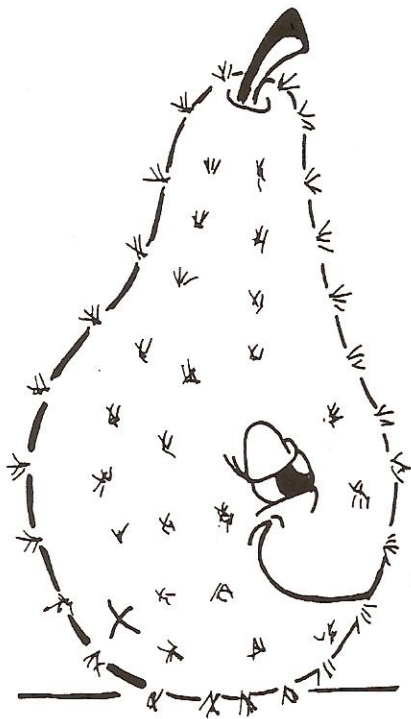


OPUNTIA

26.5



Opuntia...
otherwise known as the
prickly pear....

Well, why didn't you say so?!

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EDITORIAL: It's been a while since I've done a perzine issue. My job is cyclical, and having described most of the seasons of parks maintenance, I find it difficult to avoid repeating myself. I quit reading newspapers for the most part, which has immensely improved my peace of mind, but does mean I'm out of touch with what our Premier is up to. So, not too many of humorous anecdotes about Ralph Klein in the tavern or legislature. The Québec referendum went down to very narrow defeat, but Benoit Girard of FROZEN FROG is the chap to fill you in on those details. I suspect my perzine issues will dwindle down to annual frequency, and only then to keep the material from being stale-dated.

At work, we started up the mowing machines on May 15, in most cases just a trim around the edges of parks where the grass greened up early because of heat from the adjacent asphalt roadway. At home, I did the first mow of my yard yesterday, putting it off until the grass was 15 cm but finally conceding that the lawnmower had to come out. Just as well though, for during the night we had a heavy snowfall. In winter this is no problem, but a spring snowfall just as the leaves are opening causes problems with snow sticking to the leaves. The weight is too much for many branches, or, as happened in my back yard in the night, a tree.

There are two Manitoba maples along the back alley fence that spread out from the ground. One tree was so over-balanced that several years ago I ran chains between the trunks to tie them together and keep them upright. One chain snapped in the night, dropping a trunk onto a garden shed. Fortunately it only lightly brushed my neighbour's garage, but the shed now has a noticeable dent in the roof. If it were a car, I would be required to report it to the police before taking it in to the auto-body shop. The door of the shed still opens and closes, albeit a good yank is now needed to shut it.

My plans for lolling around the house were dashed, as it took me the afternoon to cut up the branches and stack them. Driving about the city elsewhen that day, I saw downed branches everywhere, so no doubt we shall be busy on Tuesday with City trees. I'll need a commercial service to clean up my backyard but will wait until the rush is over.

Cutting up a fallen tree takes technique. One removes a small section at a time, resisting the temptation to take a big whack at once. To do so suddenly relieves the tree of a great weight and causes it to kick back, with serious consequences. Small pieces let the tree move slowly

[continued next page]

a bit at a time to release the pressure. One also takes off first the branches sticking up into the air on the topside of the fallen trunk. This prevents the tree from rolling over and crushing the pruner or impaling him on a branch.

CANADIAN POLITICS EXPLAINED

Just reading through a zine trade, and not for the first time either is the complaint that Canadian politics as discussed in OPUNTIA is too confusing to understand. I'll therefore try to briefly summarize our situation.

1) Confederation is held together by mutual hatred of Toronto.

2) Alberta and Québec are the two noisiest provinces in Canada, but Ontario has all the money. British Columbia is like California, only with gun control and less smog. All the other provinces are bit players. The province of Prince Edward Island is too small; there are cattle ranches in Saskatchewan bigger than PEI.

3) The three most popular sports in Canada are hockey, curling, and constitutional reform.

4) There is no religious bigotry here but be careful of what language you speak in a public place.

5) The Prime Minister of Canada is not the undisputed leader of the country but only the first among equals with the provincial Premiers. The Québec Premier is always opposed to what the others favour and vice versa.

6) Unsuccessful constitutional amendments are called accords. Accords fail because there is always someone who asks "What's in it for me?".

7) Notwithstanding the constitutions of 1867 and 1982, we never follow them anyway. Any connection between what the constitution specifies as the form of government and the actual method of governing is purely coincidental.

8) The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in the House of Commons is a separatist.

9) Her Majesty The Queen of Canada seldom visits Canada. No one really cares one way or the other except two fringe groups, the monarchists and the republicans. Both groups are ignored by the general public, and as a result spend most of their time writing letters to rural newspapers and putting rubber stamps on their envelopes for or against the monarchy. Monarchists and republicans are not classified with groups like creationists or flat-earthers but only just.

10) When drinking in an Alberta tavern, never say loudly "Québec should be recognized as a distinct society". In a Québec tavern, one should never say that the Mohawks were right. In British Columbia logging towns, always sit close to the door before getting into a discussion about old-growth forests. Remember: None of these things will contribute to national unity.

11) An American President in trouble at the opinion polls will distract public attention by invading a small country. As the Canadian Armed Forces would have trouble with a native Reserve, nevermind some small country, this option is not available to Canadian Prime Ministers. The commonly accepted alternative therefore is to propose a new round of constitutional talks. This also helps keep the news media pundits off the pogy.

12) A Canadian is someone who instinctively says "London, Ontario" so as to avoid confusion with the similarly-named "London, England".

90 YEARS OF MAGPIES

I spotted a note in a local magazine AVENUE that 1995 is the 90th anniversary of the first recorded sighting of a magpie in Alberta. Lethbridge had this honour; citizens were much amused by the sight of this black and white raven with the extraordinarily long tail feathers and weird swooping flight. Today there are millions of the birds, and they are considered a pest species. Magpies have actually always been native to the Great Plains, but were quite rare until this century. They are scavengers, forever searching for scraps of anything edible. In the days of the bison herds and aboriginal hunters, magpies followed along looking for scraps of offal or insects stirred up in the grass. It wasn't until Europeans settled in large numbers and built towns that magpies began increasing in quantity. Garbage cans, litter, roadkill, and landfill have provided a rich feast for for magpies. Trees planted on the prairies added more nesting sites to the few along riverbanks. The birds are so efficient at extracting garbage that the Parks Dept. had to give up on normal garbage cans and switch to the more expensive bins with lids. You could always tell when a magpie visited a can by the circular spray of litter on the ground around it.

9 DAYS OF MOWING

1995-5-24

My maintenance district is about average size, with about 350 hectares of parks and freeway boulevards to mow. The mowing machines run 12 hours a day every day. This wears them out a lot faster than a homeowner's machine. The mowing decks are replaced every two years, although the tractor unit can last up to five years before it goes. If we get two years out of a string trimmer or lawnmower we are fortunate. Blades are sharpened weekly or sooner as required. Trucks put on about 100 km a day. No rest for the wicked.

RIVER DEEP, MOUNTAIN HIGH

1995-6-7

Yesterday we had an all-day soaker, a record rainfall of 10 cm in about 18 hours. This shut down the parks maintenance crews and mowers for the day, although we're back up and running today. The rain came just as snowmelt in the mountains peaked. Across southern Alberta, rivers are overflowing, up to 9 m above normal levels. People who live on valley bottoms are surprised and indignant that the water is flooding them out. The town of High River, built on a floodplain, has discovered a) why it is called a flood plain, and b) why the stream that flows through it was named High River.

I checked my riverbank parks this morning. In various places the parks are flooded, but nothing serious as far as the natural areas are concerned. Cottonwoods and grass can handle brief inundations without difficulty. It is the human stuff that is falling prey to the Bow River, as bridge footings and embankment pathways are eroding away. Over at Weaselhead, the delta where the Elbow River empties into the Glenmore Reservoir, the pedestrian bridge on the footpath has disappeared into the depths of the reservoir. Over at the Bow River, part of a freeway is shut down, yet another tribulation for the poor commuter. A barrier put up across a pathway downstream has been trampled by bicycle commuters, who would rather chance a sudden death than have to take a detour. Not that they will get far; they can only go about 1 km around a curve before reaching the flooded portion. I have no doubt even then some waded through the strong current to reach the other side rather than turn back and lose time. Where is natural selection when you really need it?

At the Douglasbank natural area, the levees were holding quite well. Not that they were much use, as the land is glacial gravel, and the water simply seeps under and comes up on the other side, albeit without any silt.

A PASTORAL SCENE (INSERT ELEVATOR MUSIC TO TASTE)

In a backwater at the Douglasbank pedestrian bridge over the Bow River, I saw two pair of Canada geese shepherding their goslings through the flooded grass. The parents honked watchfully, one of each pair leading the way upstream, the other at the side of the goslings, keeping them close in to the bank. As they moved along, I kept pace with them. The parents watched me anxiously. Normally they would have just moved out into the river to avoid me, but the Bow was roaring along like a runaway locomotive. The adult geese could handle the current, but the goslings were too young for it. So they had to stay close to the bank, as much as they would have preferred not to. We walked along together, I in silence, parents bobbing their heads and nervously honking, the goslings completely unconcerned and busy nibbling at flotsam.

The bank dwindled to a gentle slope, where two more pair of geese were resting on the shore while their goslings toddled around nibbling on grass. The new arrivals waddled up onto the grass, flushing out a redheaded flicker as they did so. The flicker flew over to a nearby fence and sat on a post in indignant silence. The flock of geese grazed; the goslings without notice of the outside world, the adults eyeing me with undisguised suspicion. Alas, duty called, and I had to depart this pastoral scene, back to the 'real' world.

THE REAL WORLD

On the opposite side of the river, in the Southland natural area, I discovered a white Ford Bronco sunk in past the bumpers. No, I don't think it was O.J.'s. The area is rutted and soggy at the best of times; to trespass on it after record rainfall was lunacy. The police had been notified earlier by a citizen, and were there with a tow truck and the very chagrined Bronco owner. I spoke to the constable and got the details for my records. It seems

the abashed gent had just purchased the Bronco, and wanted to see what it would do. What it would do, he learned the hard way, was sink in past the axles when driven into a waterlogged swale. Between the towing bill and the summons issued by the constable, he had an expensive lesson on the capabilities or lack thereof of 4WDs.

THE REAL WORLD IN ONTARIO

1995-6-9

So far I've been doing very well in not buying newspapers but today I made a special exception to see who won the Ontario election yesterday and for coverage of the Alberta floods. There was never any doubt that the governing NDP in Ontario were to go down in flames, only which of the two opposition parties would take over, the Liberals or the Tories. The NDP set a textbook study of tax and spend, running up Ontario's debt so high as to not only imperil their economy but act as a drag on the rest of Canada. The Grits had been favoured at one stage but the Tories came from behind on a Klein-like budget cutting strategy that made Mike Harris the new Premier today. The Tories got 82 seats, the Liberals had 30, and the NDP went from government to third party with 17. There was also one independent riding. The Ontario Tories are celebrating today, but now they have the enormous deficit and debt to look forward to, with all the attendant screaming and protest marches. Alberta Premier Ralph Klein and his fellow Tories have the advantage in having eliminated the deficit in the last three years, and are now beginning the task of reducing the debt.

WINGNUTS OVER COWTOWN

1995-6-25

David Thayer aka Teddy Harvia was in Calgary on business, and today I gave him the grand tour. A quick whip-round of the city, including the Parks depot I work out of, a trip to the Museum of the Regiments, a guided tour of my house, and a visit to the Calgary Zoo. Always nice to be able to put a face to a name I've corresponded with.

THOSE WHO LIVE BY POLITICAL CORRECTNESS ... 1995-7-2

The world's largest rodeo is the Calgary Stampede, but it is not the only rodeo held here, there being a variety of minor rodeos throughout the year. One of these is the Gay Rodeo, attracting about 4000 visitors. But alas, the Gay Rodeo was picketed today by animal-rights activists, who said that rodeo treatment of animals was no better than gay-bashing. Protestor Kelly Dunfield said that rodeos are heterosexual events which had nothing to teach homosexuals, and that animals and humans are equals. Peter Hodgson felt that gays were oppressing another group, the animals. Picketers urged rodeo fans to boycott the gays. There was no word of country singer K.D. Lang, a lesbian who grew up on an Alberta farm and, after she became a major star, then denounced eating meat.

TWO VERY MINOR VIGNETTES

1995-8-11

After a cool, wet summer, wildflowers are well behind in their flowering. I was collecting seed today in a riverbank area but found little. I did find some pods of purple vetch, a climbing legume, and harvested them for my garden. I'll try to grow them up a utility pole guy wire on my boulevard. I put the pods in a paper packet and then into my shirt pocket. As the afternoon progressed, I kept hearing little snapping sounds which I first thought was the paper crackling. Eventually I realized the pods were snapping open from the effect of my body heat.

On my way home, I saw a nice customized Chevelle with a 30ish woman at the wheel. The car licence plate read "WAS HIS". Must have been a nasty divorce. My plate is, of course, "OPUNTIA", but it came before the zine. Another plate that sticks in my mind is "46 XX", a minivan driven by a young mum with two kids.

WORLD ENDS! (STORY ON PAGE 3)

1995-8-15

I've been doing fairly well on my cold turkey break from reading newspapers, but still glance at the headlines as I drive by a street box. The trivial nature of most of the headlines confirms that I'm not missing much. The CALGARY SUN, a right-wing tabloid, is the worst offender, using end-of-the-world-sized type for what is essentially buried-in-the-classified news. Today was the best I have yet seen, a screamer "ALBERTA OPTS OUT!". Out of what? I wondered. Has Confederation finally broken up in an unexpected manner? Did the Tories repudiate universal medicare? Not at all. The tiny subheading told us that the Alberta government will not co-operate with the federal government in harmonizing federal and provincial sales taxes. Since Alberta does not have a provincial sales tax, this was a definite piece of non-news.

THEY'LL ALL GO TOGETHER WHEN THEY MOVE

1995-8-23

To a public meeting at Mount Royal College tonight, with the purpose of collecting public input on what use to make of CFB Calgary lands once the base closes down. The federal government officially is closing the base due to budget cuts, but it should have been closed decades ago. Like many military sites, CFB Calgary was kept open for political and economical reasons. The regiments do all their training exercises in northern Alberta, and will move to CFB Edmonton over the next few years. The Lord Strathcona Horse (armoured) will be gone next year, the Princess Patricia (infantry) in 1997. Last soldier out turns the key and gives it to the representative from the Ministry of Public Works.

When the base was first built, it was far outside city limits. Today it is a central location, and real estate developers are discreetly pushing and shoving to get at it. They were dismayed to find out though that they are

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at the bottom of the list for considered users. The Ministry of Defence have stated that the land will be offered first to other federal departments, then the provincial government, municipal government, and school boards, in that order. Mount Royal College, a provincial institution, has already said it wants part of the base for future expansion (the two are across the road from each other). Habitats For Humanity, a public housing group, has put in a bid as well. They specialize in housing for the working poor; not those who are on the pogeys but low-income wage earners who are willing to put in some sweat equity in communal house building. There is also a proposal to turn the base into Hollywood North, a film studio that will use the base as film sets. That proposal is probably dead on arrival, as no one in the surrounding residential neighbourhoods, such as mine, wants that kind of people around. After all, we already have the Premier of Alberta living in our area.

BUT FIRST THE WEATHER REPORT ...

Calgary has experienced another cool, wet summer, even as all my loccers from eastern USA tell me about the sweltering heat they've been suffering. Our weather has been an endless run of cloudy days with scattered showers, rather than days of full-scale drizzle. Still better than living in Vancouver, plus the advantage of lower taxes and living costs.

... AND NOW THE ELECTION RESULTS

1995-10-16

Municipal elections across Alberta today. Mostly the usual run; very quiet in Calgary, but a major upset in Edmonton. Calgary had four aldermen returned by acclamation, most of the others got back in, and Mayor Al Duerr was re-elected with his usual 90% vote. He had six fringe candidates running against him, one of

whom dropped out of sight the day after Nomination Day. It seems that when the papers published the names of all the candidates, the police recognized this chap as being wanted on a warrant. They naturally wanted him to assist them with their enquiries, as the saying goes. I broke down and bought a paper to get the election results. The only interesting election was in Edmonton, where a Left versus Right battle was fought. Edmonton went Liberal in the last provincial election while the rest of Alberta was Tory. Since Edmonton council was left-wing, they spent the last few years slagging with Premier Klein. He was laughing today though. The mayor and other Left aldermen were defeated by a Chamber of Commerce slate. The Edmonton election also included a referendum on closing the Municipal Airport in the centre of the city and moving all flights to Edmonton International Airport. For some strange reason, voters agreed to the closure. The International is about a \$30 taxi ride away, and is in a different county. The cabbies were celebrating all night.

Calgary had a quiet election, with no loud issues. The budget is balanced, nobody got caught with his hand in the till, and our idea of a traffic jam is a 30-minute commute from the extreme edge of the city.

FLOOR 6A

Viewed from afar, the University of Calgary Library looks much like any skyscraper. A prolonged observation, however, leads to the discovery that the floor above the 6th floor is strangely vacant. All the other floors are racked with bookshelves, but on the mystery floor one is able to look through the building and see out the other side. A patron using the staircase inside the building will pass floors 6, 6A, then 7. The door to 6A is locked and labelled as "Mechanical Floor". The explanation is that when the library was built, the engineers miscalculated the weight of the books. The building's centre of gravity is too high, so 6A has railed counterweights that move back and forth to compensate for the building sway.

The second BanffCon (the first was in 1989) was held at the Banff Park Lodge from October 6 to 8. Or, as the programme book had it, October 6 to 7a. GoH was Terry Pratchett of Discworld fame. I wasn't about to pay \$90 a night for a hotel room when I live only an hour away in Calgary, and so I commuted daily. Even with the \$8 daily fee to enter Banff National Park and the gas, it was still cheaper.

I skipped Friday night but drove in early Saturday morning. This had the advantage of having the sun behind me in the morning illuminating the blue and white Rockies, a spectacular sight going along the Trans-Canada Highway. Likewise, the evening return trip was made with the setting sun lighting up the peaks on the opposite sides. Over the foothills of the western city and down into the Bow Valley, through the tribal Reserves, past cattle grazing in the fields of the river floodplain, past the herds of mountain sheep grazing in the roadside ditches. The mountains loomed high, and were a inspiring sight at close range, scraping the bottoms off passing clouds, springs cascading down the cliffs. The commute passed in no time at all. I drove the new Trans-Canada, designed with wide driving lanes to compensate for drivers watching the scenery instead of the road.

Banff is so heavily dominated by the Japanese tourist industry that it is trilingual, and the hotels fly the Japanese flag along with the Canadian and American flags. Instead of the usual bilingual letterboxes, I found myself mailing postcards into boxes that had Japanese and German in addition to the usual English and French.

Entering the hotel, I found nothing mentioning the con

but the walls were plastered with announcements informing us that the Registrar's Office of the Unseen University was on the next floor. This no doubt puzzled any mundane anglophones around, although most at the hotel lobby were Japanese who couldn't read it. The concom used titles to fit the Discworld series. The programme book was the Fall Calendar of the Unseen University, there was a Chancellor instead of the Chairman, a Recorder of Recent Runes, and so forth. I saw more of the Vancouver fandom than I do at ConVersions in Calgary; I guess they don't like that extra hour's drive into the city.

My arrival Saturday morning was timed so that as soon as I registered (a fast and easy process) and read the programme book, pardon me, the Fall Calendar, I had to hustle to get to the Virtual Reality panel, a lecture with slides on what is happening there. Not that I am overly interested in it, but the alternative panel on costuming did not appeal. VR still has a ways to go; computers are not able to keep up with a quick head movement, for example. The technology is improving though, and Smith showed examples from the leading edge. I was surprised to learn that one of the big problems in VR is sound, since we use stereo location more than we realize to determine our surroundings. Another problem with VR is that barf bags are sometimes needed, where the visual input confuses the body because it is still reacting to real-world cues such as gravity. Doug Smith showed some colourful slides of VR output, artistic works in their own right.

In the interval to the next panel I wanted to see, I went to the Tower of Art, strangely on the lowest floor. Perhaps I should reread my complete run of Discworld novels to verify that one. Better quality art than normal, and, what I thought a great idea, a mail-art exhibition. This was probably the first mail-art show at an SF con and one wonders why it hasn't become standard at all cons. Mail art is homemade (but often professional quality) postcard or cacheted envelope art, sent through the post.

The highlight of Saturday was my finally getting to see a Mr. Science demonstration. On entering the room we found on each chair a disclaimer notice as follows.

"STANDARD MR. SCIENCE DISCLAIMER - Version 37 - By the mere act of entering this room I and all of my descendants (if any) hereby release Mr. Science and his social secretary Alan R. Betz, and the BanffCon Committee from any liability resulting from mishaps, nuclear or otherwise, that may take place during the Opening Ceremonies or any other demonstration by Mr. Science, including, but not limited to the following: Explosions, radiation leaks, fission, fusion, antimatter annihilation, toxic chemical spills, spurring liquid nitrogen, biological accident or bio-engineered contagion, alien invasion, inadvertent genetic mutation, unexpected tectonic shifts, asteroid impacts, unscheduled solar eclipses, inter-dimensional slippages, solipsism, embolism, myopia, hysteria, dipsomania, kleptomania, frostbite, botulism, elk gorings, thefts of uranium or plutonium, spontaneous human combustion, French nuclear testing, retaliatory airstrikes, Winnebagos, arithmetical errors, exchange rates, excema, entropy, acts of any God or Gods however hypothetical, NASA, CANDU, NATO, NAFTA, and criminal acts of physics."

With that in mind, the large crowd, myself included, took our seats and waited for the show to start. Mr. Science, who looks like Santa Claus in a lab coat, was bustling about a table crammed with mysterious apparatus. While waiting out the late start, I noticed Mr. Science had a worried look on his face as he browsed over his equipment. I began to wonder if perhaps I should move back a couple rows of seats. Matters were not helped when he stopped to mop the sweat off his face with a ConAdian T-shirt. But away went the demos in a moment. The demonstrations included clicking noises as assorted substances were passed by a Geiger counter, scribbled formulae of various nuclear reactions (Do not try this at home!), and various satisfy-

ing thuds and bangs from the experimental apparatus. Mr. Science also carried out part of his experiments while wearing rubber gloves for protection against toxic substances. The effect of this was rather spoiled when he scratched his cheek while wearing contaminated gloves and again when he took them off and handled them with bare fingers instead of turning them inside out as he peeled them off. The final demonstration was a very loud explosion that left our ears ringing and a haze of smoke that could easily have triggered the fire sprinklers. As we exited, a kindly lady handed us anti-radiation pills, flavoured orange. A puddle of yellow fluid was noted on the floor, but this was not, as some speculated, a member of the audience losing bladder control from the fright of that last explosion. Rather the bang startled someone into dropping his can of soda pop on the floor.

The next panel I went to was in the same room immediately following Mr. Science. As the panelists for the topic of "Small Press & Publishing Houses" filtered into the room, carefully walking around the puddle, I chatted briefly with Robert Runté, or at least as best I could until my hearing recovered. Runté was the moderator of the panel, and started it off by having small-press operators introduce themselves and explain a bit about their presses, such as Riverbend Books, Tesseract Books, TRANSVERSIONS, and ON SPEC. John Mansfield, sitting in the audience, then livened up the panel by asking bear-baiting questions that got a debate going. Canadian small press vs. American small press vs. American mass market press (which also controls 75% of the Canadian market), with side excursions into quality, writers in Canada, and quotations from Glasgow panels.

The Guest of Honour speeches were that evening, but since they were combined with a costume event (you had to wear one to get in) I skipped it. The Con Treasurer, pardon me, Bursar, is heavily involved in the Western Canadian Costumers' Guild, which explains that.

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Sunday morning at 10h00 was the AGM of the BanffCon 95 Society. We were there bright and early but the meeting was delayed because the Chairman, pardon me, Chancellor, wasn't. A phone call was made and he was roused out of bed and hustled down to where he was intended to be. The elections were acclamations. The Bursar (got it right that time) advised that BanffCon made money on attendance of 246. Under new business, John Mansfield proposed that NonCon, instead of being an Alberta con, become a western Canadian con. (BanffCon 95 was also NonCon 18.) Since NonCon has been held once in British Columbia, and there were no Alberta bids for 1996, this logic easily carried the day when the motion was put. Henceforth NonCon will be the Canadian equivalent of Westercon, roaming the wide open spaces of the prairies and squeezing through the narrow mountain valleys of British Columbia. In a less poetic manner, KeyCon 96 bid for NonCon 19, and was elected to such without dissent. Thus NonCon will be in Winnipeg next year.

Later in the day, I took in a panel "Tabloids in the 21st Century". This was an audience participation run by Cliff Samuels. Each member of the audience received three slips of paper, and had to come up with a 21st Century tabloid headline and first paragraph. My slips were 'JFK', 'Post Office', and 'Interviewed'. In the few minutes allotted, I could only come up with "Post Office Interviewed JFK For Job, Says Alien". The text is as follows.

"A time-travelling alien today revealed that after President Kennedy dropped out of sight by staging his fake assassination, he was working for the USPS. Kennedy and his wife Marilyn Monroe staged their deaths so they could be together and live a normal life. Monroe was easily able to change her appearance by not bleaching her hair anymore. The alien, who is from Proxima Centura on a graduate fellowship to study Elvis

Presley's life after his death was faked, asked Kennedy how it was that no one recognized him. JFK said that since everyone knew he was dead, he just told them "No, but I look like him", and that seemed to satisfy them. Kennedy retired from the Post Office in 1995."

Following on that was a Tour of Discworld, with Terry Pratchett giving a chat about his life and writing. It was humorous but doesn't translate to words as he did a lot of pantomime to illustrate his account.

The Closing Ceremonies, pardon me, Graduation Ceremonies, started off with the Chancellor thanking the pupils for being so studious. A big thank-you on behalf of the Japanese tourists in the hotel the night of the costume ball, who will take back some unexpected photographs of those crazy North Americans. He concluded with "And a final word from the Librarian ...", cupped his ear to the audience, who caught on immediately and replied as one "OOOK!". If you didn't understand that, then you must read Discworld.

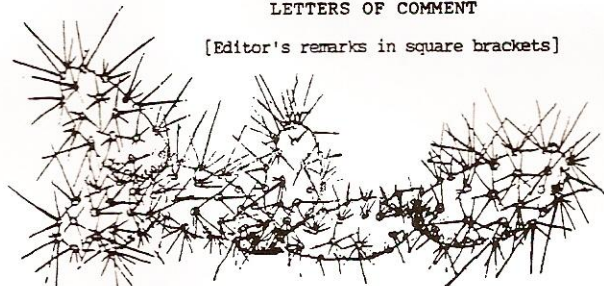
BanffCon 95 seemed to go over quite well, almost a relaxation. There were only three tracks of programming at the most. It was hard to go wrong in the scenic town; one could glance out of almost any window and enjoy the mountains looming overhead, glistening with snow caps, while the valley floor was dry and bare.

I took some of my zines along for the freebie table as I usually do, but this time got rid of very few, not more than ten copies at most of an issue. However, since I did the same thing for ConVersion earlier this summer and since most of those attending were Calgarians who would have already seen the material, this would explain it. The only other zine I saw on the table was HISSY FIT, out of British Columbia.

And so, with a final OOOK! to friends, back to Cowtown.

LETTERS OF COMMENT

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Chester Cuthbert
Winnipeg, Manitoba

1995-6-4

Your experiment at ignoring world news matches my failing to subscribe to any newspaper a few years ago. However, I found a newspaper necessary to prompt me to keep up-to-date on several of my most serious areas of study, and I have been reading the WINNIPEG FREE PRESS carefully ever since.

[The day your letter arrived I broke down and bought the paper to see how the Ontario provincial election went and to follow the news about the floods in Alberta. I won't go back to buying newspapers regularly, but will unbend occasionally to satisfy my need for a fix of political news.]

I was amused by your mention of the Reichardt brothers. Randy sends me a Christmas card and letter each year, but has not visited me since he went to Edmonton many years ago. Few former members of the Winnipeg SF Society are still in touch with me, but Randy is one of the faithful.

Are the Calgary shops stocking SF pulps, either digest or the larger pulp size? I'm being asked for duplicates by several collectors who say that they seldom see any in the shops anymore. I read somewhere that magazines prior to 1945 are seldom seen, and I have no duplicates myself older than that. ASTOUNDING and GALAXY seem most in demand, also the short-run digests which had limited circulation.

[Calgary bookstores have lots of SF zines back to about the 1970s. It is extremely unusual to see anything older than that on the shelves. The good stuff is kept under the counter for favoured customers (which is how I get some of mine) or disappears the same day it is set out. There is one Calgary dealer who buys but does not sell; she told me that the stuff gets more valuable with time so she is keeping all the pulps she can find as an investment. Pulps from the 1950s sell at about \$5 to \$15 a copy; anything before that starts at around \$20 and up. Even the 1970s issues are starting to dwindle away.]

FROM: Joseph Major
3307H River Chase Court
Louisville, Kentucky 40218-1832

1995-6-5

If you were taught in school that "American missiles would intercept Soviet missiles over Alberta", your teachers had more faith in the AEM system than the scientific establishment had here. The air conditioning in the Diefenbunker must have been quite the sight. Grant McCormick used to show off advertisements he received for Virgin Commies, which were for new vacuum tubes manufactured in the Soviet bloc for their then still-flourishing vacuum tube service base. I remember that the tube tester in the mall at Hopkinsville was not phased out until sometime in the 1970s.

[It's amazing just how long 'obsolete' technology can hang around. The mimeograph and the Gestetner immediately are in mind.]

FROM: Buck Coulson
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Hartford City, Indiana 47348

1995-6-2

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of, say, Harry Warner's manual typewriter. The receivers are large, get very warm, and need tubes that have not been made in 40 years. One of the oddest car rides in my life involved one of the above people and a VW bug. A classic old radio tower had collapsed on the hill above Candlestick Park. To fit the chosen pieces required us to remove everything from the interior except for the bare essential driving gear, and both rear side windows.

I never made a secret of my SF addiction, and I don't recall anyone asking why I believed in that crazy stuff. It was still 'crazy Buck Rogers stuff' when I began. My employers loved it because I'd take my vacations a day or two at a time to go to conventions. They could just pile stuff on my desk until I got back.

FROM: Bridget Hardcastle
13 Lindfield Gardens
Hampstead, London NW3 6PX, England

1995-6-6

I enjoyed reading about the Calgary Stampede. Is it something locals attend as much as tourists? Or is it something the locals don't bother with as it happens every year? And the breakfasts! If I ever visit Canada on a budget, I'll know to see Calgary during Stampede week.

[At a guess, I would say it's about half locals and half tourists. Some Calgarians make a big show of putting their noses in the air and leave town during the Stampede, but that is their loss. Calgary has about 750,000 population. The opening parade is estimated at 100,000 on the sidewalks watching it, and the local TV stations pick up 300-400,000 viewers. The Stampede itself gets 1.1 million paid visitors. I don't go every year but do most years.]

FROM: Mark Strickert
Box 59851
Schaumburg, Illinois 60159-0851

1995-6-22

Old tubes: A few radio hobbyists I know still insist on using WW2-era receiving equipment, much in the vein

FROM: Harry Andruschak
Box 5309
Torrance, California 90510-5309

1995-6-1

Too bad the elm bark beetles have arrived in Calgary. The introduction of foreign plants and animals to new ecosystems has long been a problem, and only getting worse as the planet gets more crowded and transportation more varied and swift. Here in southern California the Medfly is the pest that keeps coming back. Australia has its rabbits.

[What worries me is that we are now only a day or two away from those viruses in central Africa.]

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Brant Kresovich, Henry Welch, Eoghan Barry, Robert Lichtman, Michael McKenny, Harry Warner, Garth Spencer, Rodney Leighton, Vicki Rosenzweig, Paula Johanson, Murray Moore, John Berry, Brian Earl Brown, Patty Marvel, Susan Zuege