

OPUNTIA

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THE CALGARY STAMPEDE CONSIDERED AS A SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

by Dale Speirs

Introduction: Just The Facts.

The Calgary Stampede is the world's oldest science fiction convention, having begun in 1912. It is also the largest, with a paid attendance of 1.2 million over ten days in the first half of July. At a guess, about half of the attendees dress up in costume, usually as inhabitants of the planet Rodeo. Many of them spend the convention in the bar and ignore the programming.

The theme for this year's convention was "The Spirit Of 1912". This seemed a rather odd anniversary date to celebrate. One would think they could wait five more years for the centennial. It's not as if anything else important happened in Alberta that year.

Registration.

Although more than 100,000 people attended each day, I found the registration quite efficient. Instead of making everyone line up at one or two counters as with most SF conventions, the Calgary Stampede had multiple booths at the gates, and I quickly went through. I paid \$13, which would have been \$130 for the

entire ten day period. This included all entertainment and events excepting the main rodeo and the evening music act. Quite reasonable. Unlike a regular SF convention, the Calgary Stampede doesn't make you fill out a registration form or give you a name badge. You are free to wander about, and if you leave and wish to come back in again that day, you must have your hand rubber-stamped on the way out.

Opening Ceremonies.

Unfortunately I missed the Opening Ceremonies, the Stampede parade held Friday morning. I have been working weekend shift Friday to Sunday 12 hours since 1999, so I was not one of the 400,000 spectators who lined the downtown sidewalks to watch the parade. No business is done in downtown Calgary Friday morning, and very little for the rest of the convention. Bleary-eyed shopgirls are commonplace, and the big bosses are usually in "meetings" all day long every day of the week. If in doubt, a missing employee can usually be found at Cowboys, the most notorious roadhouse in Calgary.

The bagpipe bands in the parade seem to be only from police detachments, and the high school marching bands from Texas or Oklahoma. The police like to dress up as Scottish clansmen and the marching bands like to twirl wooden rifles painted white. Something to do with their subfandoms, I expect.



There are also lots of aboriginals dressed up in Hollywood's idea of what their ancestors wore, and plenty of cowboys wearing blue jeans with zippers and Stetson hats, neither of which appeared on the prairies until after the pioneers had already settled in. The horses, however, were genuine, and left genuine souvenirs behind them. Stampede parade officials always make arrangements to have street sweepers following closely behind them. It wouldn't do to have a marching band step in a souvenir.

Programming: Git Along Little Dogie.

Because the majority of Calgarians and outlander visitors are city-bred, the emphasis nowadays is educating them about agriculture and how their food is produced and makes its way to their dinner plates. One of my favourite panels is the show-and-tell, where ranchers bring in their livestock for exhibition and education. Being from a farm background, and long since a city slicker, I enjoy leaning on the corral fences and admiring the cattle, secure in the knowledge that it has been 35 years since I last had to muck out a stall, feed them, and lay down fresh straw bedding. Nothing increases the beauty of livestock more than knowing you don't have to do the work looking after them. (A dogie, by the way, is an orphan calf.)

I walked down an aisle of horses, with no other human in sight. One of the horses, a young bay, was whinnying unceasingly. I stopped and gave her a friendly scratch on her mane. She quietened down immediately. Just lonely, I guess. Saw a Texas Longhorn. Don't know if it was actually from Texas, but it did have the long twisted horns.

Programming: Git Along Real Dogs.

The Superdogs celebrated their 30th annual appearance at the Calgary Stampede in the Corral Arena. It was the usual set of

acts, with dogs high-jumping and racing through obstacle courses. All of the dogs and their owners are regular people, not professionals. The Master of Ceremonies takes pride in announcing the high percentage of dogs in the act which were adopted from humane societies across Canada.

The dogs are not perfectly trained, which makes the show funnier and more interesting when they veer off the track. It seems an instinct that if they failed a high jump and knocked a bar off, instead of continuing on down the track they would pick up the offending bar and carry it about the floor, with the owner in hot pursuit. (A dog, by the way, is a four-legged animal that runs about freely and barks a lot. Not to be confused with science fiction fans, who have only two legs.)

Programming: Whoa, Nelly!

This year the Stampede hosted the national miniature horse championships. The schedule listed a show jumping event for them. I couldn't see how anyone could ride a waist-high horse, so I went along to see how it was done. How it was done was that the owners had the horses on long leashes and ran alongside them as they jumped the bars. It was a timed event and depended as much on the owner's physical fitness as the horse's. Prior to the event, a tractor came out and harrowed the sand smooth, but it was a normal-sized tractor, not a garden tractor.

Next up with the miniature horses was the country pleasure driving event, in which the horses pull a sulky with their owner. It is not a race. The contestants circle the ring at various paces (walk or trot) while the judges look at their style. There was a test in which the rig came to a stop and then had to back up in a straight line. Horses of any size don't like to back up, so this is indeed a test of skill. Most of the owners were dressed in Western clothing, but one man was dressed as an English country squire. He was the exact image of Captain Peacock in the television series *ARE YOU BEING SERVED?*. No sign of Miss Brahms, alas.

At the opposite end of the spectrum were the giant draft horses. I didn't get around to seeing them in the show ring, but did wander the aisles of the barns and look at them in their stalls. I was glad that we only had a Shetland pony back on the farm to muck out.

Programming: There's Gold In Them Thar Seeds.

One of the biggest agricultural displays was for biofuels, a boon to farmers everywhere. In western Canada the major biofuel crop is canola, an oilseed that was previously used mostly as cooking oil but is now touted as a replacement for diesel fuel. (Rudolf Diesel had originally intended for his engine to run on peanut oil, not petroleum.) To catch the interest of urban teenagers, there was a jet-powered funny car dragster on display which runs on

pure canola oil. For the youngest generation, there was a sandbox filled with canola seeds, not sand, and digging toys.

The canola boom has been a godsend for farmers, and this was not lost on pickup truck manufacturers, who placed their tents strategically in the agriculture area of the Stampede. They seemed to be attracting only urban cowboys, none of whom would recognize a canola plant if they tripped over it. Calgary rush hour is a contest between the SUVs and the pickup trucks, with a few effete Ontario immigrants driving Smart cars sandwiched in between. For the record, both my cars are Honda Civics.

Art Show.

Like other SF conventions, the art show was mostly stereotyped paintings and small bronze sculptures. If it wasn't a string of galloping horses, then it was a cowboy admiring the mountain scenery. There were also wildlife artists, with the usual collection of bears rearing up on hind legs and trumpeting elk. Unlike other SF conventions, there were no cute little household dragons or warrior princesses charging into battle wearing only bikinis.

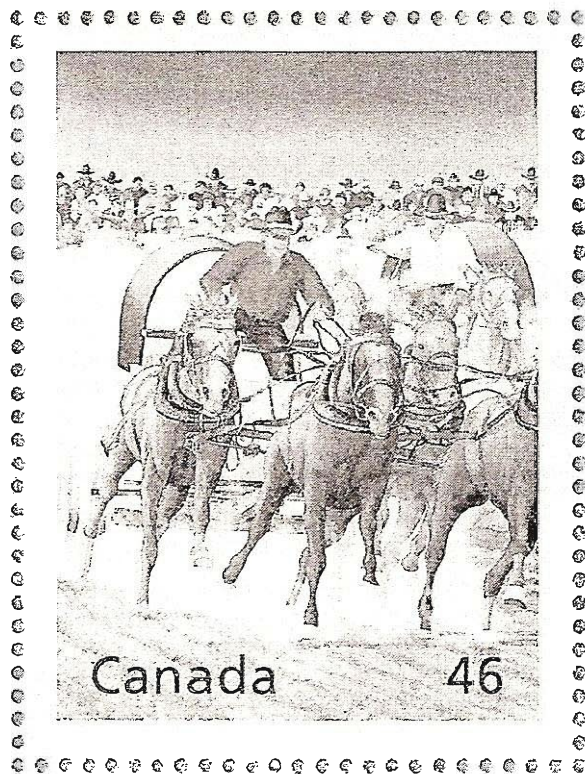
Edward Michell had abstract splatter paintings with lots of black, the gimmick being that the black pigment was actual bitumen from the Athabasca Tar Sands. He noted that the only problem

was that the bitumen took months to dry. His posted list of clientele were all oil companies and oilmen. Alberta's current economic boom rests entirely on the oilsands. Our conventional oil production peaked in 1978 and is now half of what it was despite twice as many wells. Every morning, Albertans of all religious faiths kneel beside their breakfast table, face towards the Athabasca Tar Sands, and pray for the boom to continue.

One difference between the Calgary Stampede and other SF conventions is that the former pre-screens artists to ensure they are competent. No terribly, terribly earnest pencil drawings of Mr. Spock done by someone who will never be able to do a portrait.

The Dealer Bourse.

The dealer bourse, in the Roundup Centre, had several hundred booths. Only a couple actually sold books, about the same ratio as the average SF convention. There were the usual booths, such as the one selling magic crystals that prevent heart attacks and let you live to 100. SF fans at the Stampede buy a lot of miracle mops, food processors, and chamois cloths. The man who sells 10-metre extension ladders that fold down into 1-metre step ladders seems to be able to earn the cost of his booth since he comes back every year. I've never actually seen anyone buy a ladder, at least not wandering the convention grounds with one tucked under their arms.



Food.

SF fans are always hungry. The Calgary Stampede aims to please, with genuine western foods including pyrogies (the Ukrainians were the first major group of colonists on the prairies), and Chinese (most ranch cooks in western Canada were ex-coolies left over from the railroad building).

There were booths selling mini-doughnuts coated in enough granulated sugar to kill a diabetic at ten paces. Fudge was available in dozens of flavours, with and without nuts and/or marshmallows. Marinated chicken on sourdough bread is a traditional western recipe, since it was easy for the chuckwagon cook to toss a cage of chickens into the back of the wagon. Pizza is a popular modern cowboy food. It is a poor prairie village today that does not have at least one pizzeria. Steak is too expensive for the regular cowboy diet, but hamburgers are a mainstay. As for the fatty content of ground meat, that is why God gave us Lipitor.

Costuming.

For some reason, few of the attendees dressed up as aboriginals. I guess no one wants to be identified with the losing side. This seems strange compared to other SF subfandoms, such as Star Wars, where fans don't hesitate to dress up as storm troopers.

Many Stampede-goers dress up as drugstore cowboys, wearing costumes that would make any cow bust a gut with laughter on sight. Young women in micro-mini denim skirts display their legs to advantage, and fat women display their legs to disadvantage. As with any SF convention, obesity is the standard, but everyone is accepting of everyone else. -6-

There were lots of pink cowboy hats and pink shirts being worn by men this year. This was part of a breast cancer campaign, in which Stampede officials challenged men "Are you brave enough to wear pink?". The pink cowboy hats sold for \$35 each, the proceeds going to cancer research.

Unlike most Calgarians, I wear a white cowboy hat year-round, the main reason being that I can't take the sun like I used to. I don't like baseball caps because they don't protect you from the weather on all sides the way a Stetson does. For two weeks of the year I am in fashion, followed by a couple of weeks of "Don't you know the Stampede's over?", followed by acceptance that I obviously am an old cow hand gone to the city. I found out by accident that if I wear it at work in the Parks Dept., the general public assumes that I am someone in authority. In actual fact, Parks employees do not wear uniforms, but everyone associates the Stetson with forest rangers. This can be embarrassing when I am hiking out in the Rocky Mountains, as tourists come up to me and ask the way to the nearest moose.

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2007 Jul 9

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FOR SCHEDULES

And So To Home.

After about eight hours at the convention, my feet were starting to hurt, so homeward bound it was. There is no direct route between my house and the Stampede grounds. I took the L R T train southbound to the Chinook station, then transferred to the #72 circle route bus. The bus driver was new on the route.

He missed two stops despite shouts from disembarking passengers. The rest of us quickly

learned not to try to exit by the back door as is normal but to stand at the front door where he couldn't help but notice us.

But Wait! There's More!

Although the Stampede grounds are the central focus of the rodeo, the downtown core hosts innumerable events during the ten days. The pedestrian mall is lined with both genuine and ersatz cowboy bands, and mini-parades of chuckwagons and marching bands constantly interrupt traffic. I pick up my mail at the downtown post office, and more than once took fifteen minutes to drive one block because a wagon train was passing by. It reminded me of Harry Golden's complaint in one of his books that big cities spend millions of dollars trying to make traffic flow smoothly, then let anyone with a \$50 parade permit snarl it up.

Out in the suburbs, every shopping plaza has its free Stampede breakfast, consisting of flapjacks, orange juice or coffee, and sausages. Every store has its decor dressed with unbarked spruce planks. (No pioneer townsman ever built his store with anything but kiln-dried lumber or stone; unbarked planks were what ranchers used for corrals.)

Calgary taverns and roadhouses rely on the Stampede as their biggest moneymaker of the year, as indeed do the breathalyser squads of the police.

BNAPEX 2007 CALTAPEX CONSIDERED AS A SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

by Dale Speirs

Introduction.

I am very heavily involved in my stamp collecting hobby, having been bulletin editor for the Calgary Philatelic Society (CPS) since 1983, and publishing numerous philatelic articles in various national and specialty publications over the years. I also work on the CPS Show Committee as the show catalogue editor and helping out at set-up and tear-down. Calgary's normal annual stamp show is CALTAPEX, held in October. Last year we instead hosted the national show of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada, called Royal 2006 Royale. This year we hosted a joint convention called BNAPEX 2007 CALTAPEX, hosted by the British North America Philatelic Society (BNAPS) and the CPS.

BNAPS is an international organization of stamp collectors who specialize in Canadian philately, including the pre-Confederation provinces and pre-1776 USA. Its annual convention moves around Canada and the USA, and is a deliberately small convention, with not more than 200 members, although the exhibits and dealer bourse are open to the public free. It is closer to some of the literary SF conventions, while Royal Royale caters to all stamp collectors and gets a couple of thousand visitors.

BNAPEX this year is on the Labour Day weekend, -8-
it being the only feasible time to book a convention site
in Calgary at a reasonable cost.

Waiting For Godot.

Planning a convention starts a year in advance. At first we had monthly meetings of the Show Committee, but in the final two months the meetings sped up to biweekly, with the final conclave two days before the event.

In the beginning, nothing much seemed to happen. I couldn't even block out the show catalogue because I didn't know how many pages to set aside for the list of exhibits, seminars, and so forth. This is the most frustrating part of doing a show catalogue, sitting by helplessly and waiting for copy to come in. However, I did get the front end of the book started with one-page messages of welcome from philatelic VIPS and predictable items such as the floor plan of the hotel. I could and did write filler copy on my own, but it is annoying waiting on others who have their own deadlines or none at all.

Copy finally started to flow in by late July and in a sudden rush by mid-August. My own deadlines went out the window when my Uncle Norman died on August 8, for whom I am executor and thus had to run about town dealing with funeral homes and

lawyers. I recovered within a week, and the catalogue closed on August 15. From there it was a matter of putting the catalogue on disk as a pdf, printing off a dummy copy, and taking it in to the printer. A week later I picked up the boxes of catalogues from the printer, passed them on to the Registration people, and thus concluded my major task of the show.

But there is no rest for the wicked. A couple of days before the show, the Awards Banquet menu was finalized with the hotel, and I was asked to prepare the menu as pdf copy so it could be produced at the printers on elegant cardstock. I quit going to banquets years ago because the food is never what I enjoy and I don't like suffering through speeches and endless presentations. For the record, here is what the guests ate:

First Course: Roasted Corn and Shrimp Chowder served with Jalapeno Corn Bread

Second Course: Butter Lettuce with Roasted Red Capsicum Triangle, Orange Segments, and Vinaigrette

Third Course: Blackened British Columbia Salmon on Wild Rice, Exotic Fruit Salsa with Cilantro, Painted Lotus Root, and Asparagus

or
Cranberry and Pistachio Stuffed Chicken Breast on Herb Risotto,

with Tequila Sunrise Sauce Mirror and medley of seasonal vegetables

Fourth Course: Chocolate Pyramid Anglaise with Tulip Spiral and trio of sauces

Wine: red and white house labels

I always get a laugh at pretentious menus like this. Translating the above into plain English, the guests actually ate:

First Course: Chowder with shrimp and corn, plus bread to mop it up with

Second Course: Salad with vinegar dressing

Third Course: Farmed fish, with two veg and fruit salad
or
Spiced chicken drowned in sauce, plus veg

Fourth Course: Chocolate muffin drowned in syrup

Wine: Cheapest plonk available from the wholesaler

There is an old joke that most people who drift into crime do so because you get to sleep in late and there is no heavy lifting involved. This would explain why crime among genuine philatelists is very rare, what with having to set the dealer tables in place, put up hundreds of exhibit frames, and be there early to open the show.

We had 180 frames of exhibits. A frame holds sixteen 8.5 by 11 pages, and there are two frames per display unit (one on each side) thus requiring 90 units to be set up. The rows of frames were marked out with tape on the ballroom carpet, with the dealer tables around the outside edge of the ballroom. The hotel already set up the tables, and it took us about three hours to set up the frames. This included a break halfway between for cold cuts and soda pop, before returning to work refreshed by a sugar rush.

As is traditional at many SF conventions, the hotel was being renovated, including some of our function space. The tradesmen were still frantically scurrying about setting wall lamps in place, sanding drywall, and pulling wires through the studs. Like most SF conventions, we were plagued by a few people who couldn't understand why everything wasn't instantly ready to go for them, despite the fact that the show doesn't officially open until tomorrow. We paid no account to them, and by 21h00, the

exhibits were going in to the frames, dealers were unpacking, and the tradesmen and I took our buses home.

For non-philatelic spouses, the convention had assorted tours, including one today for early arrivals out to the Drumheller badlands, about two hours east of Calgary. Besides the obligatory tour of the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology, the world's largest fossil museum, the tour bus went around the Dinosaur Trail, a two-lane highway that loops through the badlands.

The bus also took a short-cut via the Bleriot ferry, one of the few remaining scow ferries left in North America. Named after its original ferryman who homesteaded there, the brother of the pioneer aviator who flew the English Channel, the ferry can hold three cars or one tour bus. Scow ferries are flat-bottom shallow-draft boats winched back and forth across the river. The Red Deer River is only about a metre deep outside of the spring floods, so nothing bigger can be floated on the river. I talked to the club member who led the group of 27 outlanders, who weren't expecting the ferry and were rather thrilled by it. The bus bottomed out driving off the ferry and almost got stuck, but finally got off without anything worse than a scraped bumper. The ferry could have been replaced by a bridge decades ago, but it is such a popular tourist attraction that the provincial government keeps it running for the benefit of the tourist trade.

In keeping with another tradition of SF conventions, we were sharing the hotel with a contrasting group, this time the annual tattoo arts festival. The old geezers tottering about with tens of thousands of dollars of stamps in their briefcases stared with amazement at the young men and women tottering about on high heels (mostly the men; the women had more practice and didn't totter so much). Generally the displayed tattoos were confined to arms and shaved heads (mostly the women), so there wasn't much for the geezers to get excited about. At least we weren't sharing with a Jehovah's Witness convention or a policy meeting of the New Democratic Party (labour-socialists who know all the words to "Solidarity Forever").

Lights, Camera, No Action!

2007-08-31

The first day of the show. I spent most of my time circulating through the dealer bourse; tomorrow I'll take the time to view the exhibits. Various specialty clubs had meetings, and there was a track of seminars on stamp specialties. There was a television crew filming the show as well.

At most SF conventions, if a television crew shows up, they pick out the overweight nerd in the Klingon costume and make him the official representative of the convention. The newspapers will invariably use the headline "Aliens beam into town", and to assuage their conscience, will devote a couple of paragraphs to

whatever famous author they can track down.

At stamp shows, grey-haired citizens cannot be made fun of, as some of them will be lawyers or political supporters with connections to the government who can make life uncomfortable for the station owner. The news media therefore have to make do with the old saw about a fortune in stamps on display, or how all stamps are guaranteed to make money as an investment. In actual truth, most stamps are inexpensive, and investing in them is like buying stocks.

Knowledge Is Power.

Stamp exhibits do not receive awards based on the value or rarity of the items. Instead, exhibits are judged on how well they tell a story, using the stamps and covers as illustration. (A cover is the combination of an envelope, its postmark, and the stamp.) If it is a postal history exhibit, it must tell the story of a town's post office, or some aspect of the postal system such as registered mail. If it is a topical exhibit, it must explain the topic chosen.

I got to chatting with Donna, an exhibitor who is a member of the Calgary club. Her exhibit "Horse Breeds Of The World" has been winning silver and she hopes to add better material to bring it up to vermeil or gold. We got to talking about horses in general, and she answered one question that has

long puzzled me; how do you tell the difference between a paint and a pinto. The answer is that you can't. All paint horses are pintos, but not all pintos are paints. The paint breeders only want stock horses descended from thoroughbreds or quarter horses, while the pinto breeders also include ponies and oddball breeds.

I also discovered something else. Donna's mother knew the designer of the Calgary centennial stamp shown on page 2, and knew who the cowboys were. The stamp design, supposedly depicting a wild horse event at the Calgary Stampede, used cowboys from Strathmore, a village about a half-hour drive east of Calgary on the Trans-Canada Highway. Yeehaw indeed.

Saturday In The Snake House.

2007-09-01

I spent most of my time at the dealer bourse today and did a bit of looking at some of the exhibits. Unlike many SF conventions, the dealer bourse and exhibits are free to the general public, so we had continuous visits from highly tattooed people. They obviously had trouble figuring us out. Why would anyone pay money for old stamps or covers and then exhibit them? I watched from a distance as one woman stared in confusion at the show. She had a blue python tattooed on her that started up one arm, looped around her neck, and then down the other arm. Another snake rested its head in her cleavage, and the tail evidently went down her belly to some place I can only speculate upon. She shrugged

her shoulders and then left. Those stamp collectors -12- are such strange people. Her passage through the floor did not cause any comment, as the stamp collectors were too busy rummaging through the dealer stocks to notice her. Two dealers in the bourse sold books, about average for an SF convention.

It happens that tonight the Show Committee will be sponsoring a barbeque at the nearby Calgary Zoo, where, as part of the entertainment, assorted animals will be brought out for the guests to handle and have their photos taken with them. Including a reticulated python. However, venison will not be served, just hamburgers, cold cuts, and vegetables. Too bad; I think roast baby panda would be very popular.

Judge Not, Lest You Be Judged.

2007-09-02

One of the seminars on Sunday was the Judges' Critique, where the four judges discuss why they rated the exhibits as they did (gold, silver, bronze). The exhibitors formed the audience, many carrying rope and feathers, while a kettle of tar simmered at the back of the room. Actually it wasn't that bad; philatelic critiques are very civilized and constructive. The main emphasis in judging a stamp or postal history exhibit is how it tells the story about its subject, and whether or not there is extraneous, irrelevant, or missing material in the exhibit. The story is to have a minimum of text, and is to be told largely by the stamps or covers.

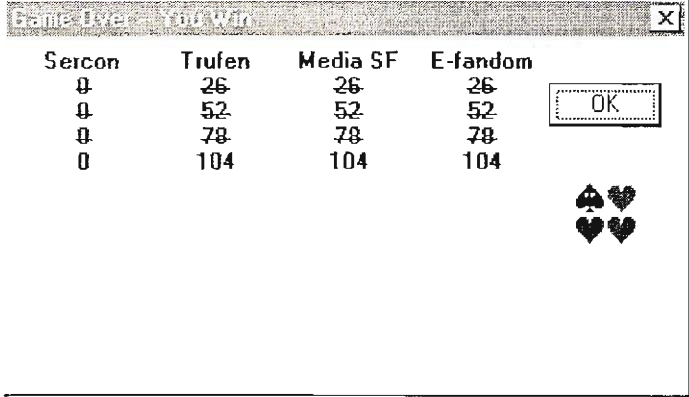
Some exhibits suffered because the pages didn't live up to the exhibit title. One exhibit showed Canada's wildflower stamps of the 1980s but was downgraded because it omitted some issues and over-emphasized others. A common mistake was to announce a time frame surveyed by the exhibit but then skip decades because the collector didn't have the material. If an exhibit title says "The History Of British Stamps From 1900 to 1940", then the pages had better have stamps from each decade. The collector can't jump from 1910 to 1930 and hope the judges didn't notice the intervening gap.

Other exhibits went on too long, like a ten-volume SF trilogy. There was one at BNAPEX which showed all the Canadian stamps from 1853 to 1952, from the reigns of Queen Victoria to King George VI inclusive. That was too much to take in at one showing, much like going to a 24-hour movie marathon.

Meanwhile, the tattoo people had thinned out and were heading home. Distinguished-looking executives shook tattooed hands with outlaw bikers, and thirty-something moms with screaming kids in tow said goodbye to young women dressed like streetwalkers.

Not long after, we philatelists began saying our own good-byes. Distinguished-looking executives shook clean hands with philatelists dressed like outlaw bikers, and thirty-something moms

with screaming kids in tow said goodbye to young women dressed like librarians. Tear-down is always faster than setup, and we were able to clear the hotel within two hours. Overall the stamp show went very well. I received many compliments about the show catalogue I edited, including one from the president of BNAPS. The dealers were happy with their takings. I assume the tattoo artists had a good time as well, but can't really say for certain.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]

FROM: Joseph Nicholas
15 Jansons Road
Tottenham, London N15 4JU, England

2007-08-29

[Re: humans muddling through climate change albeit at a cost] Biologists have argued, before the rise of climate change as a threat, that we humans are responsible for what is the sixth mass extinction in the history of life on Earth and that biodiversity is in decline. Greatly reduced biodiversity means little hope for the maintenance of sentient life. The human species is perhaps already bumping up against the point at which it should be starting to go extinct, irrespective of what climate change may or may not do to or for us.

Unless, perchance, the technological singularity, or as Ken MacLeod put it, the rapture for nerds, arrives first. In that case it won't matter what happens to Earth's climate or any other species. We'll just digitize our consciousness, download ourselves into indestructible new bodies, and we'll all live forever.

[Assuming, of course, that it isn't an Apple body or Microsoft software and that the manufacturer will continue to support it.]

I Also Heard From:

-14-

John Held Jr, Edmonton Small Press Association
(who thanked me for supporting them, even though I don't recall having heard of them before), Phlox Icona, Ken Bausert, Ned Brooks, Franz Zrilich, Jae Leslie Adams, Henry Welch

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

noticed by Dale Speirs

Kristensen, P., and T. Bjerkedal (2007) **Explaining the relation between birth order and intelligence.** SCIENCE 316:1717

"Negative associations between birth order and intelligence level have been found in numerous studies. The explanation for this relation is not clear, and several hypotheses have been suggested. One family of hypotheses suggests that the relation is due to more-favorable family interaction and stimulation of low-birth-order children, whereas others claim that the effect is caused by prenatal gestational factors. We show that intelligence quotient (IQ) score levels among nearly 250,000 military conscripts were dependent on social rank in the family and not on birth order as such, providing support for a family interaction explanation."

Angel, R. (2006) **Feasibility of cooling the Earth with a cloud of small spacecraft near the inner Lagrange point (L1).** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 103:17184-17189

"If it were to become apparent that dangerous changes in global climate were inevitable, despite greenhouse gas controls, active methods to cool the Earth on an emergency basis might be desirable. The concept considered here is to block 1.8% of the solar flux with a space sunshade orbited near the inner Lagrange point (L1), in-line between the Earth and sun. ... transparent material would be used to deflect the sunlight, rather than to absorb it, to minimize the shift in balance out from L1 caused by radiation pressure. Three advances aimed at practical implementation are presented. First is an optical design for a very thin refractive screen with low reflectivity, leading to a total sunshade mass of 20 million tons. Second is a concept aimed at reducing transportation cost to \$50/kg by using electromagnetic acceleration to escape Earth's gravity, followed by ion propulsion. Third is an implementation of the sunshade as a cloud of many spacecraft, autonomously stabilized by modulating solar radiation pressure. These meter-sized "flyers" would be assembled completely before launch, avoiding any need for construction or unfolding in space. They would weigh a gram each, be launched in stacks of 800,000, and remain for a projected lifetime of 50 years within a 100,000-km-long cloud. The concept builds on

existing technologies. It seems feasible that it could be developed and deployed in 25 years at a cost of a few trillion dollars, <0.5% of world gross domestic product (GDP) over that time."

Speirs: Not a hope in hell. Politicians do not think any further than the next election, and spending several trillion dollars over 25 years isn't SF, it's fantasy. Something I wonder about is how much waste heat will be generated by the electrical power plants needed to produce enough electricity to throw 20 megatons of payload into space. An interesting idea, but it belongs in ANALOG or POPULAR MECHANICS.

Vaks, A., et al (2007) **Desert speleothems reveal climatic window for African exodus of early modern humans.** GEOLOGY 35:831-834

"One of the first movements of early modern humans out of Africa occurred 130 - 100 thousand years ago (ka), when they migrated northward to the Levant region. The climatic conditions that accompanied this migration are still under debate. Using high-precision multicollector inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (MC-ICP-MS) U-Th methods, we dated carbonate cave deposits (speleothems) from the central and southern Negev Desert of Israel, located at the northeastern margin of the Saharan-Arabian Desert.

Speleothems grow only when rainwater enters the unsaturated zone, and this study reveals that a major cluster of wet episodes (the last recorded in the area) occurred between 140 and 110 ka. This episodic wet period coincided with increased monsoonal precipitation in the southern parts of the Saharan-Arabian Desert. The disappearance at this time of the desert barrier between central Africa and the Levant, and particularly in the Sinai-Negev land bridge between Africa and Asia, would have created a climatic window for early modern human dispersion to the Levant."

Speirs: Humans did not just migrate once out of Africa but in several different waves. Many colonies were driven back by the Ice Ages, and new groups came out of Africa much later.

Giles, D.C., et al (2007) **The psychological meaning of personal record collections and the impact of changing technological forms.** JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC PSYCHOLOGY 28:429-443

"What we have presented here is a theoretical model that identifies three clear aspects of the psychology of collecting recorded music. Traditional record collections of CDs and vinyl seem to be associated with the relationship between the consumer and the artist, and carry powerful meanings for the presentation

of the self and the construction of identity: digital music collections make music consumption a more social activity and encourage a pluralistic musical outlook, particularly in younger owners. Most of the iPod owners in our sample were keen collectors of CDs as well. Indeed there were frequent comments about the distinction between the two formats: typically, digital downloads were used to explore new music, often friends' recommendations, but consumers still felt a need to purchase particular favourites on CD. This way all three aspects of music collecting can be incorporated into an individual's consumption pattern. For a start, it seems that the death of CDs feared by some retailers may be a long way off: even for committed downloaders, the traditional aspects of music collecting still mean that there is a felt need for material recordings.

This may, of course, reflect the fact that our sample began their lives as music consumers in the CD or vinyl era. They have been socialised into a culture where ownership of recorded music is strongly associated with personal identity, so that purchasing one's first record is an important landmark in the lifespan. Recorded music also has a visible material presence in the child's environment: items of furniture like CD towers and display cases have become ubiquitous features of our homes. It will take many years, and probably a new generation of homeowners, before these items become obsolete."