

OPUNTIA

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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. A cumulative subject index for all issues is available on request.

ACTION AND ADVENTURE, EH?

by Dale Speirs

Introduction.

In the Canadian best-seller novel market, the name Rohmer means Richard, not Sax. Richard Rohmer, born 1924, is a much-decorated military man who later took up writing action-adventure novels in the style of Tom Clancy. The novels are distinctly Canadian, usually involving invasion of Canada by the USA, separation, or terrorist attacks. Most have faded out of print because they were made obsolete by the march of events. They were best-sellers when first published because of their near-future topicality, but this also doomed them because they were too much of their time. Rohmer published the majority of his work during the 1970s and 1980s when the Liberals were usually in power, busily being politically correct and antagonizing both Québec and the western provinces with their policies. His novels are strongly nationalist and are as much political polemics as they are action-adventure.

Rohmer tends to salt his novels with too many info dumps that stick out like boulders on a sandy beach. You can tell he is an ex-Air Force pilot, as, instead of just writing "The plane turned north", he uses "*Their VOR receivers were tuned in to a frequency of 117.8 Mhz, and as the aircraft passed over Albany the RMI*

needles moved from pointing toward the nose of the aircraft through 180 degrees until they pointed to the tail." [from ULTIMATUM]. Info dumps have always been a problem for authors when trying to educate the reader while keeping the plot moving, especially in science fiction, where the universe has to be explained rather than assumed. Unnecessary info dumps are even worse. It is not essential to the plot that the RMI needles moved 180 degrees, anymore than the Lone Ranger ever stopped to say: *"As you know, Tonto, the Colt revolver fires six bullets from a rotating cylinder ... "*. Too much detail can also obsolete a novel as well, such as the cyberpunk stories where the hero defeats a one-world-controlling supercomputer with a staggering 10 megabytes of memory. Rohmer falls into that trap.

The Invaders.

One theme of Rohmer's which carries forth in several of his novels is the threat of invasion by the USA. The reason the Canadian Confederation was formed in 1867 was fear by the individual dominions of Manifest Destiny. Action towards confederation began in 1864 as the American War Between The States began to wind down. Politicians of British North America, as Canada then was styled, had been squabbling with each other for decades, but faced with the prospect of a newly resurgent and aggressive neighbour to the south of them, had to unify in the face of the clear and present danger.

ULTIMATUM (1973) begins with a nasty phone call from the American President to the Canadian Prime Minister. The Americans will be suffering a shortfall in natural gas supplies, and are upset because the Mackenzie Valley pipeline from the Arctic still hasn't been built. Funnily enough, in 2011 North America has a temporary surplus of natural gas because of shale gas but the Arctic pipeline still hasn't been built. The President wants action now and threatens major economic sanctions. It doesn't help that the natives are restless in the Mackenzie Valley and are bombing the partially completed pipeline as fast as it can be built.

The President decides to take a flight over the Canadian Arctic, with permission from Ottawa who want him to understand that building a pipeline isn't as easy as it looks. He is a pilot himself, and is at the controls of Air Force One. He flies about the Arctic, stopping off at points along the way for info dumps. Matters are complicated by the fact that in Canada the provinces have equal status with Ottawa, and more importantly for this novel, have authority over natural resources within their borders, although the federal government can tax the income therefrom. The provincial premiers have their own viewpoints about the kerfluffle and the Prime Minister cannot simply over-rule them. The Prime Minister has his problems in the House of Commons and the final result is a rejection of the ultimatum. The novel closes with the Americans invading as an anti-climax.

Rohmer is from Ontario, and like many eastern Canadians he has a blind spot about western Canada. The western provinces have never been concerned about who they export their gas and oil to as long as they got paid fair market value. After the National Energy Policy was implemented by the Liberals in 1979, about \$50 billion was looted from Alberta by price controls on oil and extra federal taxes on petroleum to subsidize Ontario and Québec. When the Tories got back into power in 1984, the NEP was rescinded, but the bitter memory remains among the generation of Albertans who suffered through that period. Far from fretting about the Americans getting our natural gas and oil, we here in Alberta view them as more reliable partners than eastern Canada since they pay better. When the NEP was introduced, Alberta couldn't stop the taxation but did cut off the pipelines to the east. As a result, even today eastern Canada gets its petroleum from overseas. Rohmer's nationalism is centred on the consequences to his home province, and he confuses its well-being with the rest of the country. There is no doubt that an eastern Canadian will read this novel differently than a westerner.

EXXONERATION (1974) is the sequel to ULTIMATUM and picks up directly where the first novel ended. The American President announced on television that the USA was annexing Canada in order to get its supplies of natural gas. As that novel closed, the first USAF aircraft were on approach to various Canadian cities. The Canadian Forces, expecting the invasion,

begin Operation Reception Party. At this moment, Rohmer suddenly interrupts the narrative with a full chapter-length biography of Col. Pierre de Gaspe, who evidently is to be a lead character given the size of the info dump about him. The strategy is to wire all the cross-border bridges with explosives and take control of the airports. Some of the major roads are to be defended in eastern Canada, but only the approaches to major cities in the west. The prairies are wide open and the Chinese army couldn't get enough troops to secure the empty spaces never mind the CF, but on the other hand the invaders will be exposed to missile fire with no place to hide. While the CF is too small to defend every part of Canada against the Americans, it doesn't have to. Wheatfields, tundra, and the Precambrian Shield are of no value to any invader unless they can first take the cities. Canada is one of the most urbanized nations in the world, and the hinterland is mostly empty for good reason.

The action starts up at Toronto International Airport, where incoming American troop transports are allowed to land by de Gaspe and then taken captive before their troops can exit the planes, after first blowing up a couple of them until their commanders get the idea. Pausing briefly for occasional "As you know, Colonel!" lectures about the armaments used by the CF, the plot gets rolling. Since the Americans were expecting an easy time of it, they made the mistake of under-strength deployment, confining all their forces to transports.

These were sitting ducks, not to mention that forgetting that having control of the air is meaningless if you can't control the ground. Nor are the Canucks yearning to be free and wanting to be part of the USA; the only thing that would unite Alberta and Québec (besides mutual hatred of Toronto, as the old joke goes) is an invasion. At this point, the Soviet Union sticks its oar in, as they do not want the USA to control the Arctic archipelago. Soviet submarines surface outside American coastal cities while others remain hidden, ready to launch. Faced with nuclear war, the President has no choice but to withdraw from Canada.

A summit meeting is held, using St. Pierre et Miquelon as a neutral venue. These islands are a French enclave off the southern shore of Newfoundland, which technically makes France a North American nation. The peace negotiations are bizarre, as they discuss the best method of getting natural gas down from the Arctic. The Prime Minister demands it be moved by air using Boeing 747s to haul liquified natural gas, which turns this novel into the realm of fantasy. Further, to avoid an over-valued Canadian dollar, the equipment and gas extraction works must be built outside Canada, which would be political suicide for a Prime Minister dependent on votes from the manufacturing heartland in Ontario and Québec. No pipelines would be built down the Mackenzie River to Alberta, so the P.M. can kiss Yukon and Alberta goodbye in the next election.

The President agrees, returns home, and is defeated in the next election for not only losing a war but, worse yet, losing it to Canada in two days. -4-

The comedy continues. In the second half of the novel, de Gaspe, now working as an executive for Petro-Canada, decides to make a bid for Exxon. At that time, Petro-Canada was a Crown Corporation (owned by the federal government), although it was later privatized in the early 2000s and in 2009 was bought out by Suncor, an oilsands company. The original Petro-Canada was created by the Trudeau Liberals and was used to barge into Alberta's oil industry, another reason why Trudeau was despised by Albertans. When the novel was published, it was the epitome of Canadian nationalism. For Petro-Canada to take over Exxon would be bearding the lion in his den, but the Prime Minister gives de Gaspe the go-ahead. The government of Canada doesn't have enough spare cash for the full amount of the bid (this was back in the days when printing trillions of dollars at once was considered a bad thing). Normally Canadian companies do their foreign borrowing in New York but that would be out of the question, so de Gaspe heads to Switzerland, where a bank supplies the money from a customer who preferred not to be named. There follows a flurry of business meetings in various cities, with the characters shuttling back and forth by plane. Surprisingly, Rohmer does not describe each flight in excruciating detail including vectors, altitudes, and what the pilot ate for lunch.

The bid causes an uproar in the USA, as well it might, for the idea of a foreign company buying out an American multinational is so, well, un-American. Not just any foreign company either but from a socialist hegemony with free health care and no death penalty. Exxon fails to get a court injunction against the bid but the Senate passes a bill blocking it. At this point, the Canucks use leverage, and the Saudis enter the picture as the unnamed lender via the Swiss bank, offering to buy Exxon instead. The unspoken threat is that if their bid is denied, then another oil embargo will take place that will cripple the USA. Canada gets Imperial Oil as a consulting fee. (Imperial Oil is Exxon's Canadian subsidiary, which is why Canada has Esso stations, but no Exxon stations.)

All's well that ends well for the Canucks and Arabs, and the novel concludes with the American politicians twirling about between a rock and a hard place. This novel's plot is one of the strangest I have read, but given the improbable true events that we read about in the daily news, it is not so strange as to be condemned out of hand. Indeed, the bizarre machinations kept me reading even though the constant info dumps kept plugging up the narrative.

International Affairs.

A different type of invasion was in EXODUS/UK, published in 1975 while the aftereffects of the 1973 oil shock were still

reverberating through the world. The oil shock was not simply a matter of OPEC raising prices when they finally realized that American oil production had peaked in 1970 and was now declining. The oil shock was also a matter of Arab oil exporters withholding supplies altogether in retaliation against the USA and western Europe for supporting Israel in the Yom Kippur War.

Rohmer uses this as a jumping-off point, and the novel opens with the British government being informed that the Saudis intend to withdraw all their investments from the British banking system in retaliation for their support of Israel. Since the banks couldn't cover the withdrawals because they operated then and now on the fractional-reserve system, this meant the Saudis would lose several billion pounds sterling and only get partial reimbursement, but this was a price they were willing to pay. However, if Britain defaulted on that money, it would mean no more crude oil would be sold to them, at a time when the North Sea oil was only just starting to be produced and would not ramp up for several years.

As the British cabinet holds an emergency meeting, the Arabs announce their new policy. Needless to say, the effects are felt immediately in the financial market. The British stock market collapses, the pound sterling falls off a cliff, and citizens queue for the mother of all bank runs. The rioting in Trafalgar Square was an obvious follow-on. With a complete lack of confidence in Britain, other nations quickly pull out their money. -5-

Food imports shrivel, and since Britain can't feed itself, it means severe rationing. The British Prime Minister decides to encourage mass emigration of about 10% of the population. The problem is, of course, that a sudden exodus of millions of people to North America and the Commonwealth Dominions is not something that can be done overnight. This assumes also that the recipient nations want such a flood of immigrants, this being the 1970s when British labour unions were at their worst. Canada had just revised its immigration system to restrict the inflow because too many people were settling in a few big cities that couldn't handle them and not enough elsewhere. The Québec separatists were barely under control; Trudeau had sent the troops in during the 1970 crisis, and the province was still seething. The reaction of all Québécois to a sudden influx of Britons into their province would be to denounce the immigrants as cultural imperialism. The Canadian Prime Minister is informed but is shocked at the request to accept two million British immigrants. Setting aside the politics, the logistics would be a nightmare, as both sides realize.

The American Secretary of State rushes to Saudi Arabia in an attempt to persuade the King to rescind his boycott of Britain. Her arguments fail, and she is forced to listen to an "as you know" info dump from the King about petro-economics. On the other side of the planet, things are going from bad to worse, and the British P.M.'s plane crashes in the Canadian Arctic en route to a meeting in Vancouver. (With lots of technobabble from the flight

crew while the plane goes down onto the tundra, as Rohmer shows off his knowledge of flying.) The Acting P.M. in Britain has his hands full as rioting spreads to Manchester and other cities. Québec threatens to separate if the British are allowed to enter, while simultaneously Alberta threatens to separate if the British are kept out, as our province historically has had a labour shortage through most of its history. The Americans agree to provide the British with assistance in exchange for developing and controlling the North Sea oil but provide no open-gate immigration. There's never a dull moment.

Rohmer keeps piling on the impossible situations and eventually writes himself into a corner. The novel concludes with a lady-or-the tiger ending as to whether Québec separates. This novel well illustrates Rohmer's ability to tie up the characters in knots. With other novelists, the problem is loose threads dangling at the end of the story, but with Rohmer it is trying to untangle the ball and sort it out, so tangled are the situations. His writing method seems to be an ad hoc stream of consciousness, rather than using a plot outline.

The Separatists.

Alberta and Québec are the two noisiest provinces in the Canadian Confederation, and both harbour long-standing grievances against Ottawa. SEPARATION is the 1976 sequel to EXODUS/UK.

It was written at a time when Québec was recovering from the October 1970 crisis and the separatists had switched from violent gangs to political parties. The Parti Québécois was first elected to power in 1976 and has been in and out of office since, although its referendums to separate have all failed. A federal wing is known as the Bloc Québécois, which operates independently.

SEPARATION opens with the federal cabinet deciding to let in two million Brits and the Québec government moving to separation. The Prime Minister is a Québécois, but is a weak-willed philosopher who decides on the basis of logical deductions from questionable premises. Pierre Trudeau he is not, who was a Québécois who didn't hesitate to mix it up rough by sending the army into Québec and loot \$50 billion from Alberta.

The Prime Minister and his fellow Québécois vote against letting in the Brits, while the rest of the cabinet says yes. The P.M. swallows his pride and agrees to help implement the British exodus in the face of a simultaneous break-up. He is also forced to accept an anglophone Deputy P.M., as he is now suspect, and the cabinet ministers want to keep him in check. Bringing in a flood of two million people cannot be done until the Québec referendum is held and, assuming a Oui vote, the details of separation hammered out, although preliminary planning for the exodus can be done.

Meanwhile, back at the Arctic pipeline, the proposal to send natural gas out by LNG Boeing 747s seems to have been forgotten, and instead the usual squabbling over a pipeline route is underway. Rohmer apparently threw this in as an effort to tie his novels closer together and maintain continuity, which is not a criticism. It serves to remind us that political leaders never just have one or two tasks on their daily briefings; things tend to pile up and become interconnected.

The Canadian P.M. and the Deputy P.M. go off to negotiate with the Québec Premier, who provides an info dump of Québec's accumulated grievances since they lost the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759, and their fear of being swamped by a rising tide of anglophone immigrants. As the politicians natter on in the negotiations, a group of Palestinian terrorists begin planning their own adventure, while the British P.M. faces his own battles back home. The latter still has to sort out the details of the American takeover of the North Sea and deal with the Leader of the Opposition, Marion Thrasher. (No prizes for guessing who she might represent.)

From there, we go to an interminable cabinet meeting in Ottawa where the Prime Minister barely survives a night of the long knives, and thence to England, where that P.M. barely survives Mrs. Thrasher. The former must begin negotiations and the latter must face a general election at her insistence.

The scenes begin alternating between Canucks and Québécois nitpicking about how to divide Air Canada and the Canadian National Railway, the Palestinians ramping up their plans, and Mrs. Thrasher negotiating with Scottish nationalists during the election. Everything comes crashing together in the final chapter, as the terrorists assassinate the Saudi king who declared the embargo, and Mrs. Thrasher wins the election and sets about putting the unions in their place.

At this point, Rohmer suddenly rewinds the tape. The new Saudi king withdraws the oil embargo, a massive find is discovered in the North Sea (as did happen and which was since sold off at \$10/barrel), and the Pequistes fail to win their own referendum. No British exodus is necessary, much to the relief of Canada, and the Americans are blocked from the North Sea. Talk about tying up loose threads; Rohmer waddles them up into a ball and tosses it into the wastebasket. Although, (insert thoughtful pause here), there is still that nasty business about the Arctic gas.

SEPARATION TWO was published in 1981 as the full effects of the National Energy Policy began to cripple Alberta, and continues from the previous novel. The Pequistes lost their 1980 referendum on separation, so that end of the country is quiet for the time being. Down at the Petroleum Club in Calgary harsh words are being said about Ottawa. One oilman, name of Arthur Frame, decides to take extreme action, as in hiring a hit man. Not

a very Canadian thing to do; the last federal politician to be assassinated in this country was D'Arcy McGee in 1868, and the last provincial politician murdered was Pierre Laporte during the October 1970 crisis.

In Edmonton, the capital of Alberta, events are following much as they did in the real timeline, as Alberta cut off oil supplies to eastern Canada rather than be forced to sell it below market price, in turn requiring the easterners to buy Arab oil at full market value instead. Drilling for conventional oil stopped, and oilsands projects were delayed for two decades. The divergence of this novel is that the Alberta government decided to call a referendum to separate.

Rohmer then reprints many chapters verbatim from SEPARATION instead of summarizing what went on before, which is one good way to pad a novel. In fact, you could skip the first novel and go straight to this one, as it is essentially a reboot of an alternative history. (I trust the publisher didn't pay him a second time for that word count.) The Palestinian terrorists show up again, also verbatim, along with Mrs. Thrasher winning her election again. Talk about lazy authors, or careless publishers. I guess they assumed that no one would remember from the last novel.

Arthur Frame's hitman shows up in Calgary where the Prime Minister is making an appearance with the Alberta Premier to

announce a settlement without a second referendum. If you saw the assassination scene in *THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE*, that is what happened down to the letter, including the hitman killing the wrong person, none other than Arthur Frame, who was sitting on the dais behind the Prime Minister.

Rohmer was running on empty when he wrote this novel. I have to wonder how many customers who bought the previous novel returned this one to the bookstore for a refund.

AN EARLY MAIL ARTIST

by Dale Speirs

The first postage stamp was issued on May 6, 1840, by Britain. Not commonly recognized is that the stamp was issued for a new era of cheap postage, and people were quick to take advantage. Hand-painted envelopes and postcards with trick addresses were often used to test the patience of posties during the 1800s. One of those early mail artists was the Englishman W. Reginald Bray (1879-1939). His life and mail art have been documented in the book *THE ENGLISHMAN WHO POSTED HIMSELF AND OTHER CURIOUS OBJECTS* (2010, hardcover) by John Tingey.

Bray bought a copy of the *POST OFFICE GUIDE* in 1898 that laid out all the myriad rules of the Papernet, and decided to test them out. He began mailing objects sans any packaging, from a shirt collar to a piece of seaweed to himself. The last was based on an unusual rule that said the British Post Office would conduct any person on foot to an address on payment of registered postage and a mileage charge. Bray therefore mailed himself to his father, who had to sign for him. He did it in a practical case when he could not find an address, went to a nearby post office, and hired a postie to conduct him there for the cost of postage.

He was fond of mailing postcards with just a photo of the recipient and the town name. He also used postcards with rebus addresses or in rhyme. He mailed turnips and dog biscuits, although he later noted that he had no end of trouble trying to carve the address into them and making the stamp stick. (Using a tag was a cop-out.) He was so prolific that the Post Office eventually had to change some of the rules to keep him in check. In later years, Bray became an autograph collector. He did so entirely by post and never in person. He sent self-addressed postcards not only to famous actors, politicians, and soldiers, but to people who were briefly notorious because of highly-publicized court trials. At his death, he had about 15,000 autographs, which his daughter later sold off in the 1950s in box lots. Because the collection was of interest to both autograph collectors and philatelists, his items were widely dispersed.

ZINE LISTINGS

by Dale Speirs

[The Usual means \$3 cash (\$5 overseas) or trade for your zine. 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, and a genzine is a general zine]

Night Train To Mundo Fine #1 (The Usual from Frederick Moe, 36 West Main Street, Warner, New Hampshire 03278) Typewritten zine (yes, people still use them) with some nostalgia and a few vinyl and tape reviews (and yes, people still listen to music on them).

Probe #146 to #148 (The Usual from Science Fiction South Africa, Box 781401, Sandton 2146, South Africa) SF clubzine that specializes in fiction, short stories written by South African locals. Some news, letters of comment, and book reviews as well.

The Fossil #348 and #349 (US\$10 per year from The Fossils, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan, Denver, Colorado 80209) For those interested in the history of zines and who know they weren't born in the 1970s. #348 looks at the Metchaps, a local group of

the American Amateur Press Association, who held a convention in New York City in 1939. Issue #349 discusses Ethel May Johnston, who was a zinester in 1899, and what to do with your zine collection if no one wants it.

Statement #381 to #389 (The Usual from Ottawa SF Society, 18 Norice Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2G 2X5) SF clubzine with fannish news and notes, and always lots of astronomy news.

Banana Wings #45 (The Usual from Claire Brialey, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7ES, England) SF fanzine with extended commentary on gender balance of male versus female SF authors, some trip reports, book reading, convention reports, and letters of comment.

Vanamonde #868 to #882 (The Usual from John Hertz, 236 South Coronado Street #409, Los Angeles, California 90057) Single-sheet weekly apazine with miscellaneous commentary.

Show Me The Money #34 and #35 (The Usual from Tony Hunnicutt, Box 48161, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55448) One of the few zines that spends any time on economics, with a wide variety of non-mainstream news, rants about American and international fiscal policy, and notes about the ongoing economic troubles.

BCSFazine #453 to #459 (The Usual from British Columbia SF Association, c/o Felicity Walker, 3851 Francis Road #209, Richmond, British Columbia V7C 1J6) SF clubzine with news, letters of comment, lots of event listings, and some brief reviews.

D.I.Y. Printer Wannabe #1 to #2 (The Usual from James Dawson, Box 292, Malden, Washington 99149) Apazine discussing the various methods once used to print zines, such as mimeographing, spirit duplicating, and hectographing, as well as typewriters that automatically justified lines. An interesting discussion on font sizes. I did not know that type sizes are different between printing presses and computers; 12-point type in letterpress is not the same as 12-point font size on a computer.

Gar #66 to #74 (Mail art Usual from Ross Priddle, 734 - 2 Avenue NW #402, Calgary, Alberta T2N 0E3) Single-sheet collage zine.

Rigor Mortis #4 (US\$3.50 from Davida Gypsy Breier, Box 11064, Baltimore, Maryland 21212) Zombie fanzine, with detailed essays on racism in the genre, gratuitous nudity in zombie movies, and homosexual context in horror movies, as well as reviews.

The Ken Chronicles #19 to #20 (The Usual from Ken Bausert, 2140 Erma Drive, East Meadow, New York 11554-1120) Issue

#19 is mostly taken up by a trip report about the c
Caribbean island of St. Maarten and the fun to be had
exploring it. #20 travels up the Newport coast, an elevated
railroad turned into a pedestrian park in Manhattan, cherry
blossom time in Washington, D.C., plus letters of comment. -12-

Alexiad V10#1 to #3 (The Usual from Lisa and Joseph Major, 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040) Genzine with lots of book reviews, particularly history and SF, convention reports, various essays, and letters of comment.

Biblio-Curiosa #1 (The Usual from Chris Mikul, Box K546, Haymarket, New South Wales 1240, Australia) Reviewzine that looks at bizarre books such as the horror novels of Hanns Ewers, another strange novel written by one of a pair of behaviourally disturbed twins, a WW2 spy novel "The Fangs Of Suet Pudding", and a doctor's collection of bizarre short stories.

Grunted Warning #7, #9, and #11 to #12 (The Usual from Stuart Stratu, Box 35, Marrickville, New South Wales 2204, Australia) Collage zine with newspaper clippings about oddball events around the world.

Junkzine #5 (The Usual from James Dawson, Box 292, Malden, Washington 99149) Zine reviews, pen pal requests, and letters of comment.

Bizzarrism #11 (US\$8 from Chris Mikul, Box K.546, Haymarket, New South Wales 1240, Australia) A look at oddball people, such as a mau who repaired and gave away refrigerators for free, a Sherlockiau who may or may not have died of auto-asphyxiation, a lunatic UFO cult who got free international publicity by claiming to have clouded a human, a Mormon sex kitten and her life of scandal, a senile surgeon who was allowed to kill uumerous patients because no one dared speak up, and the Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha.

The Zine Dump #27 to #28 (The Usual from Guy Lillian, 5915 River Road, Shreveport, Louisiana 71105) Reviewziue of mostly SF zines, plus some commentary on the recent travesty of a Hugo award for Best Fanzine going to a podcast.

FOSFAX #217 (US\$4 from Timothy Lane, Box 37281, Louisville, Kentucky 40233-7281) Doorstop-class zine of 80 pages of microtext with lots of book reviews, lots of rants about American politics, and lots of letters of comment.

The Great Stereopticon #4 (The Usual from James Dawson, Box 292, Malden, Washington 99149) Persoual reminiscences about growing up in Washington State plus letters of comment.

SF Commentary #80 to #82 (The Usual from Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard Street, Greusborough, Victoria 3088, Australia)

Colour SF literit zine in card covers, with various lengthy essays on Philip Dick and Bob Tucker, hundreds of book reviews, and letters of comment. I don't know how he can afford to publish such an expensive zine.

Brooklyn! #70 to #73 (US\$10 for four issues from Fred Argoff, Penthouse L, 1170 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn, New York 11230) Life in Brooklyn, with articles on various neighbourhoods, streets that used to be creeks, bus routes, baseball fields, abandoned buildings and roads, and a dispute between Queens and Brooklyn over which large boulder represents the historical boundary between them.

Challenger #33 (US\$6 from Guy Lilliau, 5915 River Road, Shreveport, Louisiana 71105) Doorstop-size SF genzine of 90 pages. The general theme of this issue is military SF, ranging from the fiction itself to interviews with SF authors who served in the military to essays on straightforward military. Also included are articles on fannish history and lots of letters of comment.

EOD Letter #18 to #19 (The Usual from Ken Faig Jr, 2311 Swaiuwood Drive, Glenview, Illinois 60025-2741) Apazine specializing in H.P. Lovecraft, with a report on a British HPL conference, reviews about HPL's dreams, his views about religion, and reviews of new editions of his work.

Christian New Age Quarterly V19#4 to V20#1 (US\$5 from Catherine Groves, Box 276, Clifton, New Jersey 07015-0276) Discussion of Star Trek's religious aspects, humorous stories about spoonerisms committed by preachers during wedding ceremonies, a proposal for a theory of physics that includes conservation of consciousness, and letters of comment.

Fadeaway #24 (The Usual from Robert Jennings, 29 Whiting Road, Oxford, Massachusetts 01540-2035) An interesting look at various aspects of SF fandom, including the downfall of a major gaming convention, the history of COSMIC STORIES (a short-lived 1941 SF pulp magazine), and substantial letters of comment.

***brg* #67 to #68** (The Usual from Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard Street, Greensborough, Victoria 3088, Australia) Colour SF apazine in card covers. #67 has convention and writer workshop reports and letters of comment, but is mostly taken up by an extended account of living on a rice farm in northern Australia in 1958. #68 is mostly lists of music.

Cherry Monocle (2011 Spring) (The Usual from Phlox Icona, 36 Huntington Place Drive, Atlanta, Georgia 30350) Collage zine, this issue's theme being Coca-Cola.

Rambles To T(L)C #322 to #325 (The Usual from James Dawson, Box 292, Malden, Washington 99149) Apazine with

libertarian and alternative bent, and much commentary thereon. Issue #322 has a discussion about recent studies that show human brain scans change if they are rejected and what that means for our social behaviours. -14-

For The Clerisy #79 to #83 (The Usual from Brant Kresovich, Box 404, Getzville, New York 14068-0404) Reviewzine of older books of travel, detective fiction, and a few 1940s movies.

The Knarley Knews #138 to #139 (The Usual from Henry Welch, 15290 Upper Ellen Road, Los Gatos, California 95033) SF genzine, with articles on capitalism, a trip to New Zealand, and many letters of comment.

The Fanactical Fanactivist #1 to #3 (The Usual from R. Graeme Cameron, 13315 - 104 Avenue, Apt. 72G, Surrey, British Columbia V3T 1V5) Discusses the possibility of setting up a new fanzine award for Canadian zinesters for paper only, blogs and podcasts not eligible. Elsewhere, the letter writers argue "Whither zinedom?" at great length (myself included).

Les Carnets de Rastopopoulos #7 (The Usual from the editor at 2 - 7 Larch Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1R 6W4) Cut-and-paste zine with an article on Faroe Islands independence, and the famous bad poet William Topaz McGonagall.

Littlebrook #8 (The Usual from Jerry Kaufman and Suzanne Tompkins, Box 25075, Seattle, Washington 98165) SF perzine with trip and convention reports, and letters of comment.

The New Port News #259 (The Usual from Ned Brooks, 4817 Dean lane, Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720) Apazine with short comments on numerous topics.

Xerography Debt #29 (US\$3 from Davida Gypsy Breier, Box 11064, Baltimore, Maryland 21212) Review zine which uses multiple reviewers to get different points of view. Also editorial comment on the state of zinedom.

Mark Time #101 (The Usual from Mark Strickert, Box 1051, Orange, California 92856) Mark and his wife Nancy both work for transit agencies (different ones) so there is a lot of transit fanning in this issue. The kids are growing up fast, some zine reviews, and letters of comment.

Signals #4 to #5 (The Usual from Frederick Moe, 36 West Main Street, Warner, New Hampshire 03278) For radio fans, with articles on shortwave broadcasting, including one station that works out of a telephone booth in the middle of the Mojave Desert (installed by a mining company and considered to be the most remote phone booth). Also articles on numbers stations (which broadcast coded messages to spies and are popular listening for

shortwave fans), the Radiophonic Workshop (audio artists who tape and rearrange radio transmissions), how to listen to shortwave stations, and reports on various pirate or campus radio stations.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

noticed by Dale Speirs

Roebroeks, W., and P. Villa (2011) **On the earliest evidence for habitual use of fire in Europe.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 108:5209-5214

"Our review of the European evidence suggests that early hominins moved into northern latitudes without the habitual use of fire. It was only much later, from about 300,000 to 400,000 y ago onward, that fire became a significant part of the hominin technological repertoire. It is also from the second half of the Middle Pleistocene onward that we can observe spectacular cases of Neandertal pyrotechnological knowledge in the production of hafting materials. The increase in the number of sites with good evidence of fire throughout the Late Pleistocene shows that European Neandertals had fire management not unlike that documented for Upper Paleolithic groups."

"The typical alien abduction narrative of today is so well-known that it is the stuff of parody and television commercials: a blue-white light fills a room, and the victim, usually female, is surrounded by small, gray, almond-eyed creatures that teleport her from her home to a waiting spaceship where she is physically examined, psychologically manipulated, and sometimes impregnated with a hybrid fetus. Although Whitley Streiber popularized the first-person abduction narrative with the publication of his COMMUNION in 1988, since the early 1990s the genre has been appropriated by female writers, in the process becoming a gendered story of female victimization and painfully acquired spiritual knowledge ... in the 1950s an earlier version of first-person accounts of encounters with aliens emerged, one that was exclusively told by men whose experiences were radically different from female narrators of the 1990s. Known as the "Contactees," these individuals became famous in UFO circles by promoting their books on talk shows, at UFO conventions, and in other media. The Contactee narrative, while it has several important themes in common with later female-inflected abduction stories, differs significantly from them, and these differences have much to do with the cultural and historical context of the 1950s. ... While some American citizens withdrew to the safety of the

backyard bomb shelter in the 1950s, the Contactees sought protection traveling in flying saucers with their cosmic friends. Unlike the outrageous physical and psychological otherness of the aliens who later appeared in abduction stories, the Space Brothers looked, talked, and acted like earthlings, only better; they were almost without exception described as flawlessly beautiful, highly morally and spiritually developed, and technologically advanced beyond our comprehension."

Speirs: One reason I never accepted UFOs, besides the fact that they preferred to contact rednecks on back roads instead of making themselves known to world leaders, was that the stories kept changing. I am old enough to remember when all UFO stories were little green men come to save us from ourselves. Then the story changed to little grey men with teardrop-shaped eyes trying to steal our DNA. Also, no interstellar fleet would use hundreds of different styles of UFOs, from cigars to saucers. Even a modern aircraft carrier fleet only uses about a dozen types of aircraft at most. UFOlogy, like conspiracy theory, is a branch of abnormal psychology.