” by Isaac Szpindel uses Galileo as a divergence. He continues his astronomical research with reflecting telescopes and spectrometers. He discovers the red shift, decides that if everything is receding from the Earth, then the Sun must be at the centre of the universe. It is still irrefutable that the Earth revolves around the Sun, so the Church takes this as scientific proof that the solar system is at the centre, and Galileo is restored to grace. The actual story is of a Jesuit in the future who has just come up with an explanation that may shake the Church; everything is receding from everything else, therefore there is no centre. Enter the Inquisitor, stage right.

“Herd Mentality” by Jay Caselberg has the Nazis conducting cloning experiments, producing 250 Einsteins. After the war, the liberated Einsteins infiltrate corporations and gradually form a secret world government. Being clones, they are dying before their time, and are searching for the lost ability to re-clone themselves. One image from this story that sticks in the mind is a mass meeting of the Einsteins, more than 200 survivors in one lecture theatre.

**Correspondence: Models Of Letter-Writing From The Middle Ages To The Nineteenth Century** by Roger Chartier, Alain Boureau, and Cecile Dauphin (1997, hardcover, Princeton

University Press) is an English translation of a French academic tome. This book examines how letter-writing manuals with examples of letters for all occasions, developed and became popular, using French books as examples. Letter writing is taken for granted in our modern age, but it is actually a recent development for the majority of society. Letters have been sent as long as there was a tiny elite of literate scribes. Literacy used to be as esoteric and rarified as writing computer software in machine code is today. With the advent of mass literacy and a postal system open to the general public, it became possible for ordinary people to write letters. The Papernet was as revolutionary back then as the Internet is today.

The technical ability to memorize the alphabet and learn a vocabulary is not the same thing as being able to write clearly and communicate specific ideas or vignettes. The first manuscripts on how to write a good letter appeared in the opening decade of the 1100s, and were intended for the clergy and other intellectuals. After the invention of printing with movable type, mass-produced books began to appear. In the days before copyright, it was standard to pick and choose the best bits of other letter-writing manuals when publishing a new manual.

As a result, manuals tended to evolve very slowly. Some were in print for more than a century, and the model letters they used were ridiculously out of date. They purported to teach people how to

write a good letter based on cultures and fashions that had vanished decades ago. And yet they sold well enough to justify multiple editions from numerous publishers.

This apparent paradox is explained by the authors of this book as a pattern of using such manuals not for letter writing but for vicarious enjoyment of superior cultures. The priests and philosophers did not need such books, but the merchant and lower classes used them as a window into high society and nobility. Model letters such as a letter of introduction to a King were of no value to classes of people who would never be allowed by the Royal Household to even attempt to communicate with him. But people could read the flowery language and dream of a life among rich tapestries and banquets, even though they read the manuals in a room over the shop.

By the 1800s, society had changed enough that even the letter-writing manuals had to change. Model letters in the books were now on such topics as ordering stock from a distant manufacturer or demanding payment of an overdue account. Personal letters were to a lover or a son in the army, and were not meant to be labouriously copied.

Rather, they were plundered for an apt phrase or a rich description that the writer could not have thought on his own.

**Letterwriting In Renaissance England** by Alan Stewart and Heather Wolfe is an exhibition catalogue of the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. (2004, large format, 214 pages. US\$54.95 from Folger Library, 201 East Capitol Street SE, Washington, D.C. 20003-1094. Visa and Mastercard accepted.). Since it accompanies an exhibit, it naturally emphasizes the artefacts of letter-writing, as opposed to theoretical studies. The **Correspondence** book reviewed above concentrated on French letter-writing books, while the Folger catalogue uses English manuals, many of which were translated from French originals. The Folger catalogue transcribes the letters illustrated into print text but unfortunately does not normalize the spelling to our modern standard. This makes it more difficult to read the text and serves no purpose since anyone who wants to refer to the original handwritten text can check the photo-facsimile.

The catalogue starts off with a look at the tools needed for writing a letter in the Renaissance era. One couldn't just pick up a pen and start scribbling. Quills had to be cut from goose feathers, and ink had to be ground and mixed. Every cookbook of that era included a recipe for ink. Paper was very expensive and had to be treated first with alum so it wouldn't blot. Candles were necessary in that time of poorly lit houses, even during the day. Today even welfare clients live better than the richest lords and ladies of two centuries ago.

Handwriting styles were different as well, which makes letters from that age unreadable to most modern eyes because our handwriting methods came from a later time. Different letters required different styles, although in actual practice people often ignored the rules except in very refined social circles. It was amusing to read in this catalogue that British legal clerks wrote in large letters not to be clear but because they were paid by the number of pages they wrote.

Social signals of letters are the exterior signs of a letter such as the form of address, type of wax seal, and such. We still use these today in such things as return addresses and whether a letter is franked with a postage stamp, a meter mark, or a bulk mail indicia. Then and now, these social signals tell us before we open the letter about the sender. Back in Renaissance times, the style of title used on the address showed the social distance between sender and receiver. A commoner addressing a peer would use an extravagant title (“My most noble and honoured Lord”) while His Lordship’s sibling would write “Lord So-and-so”. The further to the bottom the signature on the letter was, the more subservient the sender was. This was not necessarily due to the class system. The catalogue discusses a popular category of letters in those days, that of a wayward son apologizing to his father for his latest sins or trying to hit up the old man for a few pounds sterling. Some things never change!

Secretaries (“one who keeps secrets”) were originally personal scribes of the well-to-do. The term later came to be used for letter-writing manuals. The English manuals, as with the French ones, developed into precursors of novels rather than being an actual aid to the letter writer. Not until later were more practical manuals published. Official letters from monarchs or lords were written by a personal secretary, even if the master was literate. This had an advantage in that the master could add a postscript in his own handwriting to emphasize a point. The Folger catalogue shows a letter by James I to the Earl Marshal of Scotland, who kept missing Privy Council meetings. The letter is in the secretary’s handwriting and is polite, but James’ postscript adds punch: *“I cannot now admit any excuse of your absence where you are to serve your King and Country in so godly and honourable an errand.”*

The postal system was not for the general public prior to 1635, so people had to rely on friends or paid couriers to send their letters. The system used the hub-and-spoke method whereby all letters went through London, with about the same convenience to users as the modern hub-and-spoke method used by passenger airlines. By-roads were later established to allow direct routes between rural towns. Since letters were charged by the mile, books were published with mileage charts between towns. Many letters were lost or stolen in transit, so it was customary to encrypt them. Intercepted letters were often published by political enemies.