

OPUNTIA

67.1A

ISSN 1183-2703

Edgar Allan Poe's Birthday 2009

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.

THE STATE OF ZINEDOM AS AT 2008-12-31

by Dale Speirs

Zines as we understand them today began shortly after the American Civil War, when small but cheap tabletop printing presses became widely available. In 1876, zinesters organized the National Amateur Press Association, and in 1937, science fiction fans organized the Fantasy A.P.A. (FAPA), both of which are still extant today. Apas are a type of zine distro whereby the members send in x number of copies of their zine to a central mailer, who then collates them into bundles and sends one back to each member. There is a membership fee to cover the cost of postage but it is cheaper than mailing zines individually. Many zinesters still send out individual copies for trade or contribution of an article, known as The Usual.

I define e-zines as those which are posted as pdf or other locked-in format. There are many Websites proclaiming themselves as e-zines, but which are simply HTML posts which may or may not be archived in the same form they appeared. This is an important point. If someone cites an e-zine, there has to be assurance that those following up on the citation years later are viewing it as it was originally published. Blogs are a separate category and cannot be considered as e-zines. They most resemble the type of chatty letters that people used to regularly write to family members prior to the 1920s. (In that decade, cheap telephone

service first became widely available and caused a dramatic drop in first-class letter mail.)

The World Wide Web began to cut into zine numbers in the early 2000s, as many zinesters switched to the Web and newbies went straight to it. Many people proclaimed the death of the Papernet, but while real zines are down in number, their extinction still seems a long time coming. E-zines were touted as the future but appear to have been sideswiped by blogs. There is a site for e-zines at www.efanzines.com where they can be uploaded for free, and scanned paper zines archived. Most of the new issues are from a small number of publishers though. The advent of blogs has had one good effect on real zines, as crudzines are very rare these days. The babblers and trivia mongers are busy posting blogs. It is evident that the discipline needed to create and post an e-zine is missing from the majority. There has been no massive flood of new publishers posting e-zines.

Although a few e-zines are in landscape format so the reader doesn't have to scroll up and down, many are still 8.5 x 11 vertical format. The reason given by many is that the reader will want to print off copies. This is doubtful; a few will but most don't bother. Further, it would be just as easy to print out horizontal format e-zines. Particularly in science fiction fandom, there is a strong degree of conservatism. A commercial magazine has to be 8.5 x 11, with the title at top, because that affects newsagent sales.

A real zine, sent through the Papernet for The Usual, does not have to conform to any such standards. It can be produced a la OPUNTIA, the title can be at the bottom, and the editor can insert cat flaps on the cover or add 3-D texture. Yet conformity reigns supreme, and the vast majority of zines are 8.5 x 11 and stapled at the upper left corner.

Supposedly the decline of real zines is laid to the high cost of postage and printing, although I note that the people who say that still seem to have money for booze and travel to conventions. I have been keeping statistics on the number of zines received for ten years now, as shown in Table 1. This table also includes apazines, some of which are available for The Usual, others only by joining the apa. What is important here is not the absolute number of zines but the relative trend. Even today there are still thousands of real zines being published, but I only receive a fraction of them. Everyone on the Papernet is a node connecting with other nodes (zines) but no one is the centre and connects with all of them. Some zines I would like to have traded for were not available to me as for whatever reason the editor declined to trade.

My 2008 totals are essentially the same as 2007, down by two but not statistically significant. It appears that paper zines have reached a plateau, with as many people entering as leaving. On the data presented so far, it seems the Papernet has reached the long tail state.

| Year | Australia | Canada | Britain | USA | Others | FAPA | Other apas | Totals |
|------|-----------|--------|---------|-----|--------|------|------------|--------|
| 1998 | 23 | 31 | 39 | 244 | 7 | 155 | 10 | 509 |
| 1999 | 14 | 51 | 67 | 213 | 19 | 150 | 125 | 639 |
| 2000 | 7 | 55 | 55 | 161 | 29 | 140 | 90 | 537 |
| 2001 | 9 | 42 | 35 | 172 | 25 | 132 | 68 | 483 |
| 2002 | 10 | 40 | 42 | 184 | 31 | 102 | 42 | 451 |
| 2003 | 4 | 72 | 27 | 171 | 26 | 111 | 34 | 445 |
| 2004 | 1 | 33 | 19 | 172 | 34 | 135 | 53 | 447 |
| 2005 | 8 | 34 | 14 | 148 | 27 | 116 | 0 | 347 |
| 2006 | 5 | 10 | 32 | 130 | 18 | 120 | 0 | 315 |
| 2007 | 5 | 32 | 12 | 139 | 10 | 105 | 0 | 303 |
| 2008 | 5 | 28 | 10 | 136 | 7 | 115 | 0 | 301 |

The above categories “Australia” through “Others” refer to zines received by The Usual, and do not include the zines received in apas, which I have segregated in the next two columns. Since I am anglophone, the “Others” category only includes countries such as South Africa where zine publishing is done in English. The USA presents the largest number of zines because they are the largest anglophone nation. I know there are other zines in Britain which I don’t get but the editors seem to prefer to save their money for beer rather than overseas postage. Australia has always

been the runt of the litter. “Other apa” totals dropped to zero because I discontinued my memberships in all but FAPA, not because there was a sudden cessation in them. Years ago, I used to joke that apas were the black holes of zinedom, since people would disappear into them instead of publishing for The Usual. Now I have to amend my opinion and say that apas may be the last best hope because their distribution and postage costs are much less.

I belong to FAPA, currently at 38 members, and had membership in a few others before cutting back due to lack of time, such as POD (Point of Divergence, an alternative history apa, and which is still going)..

In 2004, an electronic apa started up, whose contents are posted on efanines.com but are only openable by members, save for an annual sample copy. eAPA nonetheless is not overflowing with contributors, although it has a limit of 15 members, not currently achieved. The October 2008 issue had nine members, but one of the zines was also distributed in FAPA. eAPA doesn't disclose the number of zines in each pdf to non-members but does list the number of pages, so it is possible to make a comparison using that metric. Table 2 at right shows total number of pages published for the year in some selected apas.

Since electronic publishing doesn't cost any more for 100 pages than it does for 10 pages, this indicates that the controlling factor in publishing, electronic or real-world, is the will of the publisher to do the actual work in preparing an issue, not the cost of printing and mailing. This would explain the popularity of blogs, few of which are noted for lengthy, well thought out essays. Most are a few paragraphs of daily idle chitchat and some links to other people's work.

| Year | eAPA | FAPA | POD |
|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1997 | | 1,348 | |
| 1998 | | 1,454 | |
| 1999 | | 1,540 | 1,308 |
| 2000 | | 1,463 | 1,533 |
| 2001 | | 1,266 | 1,360 |
| 2002 | | 1,389 | 712 |
| 2003 | | 1,273 | |
| 2004 | n.a. | 1,903 | |
| 2005 | 424 | 1,065 | |
| 2006 | 722 | 1,287 | |
| 2007 | 494 | 1,019 | |
| 2008 | 448 | 1,088 | |

My conclusion is that the Papernet has reached the long tail of its existence. It will not die anymore than television killed stage theatre, or the Internet will kill cable, but there have been profound changes, setting aside the obvious decline in numbers. I can't quantify the quality of zines, but it is extremely rare now to get a primitive crudzine.

BOOK REVIEWS

by Dale Speirs

Postal Dogs by Salvador Bofarull (2008, hardcover, from Pogo Press, Four Cardinal Lane, St. Paul, Minnesota 55127) is a look at the history of dogs in the service of the post office, mostly the larger draft breeds such as huskies or St. Bernards. A major part of the book is devoted to sleigh dogs of the North American and Siberian Arctic, well known to philatelists and non-philatelists alike as mail carriers. Bofarull refers to them as sledges, rather than the American term 'sled' or the Canadian 'sleigh', which can be a bit jarring because 'sledge' in North America has an entirely different meaning. However, he does a good job covering their history, particularly on the Siberian side, about which little has been published in Canada. Some of the hazards of carrying dog team mail included the dogs taking off after a deer or rabbit if one should happen to cross the trail, upsetting the sleigh and delaying the mail. There is more to dog mail carriers than just the Arctic though. They were widely used by armies around the world as individual messengers in the same manner as pigeons, except that they could carry more. In Europe they were often used to pull small carts for mail carriers, often with the carrier riding on them. This book is well illustrated throughout with archival photos of the dog messengers and their handlers. Today their use is obsolete, and only done for staged events such as dog sleigh races. Altogether a nice look at an interesting sidelight of postal history.

The Error World by Simon Garfield (2008) is a confessional about stamp collecting as his personal life crumbles. He is having an affair with another woman, and his wife, worse yet, has no idea of how much he is spending on his collection. Garfield specialized in error stamps, and it didn't take long for his marriage counselor to spot the connection between stamps with colours missing and a life with people missing.

The memoir begins with his childhood, as told through his stamp collecting adventures, from sending off for approvals to lining up with his mother at the post office for the victory stamps when England won the soccer World Cup. On a more philosophical note, Garfield considers why he collected stamps, and concludes that it was because it offered a sense of order during his childhood. When he was a boy, his father died suddenly of a heart attack, his older brother suddenly died not long after from viral pneumonia, and his mother slowly began dying of cancer a few years later. Stamps were a release and an escape.

From there, Garfield writes of the philatelic world, mostly from a British perspective, as he saw it while chasing stamps. The stamp dealers, mostly honourable; the customers, too many of them gullible; and the sharp-practice men, who have migrated en masse to eBay. He considers at length the obsession of collectors, whether stamps, art, or soccer memorabilia, and why such obsessions are seldom taken up

by the children or grandchildren these days. He notes that the greatest regrets that collectors have is not buying that one item when they had the chance. Garfield's life-long search was for the Parliamentary issue missing blue, a stamp that appeared from time to time in auctions, always selling just a bit more than he could afford at the time. All told, a sympathetic portrayal of philately.

Alexander Botts (1929, of which I have the 1945 paperback reprint) by William Hazett Upson, is a fix-up novel compiling humorous short stories about a tracked-vehicle salesman in the early 1920s. Upson's day job was with the Caterpillar company, so it is obvious that he was writing what he knew.

But first this digression. I bought this paperback as much out of nostalgia as for the enjoyable stories. When I was a young lad and it were all fields around here, we often visited my paternal grandparents at holidays. At these extended gatherings (they had six children and 21 grandchildren), there would inevitably come the time when the adults were busy chatting about old friends and family I never knew, the younger kids were being noisy out in the back yard, and I, as the third oldest grandchild, was bored. I would go down into the basement where Grandfather kept every magazine he had ever bought, stacked up in metre-high piles. They would be worth good money today; pre-war MACLEANS, SATURDAY EVENING POST, LIFE, and COLLIERS. Alas, when my grandparents moved into a nursing home in 1981, someone

tossed them while cleaning out the house.

-6-

Over the years I actually read through them all, hundreds of issues, not once but several times. One magazine, the title of which I do not recall, had humorous stories about an enthusiastic young salesman named Alexander Botts, who worked for the Farmer's Friend Tractor company, makers of the Earthworm tracked vehicle. A couple of years ago, when I saw the paperback collecting these stories, I had to buy it.

Each story is told in the form of letters from Botts reporting his progress, with telegrams in reply from the Head Office. The plot is always the same. The letters become increasingly apocalyptic as Botts messes up and gets himself into apparently hopeless situations, followed by increasingly apoplectic telegrams as Head Office denies his ridiculous expense claims. In the final letter, there is an unexpected deus ex machina and Botts manages to make the sale, leaving Head Office spluttering but having no choice but to approve his actions. Botts closes the sale no matter how many twists and turns the plot takes.

These stories were written in the 1920s, but it is surprising how well they carry their age. But for the occasional reference to farmers riding their horses into town, the stories could easily be taking place today. Good light reading, although one shouldn't try to read them all straight through in one sitting.

The Alchemist's Apprentice by Dave Duncan (2008, mass market paperback) was a freebie I picked up at the 2008 World Fantasy Convention in Calgary. It is a murder mystery set in an alternative Venice, where Alfero Zeno is apprenticing to Nostradamus (nephew of that one). The only alternative part seems to be the presence of magic that works, where demons can be summoned and tarot cards are actually predictive. This makes it fantasy rather than alternative history. A nobleman has been poisoned, the ruling Council of Ten suspect Nostradamus, and it is up to Zeno to help him find the real murderer. Zeno goes about questioning witnesses, and suspicion is thrown around like road salt. There follows the standard routine of murder mysteries; one can almost tick them off on a list. The likely suspect dies halfway through the novel, everyone has something to hide, the hero escapes several cliffhanger perils, and red herrings are strewn along the footpath. It even ends up with Nostradamus assembling all the suspects in the drawing room of the stately manor and shouting "J'accuse!". The book reads well but one can see the plot coupons coming five pages before they get there.

Beef by Andrew Rimas and Evan Fraser (2008, trade paperback) is blurbed as "*an engaging, panoramic view of the cow's colorful history*". I bought a copy out of interest as an old farm boy. My father was a livestock veterinarian who kept several hundred head of Charolais and Hereford on the side. Dad grew up on a dairy farm but there was no way he could have a practice and milk cows

twice a day, so the herd was pure rangeland cattle, a minimum-maintenance style of ranching. The herd had to be checked twice a day, mostly just driving by and checking for downer or missing animals. In winter, feed had to be hauled out to them, but other than that the work wasn't so hard. The animals spent their entire lives out on pasture, huddling in the bush to keep warm in winters, and relaxing in the fields in summer. Few ever saw the inside of a barn or wanted to. On occasion when we had to put a cow inside, it required a couple of men shouting and thumping her back end to make her go inside.

Most beef today in the USA is corn-fed in factories known as feedlots. The cows never see a green field, and the American government subsidizes the factory farmers so heavily that it is difficult for genuine ranchers in Canada and the USA to compete. My father never had any kind words for feedlot operations. Feedlots produce cheap beef, cheap in more ways than one, and modern consumers think only of price. Feedlot cattle are pumped full of antibiotics and hormones as a matter of course, whereas rangeland cattle only get antibiotics if they actually need them. Our cattle produced more fibrous meat and with better marbling (the veins of fat that give meat its taste), but supermarket shoppers are conditioned to buy at the lowest price. Although I think ethanol fuel is a boondoggle, I am glad to see it has boosted the price of corn to feedlots, which is an advantage to ranchers.

Cattle are herd animals, the better to protect themselves against predators. More eyes and more horns increase the average lifespan. Domestic cattle, *Bos taurus*, were bred from giant wild cattle known as aurochs (*Bos primigenius*). Aurochs evolved about two million years ago in India and spread to Europe. They were woodland creatures, ferocious by all accounts, and much feared. Domestic cattle were selected from them in Neolithic times by choosing for placidity and smaller size. The two species were contemporaneous until 1627 AD, when the last aurochs was killed in Poland, another shameful episode in human history. The oldest known human art, the cave paintings in France, are of aurochs.

Rimas and Fraser discuss the history of cattle and humans, but not in a logical or chronological sequence. The narrative jumps about between disparate subjects, from Kenyan tribes who count wealth by how many cattle they own to bullfighting to Picasso's painting "Guernica", which features a bull. Interspersed at random are recipes for various types of beef dishes.

They also discuss the various religions and cults based on cattle, from the ancient Turks and Greeks to the Mithras cult of ancient Rome. Aurochs were feared for their strength, and a hunter who killed one was a brave man indeed. There was also the not unconsidered advantage of a half-ton of meat to feed an entire village.

Herding cattle came relatively late compared to other types of agriculture such as crops or goat-keeping. It also split the human race into two factions. Herding beef cattle is not compatible with growing crops on the same land. 6,000 years ago, human culture separated into the nomads who kept cattle on rangeland too poor or rough to cultivate, and sedentary farmers who grew crops and lived in a village culture. It was the increasing advantages and population of the urban way of life that allowed the civilized peoples to finally overwhelm the nomads and suppress them.

The farmers of Europe and the Middle East discovered how to turn milk into cheese, which is not only easier to preserve and transport, but was the peasant's main source of protein. Dairying, a different lifestyle than herding beef cattle, soon gave benefits to agrarian economies.

Cattle in Europe were originally valued more for their milk and manure than their beef. Manure was essential to replenish crop lands which would otherwise fail after a decade or so. Cattle were money, and wherever there is money, the thieves show up. Raiding each other's herds was a long time practice of tribes everywhere in the world, although its epitome was along the English/Scottish border, where reiving was long practiced. James I of England, who was also James VI of Scotland, came to the throne in 1603, and finally managed to crush the reivers by a

mixture of hangings, exiling, and impressing into the army. My own family name of Speirs (pronounced “spires”, not “spears”) comes from the Border Counties of Scotland, the name meaning “the spyer’s son”. Acting as a spyer or watchman was a full-time occupation in those days, protecting the herd against the reviers.



It wasn't until the 1600s that modern cattle breeds began to develop. Prior to that different parts of the world had tendencies to recognizable strains of cattle, but the idea of line-breeding for

specific traits and keeping purebred herds is relatively new in human history. The Dutch were the first to develop animal husbandry on a scientific basis. The English squires were impressed by what the Dutch did and soon copied them. Agricultural scientists such as Robert Bakewell and Jethro Tull put breeding and crop production on a numerical basis, weighing animals and crops under various conditions to see which methods produced the greatest return. The spindly all-purpose cow gave way to beef-only or dairy-only breeds, and the animals were fed on cultivated grass, not what they could scrounge in wastelands.

Rimas and Fraser hop, skip, and jump about the history of cattle. They tell the story of how the barbarian hordes of the Khanate introduced rinderpest into Europe and Africa, wiping out millions of cattle. Dairying exploded in volume with the introduction of pasteurization, which meant that milk could be obtained more than a day's travel away and still be safe to drink.

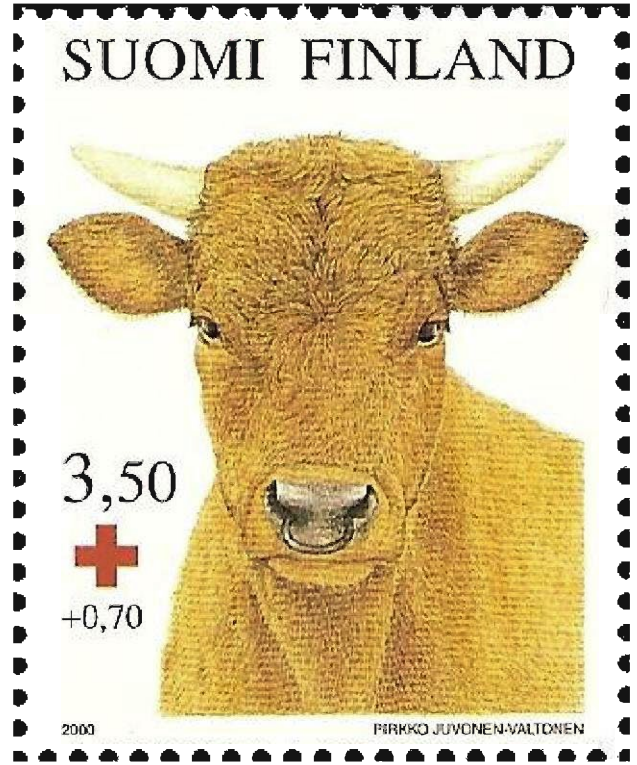
Spain, for various historical and geographical reasons, was where ranching originated in Europe. The conquistadors brought it to Mexico, from whence it spread south to the Argentine pampas and north to the Canadian prairies. The Spanish government shipped young men to the new lands who called themselves vaqueros. The name translates exactly as “cowboy”, and “buckaroo” is a slightly garbled variation of the Spanish word.

The word "rodeo" is the vaquero word for a cattle roundup, and the ten-gallon hat comes from the tan gallen (the elegant) hat of well-to-do Hispanic ranchers. The lifestyle of the modern-day cowboy in western North America is directly derived from the original vaqueros.

The Texas longhorn evolved during the American Civil War while the menfolk were away fighting and their cattle left to fend for themselves on the open range. The legend of the Old West cowboy developed from men such as Charles Goodnight (who also invented the chuckwagon) and the rootless Southern ex-soldiers who lost everything in the war. The famous cattle drives of the Chisholm Trail and the Goodnight-Loving Trail were eventually choked off in the early 1880s by barbed-wire and the arrival of railroads in Texas.

The book concludes with a look at the main problem of modern beef production, that of heavily subsidized feed grain. You eat cheap beef today because cattle are crammed into pens and overfed with grain and antibiotics. The feedlot operators are relatively new in history, and only spread in the last fifty years or so. Feedlot operators bleat that it is the only way to feed our obese nations, and few urbanites know that it wasn't always this way. The authors of this book express the hope that eventually Peak Oil and massive government debts will force an end to factory beef. Although I am sure the present unsustainable system

will collapse and beef production revert to grass-fed beef, I don't have much hope that it will happen in my lifetime.



Pyramid Scheme by Dave Freer and Eric Flint (2003, mass market paperback) is about a small black pyramid that crash lands into the University of Chicago library. It begins to expand, swallowing objects and people but only in some unknown pattern. This triggers a competitive race between various police forces, the military, and the university scientists to get control of the situation. Some of the victims re-materialize later, dead of spear wounds or nearly so from other mishaps. The evidence indicates they had been in the ancient Mediterranean. The novel then switches to the viewpoint of a group of Chicagoans who have found themselves transported into Greek mythology come true, where death is real, and modern weapons don't work, only swords and spears. They land in Odysseus's ship as it traverses between the Scylla and Charybdis monsters, then work their way through the next few chapters of THE ODYSSEY.

Back in Chicago, the pyramid continues to expand, selectively disappearing people as it enlarges. Interior dialogue of the pyramid reveals it is a scout for the Krim. They somehow detected the first use of a nuclear reactor at Chicago and were on the way since. The Krim parasitize the psychic energy of slave species by setting up Ur-universes in which the slaves' mythology becomes real for them. This requires energy for the pyramid to operate at full scale, so the Krim rely on victim species to eventually use a tactical nuke against the pyramid, thereby supplying sufficient energy to be absorbed and to complete the

task of enslavement. 300 other slave species have done so, and it appears that Earth is about to make the same mistake. The Earthlings, however, realize in time not to use a nuke, the pyramid runs out of energy, and begins to shrink, returning the captives from the mythology world. This novel tries to be gritty with practical details about soldering and daily life in primitive societies, but over-exaggerates a bit. The authors also try to wedge in everything they ever read about Greek mythology, not so much with data dumps but by putting the characters through endless vignettes of the myths. I found myself skimming pages occasionally. All told, a fair-to-middling fantasy novel, suitable for killing an hour or two of time.

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.]

For The Clerisy V15#75 (The Usual from Brant Kresovich, Box 404, Getzville, New York 14068-0404) Reviewzine covering older books that deserve renewed attention.

Statement #361 (The Usual from Ottawa SF Society, 18 Norice Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2G 2X5) SF clubzine, always with a strong component of astronomy but particularly so in this issue because of the meteorite that landed near the Alberta-Saskatchewan border on 2008-11-20.

BCSFazine #426 to #428 (The Usual from British Columbia SF Association, c/o Garth Spencer, Box 74122, Vancouver, British Columbia V5V 3P0) SF clubzine with news and listings, plus commentary on the state of fandom.

This Here #9 (The Usual from Nic Farey, Box 178, Saint Leonard, Maryland 20685) Genzine with personal news, SF fandom commentary, wrestling shows, and letters of comment.

The Fossil #338 (US\$15 per year from The Fossils, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan, Denver, Colorado 80209) As usual, lots of good solid articles on the history of zinedom, plus news of the apa scene. #338 has two main articles, one on Thomas Condie, considered to be the first American to publish a zine as we understand them today. His JUVENILEPORT-FOLIO appeared from 1812 to 1816 while he was a student at the University of Pennsylvania. There is also a review of a new book THE CCC CHRONICLES by Alfred Cornebise on the history of camp newsletters and zines published by members of the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression. In addition to

the review, the editor has added reproductions of a number of CCC zine covers.

Probe #137 and #138 (The Usual from Science Fiction South Africa, Box 781401, Sandton 2146, South Africa) SF clubzine with top-quality cover art, letters of comment, reviews, and club news. What sets this zine apart from others is the amount of short fiction they print in every issue. There is also an essay on the archetypes of Star Trek.

Royal Swiss Navy Gazette #16 (The Usual from Garth Spencer, Box 74122, Vancouver, British Columbia V5V 3P0) News and reviews about SF fandom, discussion about fandom, an essay about early Chinese exploration, and letters of comment.

Banana Wings #36 (The Usual from Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7ES, England) SF genzine with articles on zinedom, live action role playing, convention reports, and letters of comment. Robert Lichtman writes about the sad story of a history of apas printed in book form in 1900, but whose author published it himself on newsprint paper. As a result, no one can read the book today because the pages are crumbling, whereas books the same age or older on regular paper are still useable. The book is 350 pages plus pull-out charts, so volunteers willing to scan it are not to be found.

Kairan #13 (The Usual from Gianni Simone, 3-3-23 Nagatsuka, Midori-ku, Yokohama-shi, 226-0027 Kanagawa-ken, Japan) Genzine with several articles on the history of mail art and its future, as well as letters of comment. There is an interesting article on how a group of correspondents began infiltrating election posters for fake candidates into the midst of genuine others on hoardings in Japan, China, Australia, and Uruguay.

The New Port News #242 (The Usual from Ned Brooks, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720) Apazine with short comments on a number of topics.

Vanamonde #763 to #772 (The Usual from John Hertz, 236 South Coronado Street #409, Los Angeles, California 90057) Single-sheet weekly apazine, commenting on diverse topics. Much like a paper blog.

Media Junky #6 and #7 (The Usual from Jason Rodgers, Box 1683, Nashua, New Hampshire 03060) Reviewzine with a selection of anarchist, fringe, music, and miscellaneous zines.

EOD Letter #8 (The Usual from Ken Faig Jr, 2311 Swainwood Drive, Glenview, Illinois 60025-2741) This zine specializes in Lovecraftiana, and the issue at hand discusses a childhood friend of HPL. Faig tried unsuccessfully to track down the history of Arthur Fredlund as an adult, but he seems to have vanished from

the records. It's a familiar problem in genealogy; I've encountered it myself.

It Goes On The Shelf #30 (The Usual from Ned Brooks, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720) Reviewzine looking at older or obscure books, plus a look at the connection between the Fibonacci series and Pythagorean numbers.

Chunga #15 (The Usual from Randy Byers, 1013 North 36 Street, Seattle Washington 98103) SF genzine with convention reports, and articles on the Jewish origins of Superman, antique coins, and fannish behaviour, plus letters of comment.

The Ken Chronicles #9 (The Usual from Ken Bausert, 2140 Erna Drive, East Meadow, New York 11554-1120) Perzine with some trip reports and attending festivals, including some where his son's band was playing. There is an interesting look at a 1949 television set still in the family; it looks more like an oscilloscope!

Alexiad V7#6 (The Usual from Lisa and Joseph Major, 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040) Lots of book reviews, visiting the eye doctor, horse racing news (they are, after all, in Kentucky), and letters of comment.

Mark Time #89 and #90 (The Usual from Mark Strickert, Box 1051, Orange, California 92856) Perzine about life in southern California as a transit advocate and fan, along with letters of comment.

Musea #166 (The Usual from Tom Hendricks, 4000 Hawthorne #5, Dallas, Texas 75219) This issue is taken up by a short story.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

FROM: Jerry Kaufman
Box 25075
Seattle. Washington 98165

2008-11-27

[Re: experts' predictions on the price of oil] You quoted an article about analysts who were asked to predict if futures were likely to rise, fall, or remain neutral. They correctly predicted the direction of futures 49% of the time. You thought this was less than simple chance would predict, as to tossing a coin. But I think tossing a coin only works if there are two choices. The analysts were given three choices: rise, fall, remain neutral. Simple chance would give a correct answer one out of three times, or 33 1/3%. So 49% would be better than chance. Not a huge amount, but still better than flipping a hypothetical three-sided coin.

[True enough, although coins are in fact three-sided; don't forget the edge. A neutral outcome, that is, oil price remains unchanged, is extremely rare on the commodities market, and does not affect either short-sellers (betting the price will go down) or long-holders (betting the price will go up). From a practical point of view, 49% is still a useless result. I never buy commodities directly because of their volatility. If I could predict the future, I wouldn't work for a living. I'd go down to the race track once a week and put \$100 on the trifecta.]

-14-

FROM: Sheryl Birkhead
25509 Jonnie Court
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20882

2009-01-02

I am not exactly sure what I think the future of fanzines is. A blog is essentially writing a diary online. The quality of such diaries will span a fairly wide spectrum. In a zine, the editor attempts to keep the quality of the product as high as possible, and not just a recounting. I would imagine that such a diary from authors would climb the quality ladder quickly, but I suspect that many authors would turn the energy from such a diary toward their professional writing. Everyone can feel free to post and that post would be attractive to those of like minds, but the better the writing, the more the interest. So what I see is a splintering of the audience, reaching more people than zines and diluting the numbers.

FROM: Heath Row
101 Russell Street, #4-R
Brooklyn, New York 11222

2008-12-22

Can you tell me more about your experiences in FAPA? How long have you been a member? I've been working on a project cataloging all the active apas, inspired by APATALK and the New Moon Directory. Looking to learn more about apas in general, as well.

[I've been a member of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association for a decade. It was founded in 1937 by and for science fiction fans, and is still going. I also belonged to some other apas but had to give them up due to lack of time and because OPUNTIA didn't fit their format.]

[Apas are a method of zine distro whereby a zine publisher sends x number of copies to a Central Mailer (also known as an Official Editor), who then collates all the zines into one set for each member and sends them back out. This is a cheaper method of zine distribution because they are being sent both ways in bulk rather than as individual zines. Many apas specify a specific format for zines, usually 8.5 x 11, because the CM binds them into a single volume. This is, incidently, part of the reason why I dropped out of other apas, because I had to produce a separate zine (the now-defunct SANSEVIERIA) for them. This is also an

annoyance for overseas members who can only get paper in the A4 or A5 sizes. FAPA uses the bundle system; the zines are simply sent as a loose set, so I can use OPUNTIA as is, and European sizes are acceptable. Apas have a minimum activity level required, for example, 8 pages per year, and charge a membership fee to cover the CM's postage, usually about \$15 to \$20 a year. It must be understood that apas are for active participants only, not for passive subscribers. You must have the time and energy; no lurkers wanted.]

[The first apa was the National A.P.A., founded in 1876 and still in existence. There is also a group called The Fossils, who publish a bulletin that covers the history of zines. They are a society, not an apa, but the membership are apa zinesters. I am not a member of NAPA but do belong to The Fossils. Subscription to the latter is US\$15 per year from The Fossils, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan, Denver, Colorado 80209. Other apas exist as well, such as Point Of Divergence (alternative history), Spectator A.P.A. (science fiction), and many others.]

I Also Heard From: Krin Gunn, Franz Zrilich

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

noticed by Dale Speirs

Jahren, A.H., and R.A. Kraft (2008) **Carbon and nitrogen stable isotopes in fast food: Signatures of corn and confinement.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 105:17855-17860

"We sampled food from McDonald's, Burger King, and Wendy's chains, purchasing >480 servings of hamburgers, chicken sandwiches and fries within geographically distributed U.S. cities: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, Detroit, Boston, and Baltimore. From the entire sample set of beef and chicken, only 12 servings of beef had $^{13}\text{C} < -21\%$; for these animals only was a food source other than corn possible. We observed remarkably invariant values of ^{15}N in both beef and chicken, reflecting uniform confinement and exposure to heavily fertilized feed for all animals. The ^{13}C value of fries differed significantly among restaurants indicating that the chains used different protocols for deep-frying: Wendy's clearly used only corn oil, whereas McDonald's and Burger King favored other vegetable oils; this differed from ingredient reports."

Speirs: You are what you eat. This study used radioisotopes (carbon 13 and nitrogen 15) which are differentially distributed in different types of crops, higher in corn, lower in rangeland

grasses. Since even rangeland cattle are finished in feedlots before slaughter on corn in the USA, it is not surprising the results obtained here. It would be interesting to see a similar study for Canada, where canola oil is the standard cooking oil and cattle are finished on grain, not corn.

Naderi, S., et al (2008) **The goat domestication process inferred from large-scale mitochondrial DNA analysis of wild and domestic individuals.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 105:17659-17664

"In this study, we compared the genetic diversity of domestic goats to that of the modern representatives of their wild ancestor, the bezoar, by analyzing 473 samples collected over the whole distribution range of the latter species. A signature of population expansion in bezoars of the C haplogroup suggests an early domestication center on the Central Iranian Plateau and in the Southern Zagros (Fars Province), possibly corresponding to the management of wild flocks. However, the contribution of this center to the current domestic goat population is rather low (1.4%). We also found a second domestication center covering a large area in Eastern Anatolia, and possibly in Northern and Central Zagros. This last domestication center is the likely origin of almost all domestic goats today."