

# OPUNTIA

## 66.3

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**OPUNTIA** is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage outside USA and I don't collect them.

Whole-numbered OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines.

### WHAT IS FAPA?

This issue is for the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. (Details from Robert Lichtman, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, California 994611-1948) For those of you receiving this issue who do not know what an apa is, please read on.

Modern zine publishing as we know it today began in the middle 1800s as cheap, home-use printing presses became available to the general public. Zinesters developed a distro method called the amateur press association (apa) where members sent x number of copies of their zine to a central mailer (also known as the official editor). The zines are collated into bundles, and each member gets back one bundle of everyone's zines. There is an annual fee to cover postage. Apas have a minimum level of activity required, such as publishing 8 pages a year. It must be emphasized that apas are not for passive subscribers; you must commit to the minimum activity level or you will be booted out. FAPA has been going for more than 70 years; the oldest apa is the National A.P.A., founded 1876.

x.3 OPUNTIAs are for FAPA. In addition to articles, there will be mailing comments on other apazines in the last FAPA bundle. I usually quote the remark I am commenting on, so hopefully an outsider can still read the comments with interest.

FAPA #284 received in Calgary on August 26, 2008. The FAPA Clearcut Award for the most pages in the mailing for #284 goes to Robert Sabella with 45 pages.

**The Annex #26** Re: your height shrinking over the years. It happens to all of us; I was 184 cm tall in my 20s, 182 cm at the doctor's office about ten years ago, and have steadfastly refused to measure my height since (I am now 53). My driver's licence still says 184 cm, but if the Ministry of Transport doesn't ask, I'm certainly not going to tell. You mention that your parents were shorter than you. On my father's side of the family, whenever he and his brothers lined up for a photo at a family gathering in order of age, it automatically sorted them out by height as well. The shortest ones were growing boys during the height of the Great Depression, and the tallest son was also the youngest, who came of age during the more prosperous war years.

Re: newspaper story about Ray Bradbury in his dotage. His stories are badly dated and will eventually be forgotten. As with Heinlein, I read him once and never since. I'm an Asimov man, myself.

Re: the mass media's treatment of climate change. Part of the problem is that it is commonly referred to as global warming,

which is true in the sense that the average planet-wide temperature is increasing. That is the average, however, and people don't understand that it doesn't mean that Ottawa will become a desert or hurricanes pound Florida every other week all summer long. Eastern North America is becoming moister, in fact. The other problem is that we were already in the midst of a natural climate change and humans are forcing it harder and faster than it might have been otherwise, so it is a bit of both. It also depends where you live. Albertans and Idahoans don't worry about hurricanes or rising sea levels. -2-

**A Different Drummer #14** Re: the all-editors issue of OTHER WORLDS magazine published June 1952. It was interesting how everyone was so optimistic about space travel then. Now it's difficult to get excited about it when all they are doing is lab experiments in the International Floating Tin Can. Arthur C. Clarke had an easier time of it appearing on British television plugging space travel because in 1952 anything was possible. Today it's not in the budget.

**Ghu FAPAment #608** Re: your report on Leprecon, the SF convention in Arizona. You mentioned the youngest person in the room at a panel on space exploration was 40. I don't think this necessarily means a lack of interest by the younger generation. They're just accustomed to discussing things on-line, not at conventions. That is why God gave us the Internet.

**Two Pages To FAPA** Re: Einsteinian queries, such as why photons traveling at cross directions in a room don't interfere with each other if light is waves. Some do, but the effect is not noticeable for random scattered light in an ordinary room. Light waves are not really waves as we understand them washing ashore on the beach. They are probability distributions as to where photon particles will appear.

**Ben's Beat #93** Re: the ancient SF of Garrett Serviss, published before World War One. I have since bought a copy of "The Moon Metal" as one of my many sub-collections is economics in fiction.

Re: Mel Brooks, you write "*I watched his film BLAZING SADDLES on DVD. Awful.*" This is one of my favourite films because of its politically incorrect but more accurate approach to the Old West than most westerns. I skip the ending, where Brooks obviously ran out of ideas and faked his way out, but Slim Pickens and Harvey Korman are at their best. Political correctness in westerns was at its worst when Will Smith did a re-make of THE WILD, WILD WEST with himself as one of the heroes.

**Feline Mewsings #33** You mentioned Fareed Zakaria's book THE POST-AMERICAN WORLD, and write: "*Zakaria thinks the U.S. has grown careless, arrogant, and lazy since the fall of the Soviet Union. The U.S. must learn to play in the new global economy or it will go the way of the British Empire.*" All of this

depends on what happens to the American dollar, the de facto world currency because it is currently supported by Saudi Arabia and China, who hold trillions of dollars in reserves. As long as this stays the case, the USA will be able to continue running up its debts and starting wars against small countries. If the Chinese and Arabs start dumping dollars, the USA will see massive inflation that will lead to a decade of stagnation. Another thing protecting the American economy is that Wall Street bankers were able to fob off bad debt, aka sub-prime mortgages, on to foreign banks and investors, who now suffer the write-offs. By selling bad paper worldwide, the American banks ensured that the rest of the world had to write off much of their bad debts.

**Snark Hunters' Quarterly #1** Re: Hollywood producing too many re-makes and re-boots, for lack of imagination. This is because the accountants are in charge. Don't worry about it, though, for there are lots of alternatives that can be ordered on-line as DVDs. I have never owned a television set but recently bought a DVD laptop player. Television comedies you might like are CORNER GAS, LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE, the first four seasons of ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS (after that it went downhill), and GETTING ALONG FAMOUSLY. Science fiction I recently enjoyed included the second season of LEXX. Documentaries to see are WORD PLAY (about crossword fan conventions), and SO WRONG THEY'RE RIGHT (about 8-track fans).



**Alphabet Soup #59** Re: reprinting old covers of pulp magazines. Under fair use case law (not statute law) in both Canada and the USA, this is permissible if it is done as part of a critical essay or review, but not for wholesale use. You mention that some people want releases signed by the author of reprints from zines. I doubt there would be any major lawsuits from beyond the grave, but it is a good idea to ask living authors because they may not want an article reprinted that is obsolete or reflects a viewpoint that has since changed. I've never written anything that I would be ashamed to have re-published, but I would prefer people contact me about my factual essays because some of them might need to be updated.

*"There is a segment of the population that would prefer rationing. ... an even larger segment of the population that would favor revolution as a response to rationing."* The vast majority of people are slugs who would not involve themselves in revolution, otherwise they would have done it years ago in both Canada and the USA. What would happen would be the same thing as happened during the last war; people would just start gaming the system or ignoring the system altogether.

**Claims Department** Re: the *"girl who happens to be Canadian and doesn't like Rush!"* Bruce McNall was a previous owner of the Los Angeles hockey team. Knowing that there are lots of Canadian expatriates living there, he thought he'd have a winning

situation, but he couldn't make the team pay its way. He later remarked in disgust that the reason there were so many Canadians living in Los Angeles was because they all hated hockey. -4-

*"I remember the first time I saw a Taco Bell/Pizza Hut and I thought that it was a terrible idea."* In Calgary, we are afflicted with Harvey's/Swiss Chalet and Kentucky Fried Chicken/Tim Horton's Doughnuts combinations. Dairy Queen and Brazier were at one time a combo store but they have long since merged into a single unit. I'm waiting for the Opa chain (Greek food) to merge with the Edo chain (sushi) to produce the Edoopa combo.

Re: your visit to the film festival, where you write *"The first one was supposed to be a documentary about yodeling. Sadly, there were sound troubles ..."* How could you tell?

*"a tall guy with a Canadian accent"* Canajuns don't have accents, eh? Except Newfies, but they don't count.

**Visions Of Paradise #128** You mention alternative history writers who insist on jamming magic or fantasy into their stories. This happens often enough that I think there must be some sort of basic human compulsion. What we need is an ambitious graduate student to do a thesis on why AH authors can't leave well enough alone, and ruin the stories by adding magic or spirits.

**Visions Of Paradise #129** Re: your friend dying of a heart attack after retirement, causing your fellow employees to re-think their plans about staying on longer. It isn't worth it to stay on. I'm eligible after I turn 55, and I'm not staying on a moment longer than I have to. I know about a dozen co-workers who died shortly after retiring at 65 or, worse yet, just before they retired. Many people don't have hobbies to keep them busy after retirement, so they try to hang on at work as long as possible. I know you can keep busy with books and your other activities, so you don't have to take the stress any longer than you have to.



**Visions Of Paradise #130** Re: dividing SF into two categories. This reminds me of the old joke that there are two types of people, those who categorize everything into two types, and those who don't. I suggest the problem is not so much categorizing SF, but in agreeing on the definitions of the categories. Modern SF as a self-aware field is 85 years old, but we still can't agree on the definition of what SF is. Some might say that labels aren't important, and if only a few books and a couple of magazines were issued each year that would be true. Everyone could read everything and we would be as it was up until the early 1950s, when it was possible for all SF fans to have read all the available SF and share common ground. But nowadays labels are important to help us choose among the flood of titles swamping the superbookstores and on-line lists. Other than Joseph Major, no one can keep up, so we have to rely on labels to help us winkle out the titles most likely to interest us. The alternative method, used by Amazon et al, is to recommend new authors based on the ones you've already ordered. If you like Terry Pratchett, you'll probably like Robert Rankin. If you like Tom Clancy, you'll probably like Richard Rohmer.

**Ride The Lightning** Re: 8-track cartridges "*wait a year or two before jumping on any technological bandwagon, lest you hitch your future to a dying star.*" All audiovisual technologies are dying stars. The phrase "8-track" has become a synonym for failed technology but this is unfair.



During its peak, the 8-track accounted for 25% of all music sold. As the cassette took over, 8-track manufacturers started taking short cuts in quality rather than invest in improving it, so 8-tracks got an unfair reputation as shoddy technology.

I have, rather inadvertently, found it best not to be on the cutting edge of any technology. My father's collection was on 8-track, but as a teenager I abandoned vinyl very early and went straight to cassettes. To this day the majority of my music is on cassette, and only about 25% on CD and that only because pre-recorded music is no longer available on cassette. My niece and nephew own no CDs; their music is entirely on their iPods.

One thing I note with interest is that ebooks have not yet been able to kill real books. The latter are never obsolete and can be read anytime. The former are machine or manufacturer specific, and if you have a disk crash or lose the software, good luck in being able to retrieve the text.

Re: self-serve gas stations being illegal in Oregon and New Jersey. I am astonished. Is this some sort of featherbedding regulation designed to save low-wage jobs? It can't be safety because the rest of the USA and all of Canada get along just fine with them. This is like righthand turns on red lights being illegal in some states, while the rest of us get along okay with them. Alberta, supposedly a redneck God-fearing province has had Sunday

shopping for decades, but there are still some jurisdictions that ban it. I've always been puzzled by these arbitrary laws.

**Lofgeornost #92** You certainly managed to pack in quite a few museums on your trip to Paris. I live one block from a military museum which I have only visited once, when cartoonist David Thayer came to visit me. He was a Vietnam veteran, hence his interest. Your article got me to thinking of how people view tourist trips. As a boy, my parents liked to make Grand Tours through various parts of Canada and the USA on our summer vacations. I have been to every province except Newfoundland and every state except Florida, but I remember little if anything. We would run through Mom's checklist of sights to see, very heavy on the museums. Dad, as a livestock veterinarian and cattle rancher, had little interest in this, but driving through the countryside on the highways, he would be watching the cattle grazing in the roadside pastures. As an adult, I concentrate on the Rocky Mountains adjacent to Calgary, on the principle that it is better to know one area well than to have a bunch of fleeting memories of a jumble of places. I have seldom visited museums other than natural history, and when I think of visiting some locale, I think of its natural areas. If I ever visited Paris, I would ignore the museums and instead go the zoos, botanical gardens, and any natural areas. This is as it should be; tourists often make themselves miserable visiting sites they have no interest in.



**The Road Warrior** Re: using Ricola lozenges from Switzerland for coughing. They're all I use, and the only effective over-the-counter cough drops I've ever found. In winter, when the furnace is running continuously, the humidity inside my house drops down to 5% (I have an electronic meter that displays it next to my bed). If I don't take a Ricola at bedtime, I have trouble falling asleep due to coughing from a dry throat.

Re: Arnie Katz's definition of Core Fandom meaning fanzine fans, whether active or inactive. Convention fans might argue that they are Core Fandom, since conventions are only a decade younger than fanzines and far more populated. I would argue that the centre cannot hold, and things fall apart, which is to say that fandom is so splintered that no faction can claim to be the core.

**Edgar's Journal #8** As always, the best cover, and, I feel safe in saying, the first zine that came with its own bookmark attached to the zine.

You reprint Arnie Katz's article on why he is leaving the Papernet for the Internet and that electronic fanzines are the wave of the future. Unfortunately, as a look at [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com) will show, electronic fanzines are also dying. The vast majority posted on that site, excluding archives, are by the same few publishers. Worse yet, Katz and others insist on posting their zines in vertical 8.5 x 11 format, forcing readers to scroll.



Few will print them off, the ostensible reason for publishing them in vertical format. A few fanzines are horizontal format, and a tip of the hat to their editors, such as Chris Garcia. Katz, one of the loudest proponents of e-zines, should be practicing what he preaches. If he is going to go electronic, then he should not use half-measures and produce something neither fish nor fowl.

Re: Vicki's comments about whatever happened to jet packs and flying cars, which, like hydrogen cars and fusion reactors, always seem to be imminent within the next decade. Years ago I was talking to a police constable about the first two and he shuddered, saying the police had enough work without drunks smashing into 17th floor apartments. Peak oil will put a permanent kibosh on flying cars, a few prototypes of which exist today.

**Voice Of The Habu V10#3** *"Sometimes when an author's sales are disappointing, the author adopts a pen name to overcome the stereotype, not by the author's choice but because the publisher or agent insists."* SF author Dave Duncan ran into this problem years ago. Many of his books are now print-on-demand because he was fed up with his previous publishers being under the thrall of accountants.

**Number One #14** Re: your comment about OPUNTIA: *"The zine reviews are mostly listings and could use more editorial interjections I think."* You'll notice the title is "Zine Listings", not

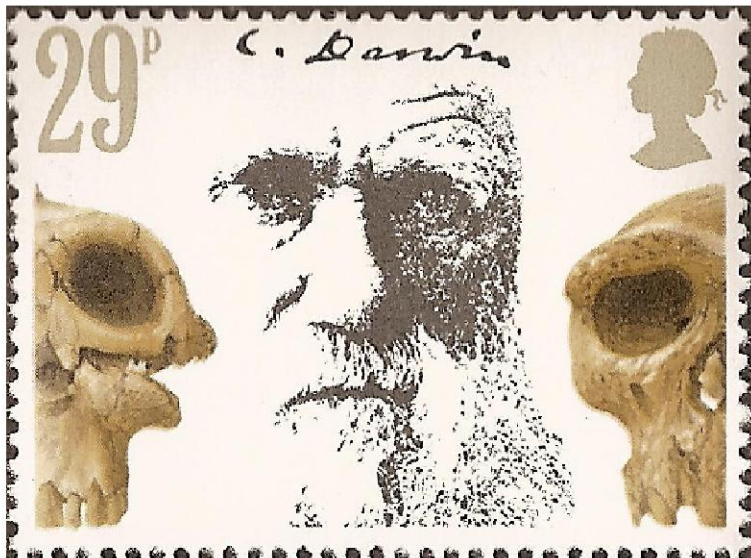
"Zine Reviews". I provide them more as a networking aid. While I occasionally go into depth, I usually just write a few lines summarizing the content. I don't have time to write full reviews for each zine, and many are not worthy of the effort anyway.

**Science Fiction Adventure Magazine V3#2** Re: a man from circa now moving ahead in time ten megayears. I suspect there would still be humans but it would be questionable how much of their civilization would remain. If we go out into space and expand, some records of circa now will be stored in electronic archives. If we don't, and just slowly descend back to nature because of peak everything, it would be as you say, humans evolving into specialized niches. I don't think any new animals would evolve intelligence. If chimpanzees were going to evolve, they would have done so by now, since their stock radiated at the same time as humans. What made humans, it seems increasingly clear, is that our environment kept changing in eastern Africa, forcing hominids to keep changing as well. The apes in forests changed to fit their environments, but when their environments stabilized, so did they. Tool-using birds are not going to evolve further; they have had sixty megayears to do so but missed their chance.

The saddest part of all this is that if we don't get out into space and stay there, everything the human race has accomplished for



the good will have been wasted. How many other alien civilizations have run into this problem? It may be a law of nature that a civilization gets only one chance at the stars, and if it misses it, sinks back into the mud. Once humans reach the stars, then we can attempt the next big problem, surviving proton decay and entropy. This is why I find cosmology such a depressing topic.



**Nice Distinctions #17** Re: your copy editing job where you had to use the AP style manual rule "*names ending in -s forming possessive without an additional s.*" I've never gotten used to editors spelling my name in the possessive as Speir's, as if my surname was Speir.

Re: Hilaire Belloc investing in Tsarist bonds. I'd laugh, but I owned \$20,000 of GMAC bonds which pay 10% interest (General Motors Acceptance Corp., their vehicle financing and leasing subsidiary). I expect General Motors to stagger on for a few more years, but unloaded the bonds at a capital loss, although I made money overall from the interest. There is a joke that General Motors is a health care company that builds cars on the side, a reference to them agreeing to over-generous health plans.

**Trial And Air #18** "*because there is no absolute inertial framework, the speed of light is a limiting speed*". I was interested to read this interpretation about the speed of light, as compared to the traditional explanation that  $c$  is the limit because at that point the values in the equations reach infinity. The remark above makes me wonder if light itself could be considered as the inertial framework of space-time. Cosmology, besides being a depressing topic, is also one that annoys because so many of the universal constants are not neat integral numbers but weird ones like the speed of light or the weights of various sub-atomic particles.

FAPA #285 received in Calgary on November 18, 2008. The FAPA Clearcut Award for the most pages in the mailing for #285 goes to Robert Sabella with 47 pages.

Thank you Milt Stevens for your steady work over the years in mailing out the FAPA bundles. Well done! And welcome to Robert Sabella, who takes over the job.

**A Propos De Rien** Re: growing a tree creates a small carbon debt. You're quite right. In the last five years, scientists have determined that only young rapidly-growing trees sequester carbon in their aboveground wood. Old-growth forests give that carbon back out when they die and decay. Grasslands are actually a better way to sequester carbon because they store the majority of their carbon belowground in their root systems. But you can't convince Greenpeace or the Sierra Club that old-growth forests should be clear cut and seeded down to hay.

*"I'd like to see someone trace out the consequences of the French winning the battle at the Plains of Abraham."* The French government was never very enthusiastic about its colonies in North America; the intendants didn't like snow. It all depends on whether or not the French bothered to keep Louisiana, or if the Purchase still went through. If France held on to the Mississippi

valley, then a chain of colonies would have developed -10- north-south up the middle of the continent. The French presence in middle USA would have pre-empted the English colonies from annexing the west, as a result of which Mexico would have extended up to northern California. The Oregon territory would still be British. Western Canada, colonized via Ontario, might reach down into the Great Plains until it made contact with Mexico (which would also be coming up the eastern slopes of the Rockies). Texas might be an independent republic but probably not. The chain reaction would extend as far out as Alaska and Hawaii. Alaska could still be Russian; the British were too stupid and uncaring to buy it in our timeline or any other. Hawaii would still be a British protectorate.

**A Different Drummer #15** A well-done convention report on Confluence 20 in Pittsburgh. You mention a rare pulp magazine in the dealer bourse that went unsold. This may not be because the younger generation are all Philistines, but rather because their first instinct is to shop online. I used to make the rounds of Calgary secondhand bookstores but haven't set foot in any of them in five years. Even a semi-Luddite such as myself prefers to shop online for those rare items. Pulp magazine collectors do not necessarily attend conventions either.

**Generic Apa Zine #3** Your village post office is closing and you have trouble with Internet access. This is why I intend to stay in Calgary when I retire. I grew up in a rural area and am well aware that services city slickers take for granted may not be there in the country. This doesn't matter too much when you are young and healthy, but can be a nuisance in retirement when you have to drive 50 km to get a prescription refill.

You mention all the problems you have because Apple products are harder to set up in a Microsoft world. This is the main reason why I stick to Toshiba laptops running Windows. My 1998 laptop runs Windows 95 and my 2001 laptop runs Windows XP. Both are stable because I don't add new software and neither are connected to the Internet. I go to the University library for my Internet connection once a week. Applications on both are WordPerfect/QuattroPro, Adobe Acrobat, and separate Hewlett Packard printers and scanners. Life is too short to waste time trying to keep 8-track systems like Apple up and running.

*"In Australia, our Constitution does not actually mention the position of Prime Minister."* Same thing in Canada. If you read our constitution, it seems as if the Governor-General is in charge, but in actuality she is a figurehead attending state funerals and cutting ribbons. That is why cabinet decisions are called Orders-in-Council, because technically the cabinet is but an advisory council to the G-G.

**FAPAlement #908** Very amusing cover on your zine with the flap to be lifted up and the message underneath.

**Alphabet Soup #60** *"I was heavily involved in stamp collecting for a couple of years. ... Since the collection is more than fifty years old, it might be worth a few bucks."* Probably not if you only bought packets or soaked stamps off incoming mail. Check the Internet for a stamp club near you or ask a local dealer. If it isn't worth much, donate it to the stamp club for their junior collectors. Don't just let it sit in the garage deteriorating.

*"And then I encountered science fiction, and I haven't needed any other avocations since then."* They're not mutually exclusive. I am far more heavily involved in philately than zinedom, still keep an aquarium, read science fiction and mystery, and go hiking in the mountains adjacent to Calgary. My secret is that I have never owned a television set.

*"Mystery fiction doesn't seem to develop fans the same way or to the same extent science fiction does."* Sherlockians have developed a tremendous network of clubs, zines, and books, but they are the only such group I can think of. Most mystery fan clubs are straightforward subscribe-and-sit-back clubs, without the level of involvement that Sherlockians or SF fans have.



**Visions Of Paradise #132** Re: your friend burning copies of STAR TREK for your computer. I hope you didn't put that part on the Internet, where a Paramount Pictures search bot can pick it up and notify their legal department. They like to pick on ordinary citizens because they know they can't afford the legal bills for illegal copying cases.

**Lofgeornost #93** Re: Dewey Decimal versus Library of Congress systems of classifying books. One thing that struck me as peculiar is that in Alberta the public libraries use the Dewey system but the university libraries use the LC system. Both, of course, are inadequate for today's world, but like railroad gauges and barrels of oil, it is too much trouble to change over the system.

Mark Shainblum's letter of comment to you mentions that he had thought of writing a novel where millions of Jewish refugees were settled in Saskatchewan during the 1930s. Good thing he didn't, since Saskatchewan at that time was being hammered by its worst extended drought ever, locusts, and sandstorms. There's a reason that decade was called the Dirty Thirties. My father grew up on a southwestern Saskatchewan homestead in that decade; his family was eventually forced to flee to the Calgary area and start over from scratch. Since most of the Jewish refugees of that era were urban Europeans, they wouldn't have had a chance.

I discovered recently that the University of Calgary Library is

using your PILOTS database, having stumbled across it while searching one of their other databases. I never use Digital Object Identifiers to locate scientific papers. It is much easier to use JSTOR or Scholar Google.

**Feline Mewsings #34** You ask why I have two cars. Partly because I'm the guy who unlocks the depot at work in the morning, so I absolutely have to be there on time. There is no bus service near there, and taxis take too long to obtain at 06h00. So if one car won't start, then I have a backup instantly ready to go. Both cars are relatively new and low km Honda Civics, very reliable, but a flat tire or dead battery could cause problems. When I retire a couple of years from now, I'll give my cars to my nephew and niece, buy a single new one, and that will be it. On my days off, if I am going downtown or to the university, I take the bus, mainly because parking is impossible in both those areas.

## WORLD FANTASY CONVENTION 2008

I'll have a detailed report on the Calgary WFC in the next issue. I'd like to comment here, since this is a FAPA issue, that I was pleased to meet up at the convention with fellow FAPAn Peggy Rae Sapienza and her husband John. We went out one night to a steakhouse with a few others and made it a sort of FAPA party. A good time was had by all, etcetera.

## SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

noticed by Dale Speirs

Osborne, A.H., et al (2008) **A humid corridor across the Sahara for the migration of early modern humans out of Africa 120,000 years ago.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 105:16444-16447

*"It is widely accepted that modern humans originated in sub-Saharan Africa ~150–200 thousand years ago, but their route of dispersal across the currently hyperarid Sahara remains controversial. Given that the first modern humans north of the Sahara are found in the Levant ~120–90 ka, northward dispersal likely occurred during a humid episode in the Sahara within Marine Isotope Stage (MIS) 5e (130–117 ka). The obvious dispersal route, the Nile, may be ruled out by notable differences between archaeological finds in the Nile Valley and the Levant at the critical time. Further west, space-born radar images reveal networks of—now buried—fossil river channels that extend across the desert to the Mediterranean coast, which represent alternative dispersal corridors. These corridors would explain scattered findings at desert oases of Middle Stone Age Aterian lithic industries with bifacial and tanged points that can be linked with industries further to the east and as far north as the Mediterranean coast. Here we present geochemical data that*

*demonstrate that water in these fossil systems derived from the south during wet episodes in general, and penetrated all of the way to the Mediterranean during MIS 5e in particular. This proves the existence of an uninterrupted freshwater corridor across a currently hyperarid region of the Sahara at a key time for early modern human migrations to the north and out of Africa."*

Evershed, R.P., et al (2008) **Earliest date for milk use in the Near East and southeastern Europe linked to cattle herding.** NATURE 455:528-531

*"The domestication of cattle, sheep and goats had already taken place in the Near East by the eighth millennium BC. Although there would have been considerable economic and nutritional gains from using these animals for their milk and other products from living animals, that is, traction and wool, the first clear evidence for these appears much later, from the late fifth and fourth millennia BC. Hence, the timing and region in which milking was first practised remain unknown. Organic residues preserved in archaeological pottery have provided direct evidence for the use of milk in the fourth millennium in Britain, and in the sixth millennium in eastern Europe, based on the  $^{13}\text{C}$  values of the major fatty acids of milk fat. Here we apply this approach to more than 2,200 pottery vessels from sites in the Near East and southeastern Europe*

*dating from the fifth to the seventh millennia BC. We show that milk was in use by the seventh millennium; this is the earliest direct evidence to date. Milking was particularly important in northwestern Anatolia, pointing to regional differences linked with conditions more favourable to cattle compared to other regions, where sheep and goats were relatively common and milk use less important."*

Norenzayan, A., and A.F. Shariff (2008) **The origin and evolution of religious prosociality.** SCIENCE 322:58-62

*"We examine empirical evidence for religious prosociality, the hypothesis that religions facilitate costly behaviors that benefit other people. Although sociological surveys reveal an association between self-reports of religiosity and prosociality, experiments measuring religiosity and actual prosocial behavior suggest that this association emerges primarily in contexts where reputational concerns are heightened. Experimentally induced religious thoughts reduce rates of cheating and increase altruistic behavior among anonymous strangers. Experiments demonstrate an association between apparent profession of religious devotion and greater trust. Cross-cultural evidence suggests an association between the cultural presence of morally concerned deities and large group size in humans."*

Speirs: In tiny groups such as a family unit, people know who to trust. As this study indicates, larger groups can only function if held together by a mutually shared religion, or, by further extension, ideology or culture. This explains how humans were able to develop nations.

Menchik, D.A., and X. Tian (2008) **Putting social context into text: The semiotics of e-mail interaction.** AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY 114:332-370

*"E-mail excludes the multiple nonlinguistic cues and gestures that facilitate face-to-face communication. The authors analyze the problems and solutions experienced by a research panel that communicated over e-mail and face-to-face for 18 months, evaluating both kinds of exchanges alongside survey and interview data. The authors find that e-mail requires the cultivation of new techniques for specifically conveying the "pragmatic information" that connects the meaning of words to their users. Such information is assigned in e-mail through the use of what are termed emphatic, referential, and characterizing semiotic tactics. These tactics are also evident in sustained online interactions studied by other researchers. This theoretical vocabulary represents an alternative to the dominant sociological characterization of e-mail as an inferior substitute for face-to-face interaction."*



Efferson, C., et al (2008) **The co-evolution of cultural groups and in-group favoritism.** SCIENCE 321:1844-1849

*“Little is known about how cultural groups form or the evolutionary forces behind group affiliation and ingroup favoritism. Hence, we examine these forces experimentally and show that arbitrary symbolic markers, though initially meaningless, evolve to play a key role in cultural group formation and ingroup favoritism because they enable a population of heterogeneous individuals to solve important coordination problems. This process requires that individuals differ in some critical but unobservable way and that their markers be freely and flexibly chosen. If these conditions are met, markers become accurate predictors of behavior. The resulting social environment includes strong incentives to bias interactions toward others with the same marker, and subjects accordingly show strong ingroup favoritism. When markers do not acquire meaning as accurate predictors of behavior, players show a markedly reduced taste for ingroup favoritism. Our results support the prominent evolutionary hypothesis that cultural processes can reshape the selective pressures facing individuals and so favor the evolution of behavioral traits not previously advantaged.”*

Speirs: The application of this to SF fans, stamp collectors, or any other hobby group seems obvious.



*Five satellite dishes on one house; that's not too many.*

*Photo by Dale Speirs, taken at Taralea Green NE, Calgary.*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

FROM: Joseph Major  
1409 Christy Avenue  
Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040

2008-07-23

Re: book collectors and uncut pages. The collecting bug drives one to outre ways. I recall reading of toy shop managers punching holes in the boxes of newly-issued action figures. Mutilated boxes are not collectible, so that was their way of fending off the collectors who show up first thing in the morning and buy every new action figure in the store, keeping them out of the hands of kids who would \*ghasp\* play with them.

*"I don't see how a book dealer could earn back his costs at a convention."* Which is why [my dealer friends] Leigh Kimmel and Larry Ullery are apparently not going to get around as much any more. They sold used books and various collectibles at conventions, but evidently no one's buying that stuff in person any more.

[The 2008 World Fantasy Convention was held in Calgary (a report will be in the next issue) and its dealer bourse seemed quite successful. The WFC is a literary convention though, with no masquerade, costuming, or video stars, and a regular general SF

convention would be a different story. It helped that the dealers were specialists, such as the Sherlock Holmes dealer where I dropped \$100 on pastiches and essay collections. There were various small-press publishers flogging fantasy and SF books, but alas, no dealers in NASCAR romances.]

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

2008-11-11

Someone in the We Make Zines online community is proposing an International Zine Month. I want us to consider precursors and similar holidays. Can you help me?

[2009 will be the 16th annual World Wide Party. Founded by Benoit Girard (Québec) and Franz Miklis (Austria), the World Wide Party is held on June 21st every year. At 21h00 local time, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of the Papernet around the world. The idea is to get a wave of fellowship circling the planet. Face to the east first and toast those who have already done the WWP, then north and south for your time zone, and finally to the west for those yet to celebrate. If you are a zinester, it is a reminder that you are not alone, but a node on the Papernet.]

**I Also Heard From:** Joseph Nicholas, Franz Zrilich