

OPUNTIA

250

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GENESIS 47:15

by Dale Speirs

Gold was US\$20.67 per Troy ounce in 1900, revalued to \$35 in 1934, was \$950 before the Panic of 2008, and is today in the \$1,600 range. This is a true measurement of a paper currency's depreciation, also known as inflation. Central banks and governments the world over want inflation because it depreciates their debts. Pensioners and creditors oppose depreciation because it reduces real income and investment returns, but they don't have much success since the government is always the biggest debtor of any nation. The general public, as always, don't have a clue and happily put their cash into 3% term deposits, which lose money because of inflation and income taxes on the interest. Then they complain they can never get ahead.

There is currency depreciation because of natural causes such as government annual deficits and national debts. Some governments, however, try to speed up the process because it gives them an advantage in international trade. The last time it was tried as full-scale policy was during the Great Depression, when every nation tried to beggar their neighbour in a currency war. It is now once again happening but in a slow-motion behind-the-scenes manner. It is this trend which is the subject of **CURRENCY WARS: THE MAKING OF THE NEXT GLOBAL CRISIS** (2011, hardcover) by James Rickards.

Onward Currency Soldiers.

Rickards starts off with an account of the first financial war game ever hosted by the Pentagon, in which he was a participant. Only he and two others had actual experience as Wall Street traders. The rest were military and academics, none of whom had any idea of what the real world looks like when day traders deliberately crash the stock market or commodities because they can, not because the fundamentals supported them. As a result, the war game proved unrealistic and did not take into account what a full-scale currency war would do.

Currency wars begin when a nation is bedeviled by a decline in its domestic economy. One method of boosting a local economy is to devalue the currency against others. This makes the nation's exports cheaper and imports more expensive, both of which at one time used to increase manufacturing within the nation. It assumes that other nations won't retaliate by depreciating their currency and triggering a race to the bottom. This is the main problem with depreciating one's currency, for as soon as one nation begins it on a large-scale, then others will do the same to keep their currencies competitive.

Globalization has messed up this idea in recent decades because currency exchange rates are no longer the dominant factor in where manufacturers locate. Offshore outsourcing was not begun

because of exchange rates. It began because Asian workers are paid \$5 per day and no benefits compared to North American workers who want \$15 per hour plus a defined-benefits pension plus healthcare plus innumerable other perks. Outsourcing sped up as First-World country environmentalists attacked proposals for new mines or factories, and government regulations wasted countless hours on form-filing and studies.

Nonetheless, if a currency is depreciated enough it can overcome such disadvantages. The traditional method of depreciation is to print more currency or, these days, add some extra zeros into the central bank computer. The problem is that the USA or Europe then end up paying more for essential imports such as oil.

Marching Off To War.

The globalization that we see today is the second such in modern times, the previous one being during the golden age of the British Empire when the pound sterling was the universal currency against which all others were measured. Today's globalization is the most extensive in human history and is based on cheap oil. Peak Oil is throwing a wrench into it, but the full effects will not be felt for at least another decade and will be what reverses the current globalization. In the meantime, an American company may design a product in India (where engineers are cheaper) and

build it in China (where labour is cheaper) out of metals mined in Canada, melted down and refined with electricity generated from Australian coal, and shipped to Europe on freighters built in South Korea. The profits are booked in euros held in a Caribbean bank, then converted to American dollars in a Swiss bank.

All this makes it difficult for pure-play currency depreciation as done in yesteryear, so many countries use protectionism. The old-fashioned type of protectionism was import tariffs, but other forms can be used in economic warfare. As an example, Rickards cites the September 2010 incident when China and Japan came to blows over a Chinese fishing trawler in disputed waters between the two countries. The Japanese arrested the captain of the vessel. China currently controls almost all the world's purified rare earth metals, which are essential in electronics. They cut off all supplies to Japan, which crippled their manufacturers. Japan retaliated by devaluing the yen against the yuan by 3% in three days, which made Japanese goods cheaper than Chinese goods. It turned out that the shortage of rare earths trumped the currency devaluation, so Japan ended up apologizing and freeing the trawler captain.

Going On Before.

The idea of a currency war is nothing new. Although for most of human history the world was on a gold standard, where each

currency was set by its government as being equal to x amount of gold, the classical gold standard era was from 1870 to 1914. Prices and currency exchange rates seldom or never changed in this era. If you wanted to exchange currencies, you could consult a five-year-old book and still have the correct rate. International trade deficits were settled by shipping physical gold back and forth between banks. This brought fiscal discipline to governments and citizens alike, which neither liked then or now.

World War One could not have been possible except by governments going off the gold standard "for the duration" and printing paper currency unbacked by gold, as well as borrowing money without collateral. In the aftermath of the Great War, paper currency, like crystal meth, became very addictive, and a series of competitive devaluations began. Rickards identifies Currency War One as running from 1921 to 1936, from the German hyperinflation to high American interest rates that crippled industry and consumers. The effect of this currency war was to pave the way for the Nazis to take power in Germany and the Bushido faction in Japan. You know the results.

Currency War Two ran from 1967 to 1987. It began as the American government tried to have both guns (the Vietnam War) and butter (the Great Society social programmes) without raising taxes. This could only be done by printing more currency.

Simultaneously the British pound began to fail as the Empire slowly dissolved. In 1970, American oil production peaked and the USA had to buy more Arab oil. Until August 15, 1971, foreign governments could convert U.S. dollars into gold on demand. When the demand got too high, Richard Nixon suspended the convertibility of the U.S. dollar on that date. Henceforth the dollar was backed by nothing more than the willingness of the American government to take it as payment for taxes and fees. This forced all other governments to go off the gold standard, and currencies began floating free against each other. Briefly the U.S. economy was favoured by its currency depreciation, but depreciation always brings inflation because it takes more dollars to buy a given thing, whether a barrel of oil from the Arabs or a bag of flour from a Kansas miller. Inflation feeds on itself, and by the early 1980s reached 22%. This currency war staggered to a close by the late 1980s from default as unemployment grew everywhere and exchange rates fell back into their natural levels without further manipulation.

Hosea 8:7

Rickards dates Currency War Three from 2010, this time a three-way battle between the U.S. dollar, euro, and yuan. Like World War Two it can be considered not as a single war but two separate wars, one in the Atlantic and the other in the Pacific.

On the Pacific front, the enemy this time is China. -4-
Japan's economic miracle ran headfirst into the demographic wall, as its population aged faster than any other country. China began liberalizing its economy in 1975, but initial progress was slow and it wasn't until the late 1990s that foreigners began to take notice. Along the way there were incidents, political and economic, on both sides, but the 9/11 attacks helped smooth relations between China and the USA. China, having its own restless Muslim populations, joined the USA in the war on terror. The U.S. Federal Reserve dropped interest rates to record lows around the 1% mark, triggering a financial boom from 2002 to 2007. American investors could not find decent returns in bonds, so they began speculating in real estate and stocks, then uniquely combined them in the form of mortgage-backed securities issued by Wall Street brokerages. The nearly free currency set off a consumer boom, as cheap Chinese goods flooded North America and Europe, made easier by artificially low exchange rates between the yuan and the U.S. dollar.

Rickards points out that the end result produced a Mexican standoff. China took the dollars but had so many that the only place to put them was to buy U.S. Treasury bonds. Had the gold standard still been in effect, China could have redeemed the entire American stock of gold and still have dollars left over. The rise of 100% fiat currencies meant that the USA could rev up the printing presses. Nor could China refuse to take dollars, as this would shut

down their factories and start a civil war. The Chinese Politburo do not fear the American government, but they are terrified of their own young people. Every year there are tens of millions of them graduating from schools and moving to the big coastal cities looking for work. Conversely, for all that the American politicians bluster about retaliating against China's currency policies, they dare not take any effective action. China would simply dump all its dollar holdings at once, which would crash the dollar into worthlessness, result in no country outside the USA accepting them, and produce hyperinflation in the USA. China would take the loss and accept that its hair would be mussed, while Americans would be torching federal buildings and looting supermarkets for bread.

Fortunately the Chinese got lucky, as just about the time it seemed that a toe-to-toe economic war would develop, the attention of the American government was diverted to the Atlantic. The Europeans had been living the good life on paper debt that made American consumers look miserly by comparison. One overlooked aspect of the Panic of 2008 is that most of the bailout currency the U.S. Federal Reserve printed went to European banks, if not directly then secretly rerouted through Wall Street banks who had sold toxic paper overseas. The Fed had to make good on that paper or else the USA would definitely have faced a full-scale currency war from the Eurozone.

The initial fire from the Panic was successfully flooded out by dollars, but other smaller fires sprang up in 2010 when the Fed was forced to reveal the details of its European bailout by the Dodd-Frank act passed by the U.S. Congress. That information confirmed what many had suspected, especially gold bugs and currency speculators, that the Euro was a fraudulent currency. A consequence of the bailout disclosure was that the PIIGS (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, Spain) banks started to fail, so their governments bought their bad debts and converted the problem into a sovereign debt crisis. Ireland was the first to wobble, then Greece, as speculators noticed that more money had been borrowed than could ever possibly be paid back. As of December 2011, those who lent money to Greece over the past decade will take a minimum 50% writedown on the Greek bonds. That's just the official agreement; the actual losses will probably be higher by the time the whole sorry affair staggers to its final conclusion a decade from now.

Paradoxically this put China and the USA on the same side, as both had to help prop up what was to both of them a major export market. Just as the USA and China are handcuffed to each other in their trade, so it is that Europe is also a substantial market for China. The Chinese have been forced to buy Eurobonds to prop up the European economy and ensure that Chinese exports will keep rolling in. The USA has been forced to do the same, for if the Euro collapsed

it would win the race to the bottom against the dollar and flood the USA with cheap imports from Europe. Any attempt to block such imports with protectionist trade rules would trigger retaliation from Europe and repeat exactly the same mistakes that turned the 1929-31 recession into the Great Depression.

Forward Into Battle.

Rickards then looks at one consequence of U.S. dollar depreciation due to quantitative easing (QE) by the Federal Reserve. QE is a euphemism for debasing the currency by running the printing presses at the central bank, or, these days, by someone sitting down at a computer and typing in some extra zeros into the database spreadsheet. Since the U.S. dollar is still an international currency, QE had the effect of exporting inflation to the rest of the world. North Americans and Europeans see this inflation as a mild inconvenience when shopping for groceries or filling up the car with gasoline, because those take a relatively small proportion of our personal budgets. In poor countries where food alone is more than half the household budget, inflation caused by higher food prices is very serious indeed.

This is what triggered the so-called Arab Spring riots that have toppled several dictatorships. The mass media spout the line that Arabs were suddenly yearning for democracy after tolerating dictators for centuries, but it was a price spike of basic foodstuffs

such as rice and wheat that brought down the strongmen and allowed the Islamic Brotherhood to move in. Matters were not helped when Japan suffered a 10-metre-high tsunami on 2011-03-11 that crippled its economy. The Japanese, directly or indirectly, had to sell foreign investments and convert them into yen to bring them back home to rebuild the country. If a giant earthquake were to level California, the same thing would happen to the American dollar; it would soar as foreign investments were sold to pay for the rebuilding. Since the soaring yen meant it would be more difficult for the Japanese to rebuild, the USA and other governments momentarily set aside their differences and began selling off their yen reserves to drive the exchange rates down. This had the effect of briefly strengthening the dollar but the American government agreed to let that happen for humanitarian reasons.

For all that countries want to devalue their paper currency against others to get an advantage, many of them do not think only in terms of trade. Russia views its natural gas exports to Europe as a means of putting a political chokehold on it, just as in 1973 the Saudi Arabian government used an oil embargo to remind the USA not to be too blatantly biased towards Israel.

Rickards takes a look at a few sample econowar potentials. He starts off with Dubai, which tries to be a trusted neutral in a world where most nations think in terms of "The enemy of my enemy is

my friend". It is where countries slowly dump U.S. dollars for gold, where cargo is trans-shipped to and from Iran regardless of any embargoes, and Somali pirates negotiate ransoms and do their banking. Dubai has the world's largest physical gold market. As Rickards points out, Dubai is the modern-day equivalent to Casablanca in World War Two, where enemies can have back-door meetings and negotiate privately without losing face. It is where embargoes are bypassed.

In Russia, the government is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Gazprom, a petroleum conglomerate which makes up 10% of the Russian economy. Past and present premiers and presidents serve on the board of directors quite openly, and no one hides the overlap. Gazprom has its own private army. While it exploits Russia's natural resources, it is not a one-sided affair, and it is used by the Kremlin to assert political power. When the Europeans got a bit uppity a few years ago, Russia cut off natural gas supplies, once in January 2006 and again in January 2009, leaving much of Europe to shiver in the dark. (Natural gas is used for both heating and generating electricity.) The stated purpose of this economic warfare is to ensure that Europeans don't stray too far into the American camp.

China's great concern is preventing the USA from devaluing its dollar reserves, well over \$1 trillion. What the Politburo really fears are the 24 million excess males in its population (because of

female infanticide) and the constant flow of young people into the coastal cities looking for jobs. They must therefore keep their economy growing regardless of any other consequences.

As Rickards writes, when a Chinese official telephones a Wall Street bank, his call never goes to voice mail or a call centre but through a direct line to the trading floor where a trader will always answer by the second ring. This is not hyperbole; JPMorganChase, Goldman Sachs, and other banksters have specific procedures in place to ensure that Chinese calls are answered immediately and their trades given priority. China is tiptoeing to the exit, slowly unloading U.S. dollar-denominated investments and buying commodities or companies that it needs. It can't suddenly buy large amounts as this would spike the markets and crash the dollar. However, it could if it wants to and take the damage to its holdings as a cost of economic warfare. This is not a surmise. The Chinese government has openly stated in its 1999 document "The War God's Face Has Become Indistinct" that it will use economic warfare if the American government tries to devalue the dollar too low.

See Their Banners Go.

At this point in the book, Rickards suddenly pulls over to the side of the road and contemplates the history of modern economics.

He reviews the usual suspects from Keynesians (print currency and inflate your way out of debt) to monetarists (it's not the currency, it's how fast it circulates) to the Chicago school (markets are always efficient and tend to the golden mean). Rickards is particularly vicious to the Chicago school and rightly so, because they were the ones who encouraged the growth of financial futures contracts and derivatives, secure in the belief that nothing could go wrong because there was a mathematical formula that would prevent it.

If any group of men were to be put up against the wall for causing the Panic of 2008, it should be the Chicago school of economists. Their belief was that all financial risks could be graphed on a bell curve, but as we found out, catastrophes do not follow the curve. If you read of someone hoping for a "soft landing", that person is still wedded to the bell curve, where the line smoothly curves down. In the real world, as we found out with the Panic of 2008, there is no soft landing. Instead, the engine unexpectedly goes BANG! and the economy dives straight into the ground.

A newer theory of economics, one that arrived too late to prevent the disaster, is complexity theory. Some basic principles of this theory are that complex systems have behaviour that cannot be deduced by looking at its parts, they run on exponentially greater energy as they grow, and they will collapse suddenly when the energy runs out. Energy in the case of economic markets means

currency. As an example, the American housing market was inflated by low interest rates and currency printing, which in turn were used to produce mortgage-backed securities (MBS) and collateralized debt obligations (CDO). It is not necessary to know the details of MBS and CDO derivatives; the phrase "toxic paper" describes them in easy-to-understand language. What happened in 2007 was that so much toxic paper had been produced by Wall Street that the Federal Reserve couldn't keep the printing presses running fast enough to produce sufficient currency to keep the system inflating. The system ran out of energy, and homeowners began defaulting on mortgages because there wasn't enough economic activity to allow them to earn enough money to make even a few monthly payments. The system tottered in middle 2008 for want of fuel and fell in ruins that autumn, better known as the Panic of 2008. A similar situation has developed in Europe where the PIIGS countries have borrowed more money than will ever be paid back, and the Eurozone system has therefore run out of energy. Rickards explains quite well how complexity theory works and why economists never saw it coming.

The Endgame.

Rickards looks at possible scenarios for the U.S. dollar: multiple reserve currencies, special drawing rights, gold, and chaos. Multiple reserve currencies are the case where the dollar is no

longer the sole currency used as an international standard. It actually appears to be happening now. Over the years central banks have kept fewer and fewer U.S. dollars in their reserves, and more euros, Swiss francs, yuan, and gold. This is a slow evolution, and while the dollar will never completely disappear or crash, it will become only one of several reserve currencies.

Special Drawing Rights are issued by the International Monetary Fund, and are a basket of currencies. Only central banks can use them. The ratio of currencies in the basket can be changed from time to time, and the IMF can print as many SDRs as it likes without actually backing them with the currencies. Since the currencies are themselves unbacked, this is only one step removed from the Federal Reserve typing some extra zeroes into its database computer. If you try this at home, a constable will come and take you away on a charge of fraud, but international bankers talk about SDRs with a perfectly straight face as if they were real. The IMF makes no secret of its hope that eventually SDRs will become the One World Currency and enable it to operate without having to deal with inefficient concepts such as democracy and elections. This is not conspiracy theory. The IMF has said so in its position papers and is relying on the apathy of the general public, who would rather watch reality shows than the reality around them.

The return to a gold standard is an unlikely scenario, since it imposes fiscal discipline on central banks, politicians, and the

general public, none of whom want it. Central bankers want slow but steady inflation as an invisible tax and to reduce debts. Gold bugs will have to be satisfied with private ownership of gold as an insurance policy to protect against inflation and currency depreciation. The price of gold has steadily risen in every fiat currency, but this is more accurately stated as being that every currency has depreciated against gold. This is why it now takes about \$1,600 to buy a Troy ounce of physical gold, setting aside short-term fluctuations as Wall Street banks game the markets. For individuals, gold is not an investment but an insurance policy. No gold bug seriously expects to buy bread with gold, but rather as they need the currency they can cash out a coin that will give them the same value but adjusted for inflation. On a world scale, a return to the gold standard is improbable.

Rickards then considers the fourth scenario, that of chaos, the one that he thinks will happen. One dollar too many is printed by the Federal Reserve, and it crashes against everything else, whether foreign currencies, gold, commodities, or Beanie Babies. The American government begins confiscating all the wealth of its citizens, but not by outright seizure. They will instead demonize the rich and impose a 90% wealth tax. The rich will first be defined as anyone with more than \$5 million, then more than \$1 million, then any homeowner who selfishly refuses to pay a 90% property tax.

Foreign countries will have any assets they hold on American soil seized, and they of course will retaliate. Oil will be worth its weight in gold, although any gold will be government property. From there, we go to any of the post-apocalyptic SF novels.

Myself, I don't believe in fall-off-the-cliff scenarios. My observation is that there will be a descending staircase, with each economic shock being another step downward in economic living standards. The Roman Empire didn't collapse in one day; it split apart into smaller and smaller pieces. The British Empire didn't collapse in one shove; there were endless native wars and the garrisons came home one by one over a couple of decades. The Boomer generation may live to see the start of the downfall of the American Empire, but it is only their grandchildren who will look back and see how we slid down the slope.

A currency war is not hypothetical. We are in one right now, as Rickards emphasizes. Just as the boys didn't get back home in time for Christmas in 1914 or 1939, this war will not be over and done with in a year. There will not be a single battle, but many of them. The first few have already been fought, and more will come.

WATCHING YOU IN COWTOWN

-10-

by Dale Speirs

Calgary uses an automated street parking system. There are no parking meters. Instead, one locates a nearby kiosk, inserts a credit or debit card, types in their licence plate number and location of parking, and how much time is wanted. There are also smartphone apps allowing the driver to do it on a handheld. The advantage of the apps is that five minutes before your paid time runs out, it sends you a warning message and asks if you want to add more time. If the meeting is running late, you can refresh your parking tab without leaving the boardroom. Although commissionaires are still used for non-standard parking complaints (private property, back alleys, etcetera) the enforcement of street parking is done by surveillance minivans. These are equipped with three cameras on each side to cover all the angles. The van driver spends his day driving the streets photographing licence plates. He uses a randomized route so scofflaws can't predict the van's appearance. The images are transmitted to a central computer which can read the plate and using GPS compare it against who has paid and who hasn't. For the latter, a ticket is printed automatically, stuffed into an envelope by machine, and goes out in the mail that afternoon. I've been trying to photograph a surveillance van for quite some time but they move so swiftly that by the time I fumble the camera into position, the van has zoomed by.



I finally got lucky and photographed this one waiting at a traffic light. Park Plus is the CPA's name for the system. Note the

camera over each front door, and two cameras on each corner of the rear bumper, plus dish antenna on the back roof. -11-

CALGARY COMIC EXPO 2012

by Dale Speirs

[This was originally supposed to be a response to Lloyd Penney's letter of comment on the next page, but I got so long-winded that I decided to separate it out as an article.]

The 2012 Calgary Comic Expo was held on April 28 and 29, sold 50,000 tickets, and needed the huge exhibition halls and hockey arenas at the Stampede Grounds. Some fans paid \$495 extra for a photo opportunity with the complete leading cast of Star Trek:TNG. You had to pay extra for everything; the admission ticket just got you inside the building. The Las Vegas Star Trek convention had tried to get the complete cast and failed, so it was quite a coup for Calgary. At one point the Fire Marshall closed an exhibition hall for a short time due to over-capacity.

I did not attend, needless to say. However, had I known, I might have gone down to the grounds to watch the blocks-long lineups of costumed fans and take some photos. That would have been free, standing outside, and there would have been nothing inside that I would have paid to see. If the weather is nice next year I may go down and photograph the barbarians at the gate (both figurative and actual). These are not the people who would attend When Words Collide, nor would we really want them there. 50,000 isn't a convention, it's a crowd of faceless consumers.

When Words Collide is Calgary's literary convention with a completely different audience, so even if the commercial events targeted it (which they haven't) they couldn't do any damage. WWC does not have a masquerade, the dealer bourse sells only books, and there are no overweight Klingons roaming the hotel corridors. I enjoy it very much because I don't have to apologize to people when I tell them I'm going to a literary convention; they accept it at face value. With the now-defunct Con-Version SF convention, I had to tell them that no, we don't all dress up as Klingons or stand in line an hour to pay \$25 for the autograph of a supporting actor who played third vampire from the left in the second Twilight movie.

I'm sure the people who paid \$495 for twenty seconds of face time with actors who haven't done much lately thought they got value for their money, just as I'm happy to pay \$40 for an entire weekend with them that has read a book or written one good. Ad Astra, the Toronto SF convention, and other fan-run conventions of that ilk, shouldn't be trying to compete with comic cons. Since the professional operators can do that sort of thing better, let them have that market. Fan-run conventions should be targeting the niche markets that no Las Vegas business would consider, such as literary SF, fanzines, or filk singing. Those are the conventions that I enjoy most, where attendance doesn't go past 500, you don't have to stand in line for hours, and you can actually meet and greet friends or chat with an author without paying \$25.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

FROM: Murray Moore 2012-04-27
1065 Henley Road
Mississauga, Ontario L4Y 1C8

Re: your eAPA and FAPA page count comparison. I suggest FAPA has more pages in part because FAPA has more members and each FAPA member must contribute a minimum of eight pages per year.

[My point is that e-zine publishers should be churning out far more pages than they do because they have no expenses for postage or printing. Such people keep telling me that they have no money for paper zines, but given the chance for unlimited e-zines, they can't seem to get beyond a few pages of natter written by themselves, and the rest as letters of comment conveniently cut and pasted from e-mails written by others. Where are the Bruce Gillespies of pure e-zines?]

SFCOntario has non-book dealers as well as book dealers but not because of a quota. All book dealers who have wanted tables get tables. Book dealers are in the minority in general-interest conventions because few dealers in used books in this century find selling at conventions to be worth their time and investment.

FROM: Lloyd Penney 2012-04-03
1706 - 24 Eva Road
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

Re: the state of zinedom. I received enough zines and e-zines to allow me to write over 300 letters of comment this past year.

[I'd like to see more people keeping count and publishing statistics on their particular node in the Papernet. I started doing it after seeing Robert Lichtman's data.]

If the Calgary Comic Con killed [fan-run] media SF conventions in Calgary, the Ottawa Comic Con might do the same thing. Ottawa fandom will tell you there aren't many conventions left in town, but I figure the Ottawa Comic Con will get the rest of them, with the exception of Cancon, their own local literary convention. Similar professionally-run events in Toronto have, in my opinion, damaged our own local fan-run conventions, mostly by planting themselves on the same weekends and saying it's all coincidence, it was the only weekend they could get, etc. Wizard World Toronto landed on the same weekend as Ad Astra, which I know will lose anywhere from 50 to 75 people with that move. For a small fan-run convention that might be the difference between a profit or a loss.

FROM: Bob Jennings
29 Whiting Road
Oxford, Massachusetts 01540-2035

2012-04-30

offices of southwestern Alberta (where I live) and -14-
central-west (where I was born and raised) which I
expect will take me about five to ten years to finish. If I get all of
southern Alberta and central Alberta done before I die, I will be
lucky. I don't seriously expect to live long enough to do all 4,000
post offices. The articles are not dry statistics, although some
dates and names must be included of course, but narratives about
how the pioneers settled Alberta since 1876 (when the first post
office opened) and built up the Papernet. The book would not be
intended for the general public, anymore than they would buy a
book on the history of SF pulp magazines.]

You're writing a postal history of Alberta? I'm absolutely
stunned. Was there some crying need for this history that
compelled you to leap into the breach out of civic duty or
something? Who will be publishing this manuscript, once
completed? That's if it gets completed. Your remark about 4,000
post offices past and present implies the project is going to be an
extraordinarily lengthy one.

It certainly does appear that the print fanzine is a dying breed,
although those of us who are still dedicated to the form will
probably keep putting the things out until we keel over dead. At
least I plan to.

[Why would anyone write the history of anything? Say, for
example, SF pulp magazines, which you and I find interesting but
others shake their heads at. Lots of people are interested in postal
history and all the major developed nations have postal history
societies which publish professionally-printed journals on the
subject. I'm writing one district at a time, about five to ten post
offices, and publishing the articles in CANADIAN PHILATELIST
(a newsstand magazine in full colour), POSTAL HISTORY
SOCIETY OF CANADA JOURNAL, POSTAL HISTORY JOURNAL
(U.S.), and BNA TOPICS (by British North America Philatelic
Society), to name a few. All of these have circulations in the
thousands. As each installment is published, I am adding it to a
book manuscript, which will eventually be published in several
volumes but not just yet. Currently I'm working on the post

[As do I, although I suspect that a decade from now we'll all be
electronic whether we want to be or not. I've scanned all the back
issues of OPUNTIA but will hold off posting them on the Internet
for now.]

FROM: Ned Brooks
4817 Dean Lane
Lilburn, Georgia 30047

2012-05-03

In general, what I have seen of mail art mailings is quite a bit too far into the abstract corner of surrealism for me. Some of it is interesting to look at, but there is no way I would comment on it. There seems to be a much greater desire for anonymity in mail art than in fanzine fandom; most faneds put something like their real name on their zines. Hard to see why the mail art people are so shy. Some fanzines might be thought controversial, but most mail art efforts are completely impossible to argue about!

[In the last half of the 1900s, when mail art bloomed, those behind the Iron Curtain had to be careful, and those in democratic countries often copied the idea simply because it was artistic. Now that even the USA has begun repressing its citizens (Patriot Act, mandatory reporting of wealth, etcetera), it may be safer. This is also because if a mail artist uses nudity or coarse language in a piece, there may be some Deppity Dawg out there looking to rack up some easy arrests to fill his monthly quota. I've never published anything that I wouldn't have shown to my mother, but some people prefer to play it safe instead of having to bankrupt themselves defending a court case.]

FROM: Mark Plummer
59 Shirley Road
Croydon, Surrey CR0 7ES, England

2012-04-28

[Re: zine statistics] We saw 34 issues of 20 different British titles last year, and that's all on paper. Steve Green, administrator of the British Nova Awards, lists 36 eligible fanzines so far for the current "Nova year", which runs from 1 October. All this suggests a current level of activity if not quite in line with 1999/2000 then at least roughly on par with the early years of the last decade. I've just checked and in 2001 we received 58 British fanzines as against the 35 you received. Last year it was 34 against your 7. So it does seem that you're seeing fewer British fanzines rather than the number has gone through the floor.

[I had to prune my British exchange list, not so much for lack of zines but because a lot of them don't respond even with a letter. Given the horrendous new international postage rates in Britain thanks to the Bank of England depreciating the pound, I suspect a few more zinesters will stop sending to me.]

I Also Heard From: Henry Welch, Theo Nelson, John Held Jr, Franz Zrilich, Frank Denton, Phlox Icona, Tom Dangerfield, Stuart Stratu



The University of Calgary campus hosts an anime festival every Victoria Day weekend. I was doing some research at the University library on the Sunday morning and wove my way in between clusters of anime fans as I walked to the library. During the event, the central quad is the place for anime fans to see and be seen. On my way home I took some photos. This group looks more like a steampunk bunch except that there were no goggles or brass ornaments, and the women were wearing bright pink. Otafest is a combination film festival and costume convention. I've seen them in past years, and there seemed to be just as many this year, so Calgary Comic Con doesn't appear to have hurt them. Not a Klingon in sight, just Caucasian kids pretending to be doe-eyed Japanese. -16-

WORLD WIDE PARTY #19

2012 will be the 19th annual World Wide Party on June 21st at 21h00 your local time. Invented by Benoit Girard (Québec) and Franz Miklis (Austria), the idea is to get a wave circulating the world of zinesters, mail artists, and SF fans toasting the Papernet. At 21h00, you are requested to raise a glass to your fellow denizens of zinedom. Face to the east and toast those who have already celebrated the WWP. Then toast to the north and south for those in your time zone. Finally, face to the west and toast those yet to celebrate.