OPUNTIA

69.3

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

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 CLEARCUT AWARD (for most pages published in a mailing) goes to Robert Sabella for 48 pages in FAPA #290 and again for 40 pages in FAPA #291. Steve and Vicki Ogden won it for bundle #292 with 64 pages.

MAILING COMMENTS ON FAPA #290

FAPA #290 received in Calgary on February 26, 2010.

Visions Of Paradise #146 You worry about whether or not you should retire. Go for it! I got my freedom on August 8, 2010, and love it.

Snow Poster Township #3 Re: listening to drive-time radio in your car while commuting. I did a lot of driving in my day job but my tolerance for commercials is zero. Weekdays I may tune into the market news on a business station (CFR 660 AM) to find out how oil and gold closed but don't listen otherwise. The commercials I do catch are even more annoying than they used to be, particularly the current saturation ads for snake oil being peddled for prostate problems which begins: "Men, are you urinating more frequently?" with the toll-free number repeated five times in rapid succession at the end. I can see why so many drivers would rather listen to their iPods.

Re: schlock film companies releasing a parasite version of a big-name movie before the movie comes out. This is nothing new but has gotten easier with VHS and DVD, where the idea is to confuse the customer into buying the wrong version. It only works with public domain stories, of course. I recall back in the 1960s seeing all kinds of LPs and 8-tracks duplicating Beatles albums sold for 99 cents, with fine print on the back of the cover "played and sung like the originals". These hit-and-run companies would eventually be sued and suppressed, but not before they grabbed the money and ran.

Trial And Air #19 Re: your obituary of Canadian palaeofan Chester Cuthbert (1912-2009). He basically kept Canfandom alive during its nadir in the 1950s. I corresponded with him for years and published his letters of comment in OPUNTIA. When Winnipeg hosted the World SF Convention in 1994, I took time out from the convention to visit him at his house. He took me upstairs to show me his book collection and I had to turn sideways to get down some of the aisles of bookshelves. Even though the convention was practically on his doorstep, he did not attend. However, many of us fans visited him, and the neighbours must have wondered at the steady stream of visitors all weekend. His ERB collection went to his son and the rest is deposited at the University of Alberta Library.

Calgary skyline 2010-06-11 from Scotsman's Hill looking to the northwest. At lower left is a corner of the Stampede race track. The Saddledome hockey arena is seen in the middle.

The Calgary Tower is in the centre background. The skyscraper under construction in the right background is the Bow Tower, which will be the tallest Canadian building outside Toronto when completed.

Visions Of Paradise #147 I liked the Steve Stiles remark to you that: *"you'll never ever see a cartoon of mine with a unicorn, unless there's also a chainsaw in the drawing."* Speaking as a man who earned his living with a chainsaw and hates unicorns, I'd be delighted to see such a cartoon. At left is the only postmark I'm aware of that features a chainsaw.

Alphabet Soup #65 *"William Jennings Bryan was a minion of darkness who opposed the theory of evolution. It is sometimes pointed out that he also favoured many good things like women's suffrage."* He also advocated an 8-hour work day at a time when it was physically dangerous to belong to a labour union. Unfortunately he is only remembered for his part in the Scopes trial in his declining years (he died shortly after the trial ended) instead of his good works, such as his famous Cross of Gold speech. Woodrow Wilson wanted to see the world at peace and worked tirelessly towards that goal, but he was also a racist who felt that Negroes should have no place in public life.

Re: people scanning back issues of your zines. *"I might be called upon to defend opinions I no longer remember."* I have been scanning back issues of OPUNTIA, but won't put them on-line for many years yet. As much as I hate to acknowledge it, the next generation will be only on-line for their reading material, and Kindle is but the foreshadowing of what will be 25 years from now. One advantage of preparing scanned copies is that OCR devices can't read the text, so university students can't just highlight my text and steal my essays.

Visions Of Paradise #148 You worried about Margaret Atwood and others disclaiming that they write SF. I don't know about the others but Atwood is a grande dame who is part of the Canlitcrit crowd. She is a university professor. The novels they recommend are seldom read by anyone other than fellow academics and undergraduates who are required to read them. History will dispose of them into the dustbin.

Voice Of The Habu V12#1 Re: your computer being hacked. This is why my computers are offline, and I check my e-mail on the university computer. It saves a lot of fuss and trouble. I have never gotten an e-mail that couldn't wait a week. The only one true way to stop spammers is to charge everyone to send e-mails. This would prevent the spammers from sending millions of e-mails at their expense, and users who got a bill because they were

were careless about clicking on dodgy links will quickly learn to be more careful. As it stands now, anyone can send millions of spams a day at little or no cost, but they only need one hit.

A Propos De Rien *"Did oil or coal not involve plants of the Carboniferous?"* Oil is squished microscopic plankton (and not dinosaurs as popular misconception has it) cooked under pressure, while coal is squashed trees and ferns compressed by the weight of sediments. Oil and coal can originate in any era depending on how they were subsequently treated by geological movements, temperatures, and pressures. They can also move about; the Alberta oilsands are found in Cretaceous rocks but originated in Devonian rocks and flowed from one to the other when the Rocky Mountains were lifting up. The much-touted Bakken oil of the northern Great Plains and Canadian prairies was the source rock of the Williston formation directly above it and which has been pumped for decades. Most of the oil in the Bakken leaked into the Williston, and it wasn't until horizontal drilling and fracturing became profitable with high oil prices that anyone bothered about the Bakken.

"You refer to it as the "tar sands", which the industry would rather call "oil sands"". Strictly speaking, tar sands are bitumenous deposits exposed to the surface. Oil sands are subsurface deposits that may have bitumen or may be heavy crude oil that doesn't flow easily. Oil sands is the inclusive term, while tar sands refers only to the aboveground deposits that are being mined by open pit. The Athabasca Tar Sands are visually spectacular with their giant dump trucks and massive open pits, but the focus has been shifting to oil sands because they are less trouble to extract and the visuals aren't as bad, just a concrete pad and a shack containing the equipment.

"Currently my stock in Barrick [gold mines] *is far below what I paid for it"* This is why I don't own any publicly-traded stocks. Barrick foolishly hedged too much of their gold production several years ago, that is, they sold their gold in advance before they even mined it at $300 to $400 per ounce. Then they starting buying back their hedge book after gold topped $1,000 an ounce, and worse yet, financed it by issuing new shares which diluted the equity of existing shareholders such as yourself. My gold is physical, as 1-ounce Maple Leaf coins sitting in my safe-deposit box. Gold mine stocks are paper, not a method of gold ownership.

Lofgeornost #98 Re: using citation analysis to assess how important a scientific paper is. Isaac Asimov said that one advantage of having an independent income as a writer was that he didn't have to prove anything to the university administrators. Some universities are now starting to realize the fallacies of information theory, but publish-or-perish still keeps too many scientists in thrall to administrators instead of the other way around.

Re: the relationship of identifiable groups such as Jews and Romas (gypsies) to a homeland. This only seems to work where some effort has been made by elders to indoctrinate their children and remind them they are separate. For most immigrant groups, the parents may keep up with their family and friends in the Old Country, but the kids have no interest. My mother kept up correspondence with distant relatives in Finland, but that correspondence died when she did, and my generation never learned to speak Suomalais.

The Days Of Miracle And Wonder #3 "*It can't be 2010. That's the future. ... the events of 2001 don't seem to have occurred.*" 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY is the best SF movie yet made, but it saddens me how we threw away the potential. All we have is an International Floating Tin Can, no Pan-Am shuttles, and no capability to put a man on the Moon and return him safely to Earth. Oh, what might have been!

FAPA #291 received in Calgary on May 18, 2010.

Alphabet Soup #66 "*I think approaching retirement can be a strange experience for most people. ... Everything went along fine until I had six months left. Then time slowed to a crawl. It seemed like it took five years to complete the last six months.*" Amen for sure! I got re-organized into a new job in April 2010 I didn't particularly like but tolerated since I was so close to my retirement on August 8. The days went by like nothing when I was the Weekend Trouble Calls Supervisor but dragged after I was put downtown where I had to once again start attending meetings and dealing with bureaucrats. I could have grieved the transfer but I think management correctly expected I wouldn't bother since I only had a few months to go.

"*Even precious metals aren't worth anything if you will be looking for your next meal under a rock.*" I don't expect a fall-off-the-cliff scenario, but rather a slow ratcheting downward as inflation and Peak Oil take hold. The idea of accumulating gold or silver coins is not that I would use them to buy bread but rather to cash them in as I need the currency. Gold is not going up in value; it has held its value constant for 5,000 years of human history. The gold price is steadily increasing because the fiat currencies of the world are steadily depreciating. Gold is an insurance policy.

"*We need faith because our money is largely imaginary. Naturally we can't tell the public about this or they will panic.*" I've concluded that some members of the public are smarter than others. The U.S. Mint, the Royal Canadian Mint, the Austrian Mint (which produces the Philharmonic gold coin, the accepted standard in Europe), and others around the world are going flat out trying to keep up with demand for gold and silver coins. More citizens than the central banks will admit are coming to the same idea, that if you wait until the bank runs start, it will be too late. Remember that the Great Depression didn't hit bottom until 1932; there was an 80% stock market rally after the Panic of 1929.

Currently Untitled Re: authors creating new worlds and then breaking them or ignoring the society arising therefrom. You wrote: "*It does me no good if you create a wonderfully rich medievalesque setting for your fantasy series, only to have the characters spend 90% of their time trudging though the forest.*" A very common failing of world creation in SF is the lack of common sense in economics. I never liked cyberpunk because the characters lived in the mean streets yet apparently could hack any computer in the world, in which case they should be transferring bank accounts to the Caribbean. As a Parks Dept. supervisor, I saw any number of street people sleeping in shrub beds, but none of them are ever going to lead a revolution against the Evil Overlord (or even the Mayor) or hack a Swiss bank. The goths and punks are good at vandalizing parks or vomiting on the grass, but none of them are intellectually gifted computer nerds who can create new identities by tapping a keyboard for a couple of minutes. And as a farm boy, it is quite obvious to me that most SF writers don't understand the economics of crop and livestock production.

For FAPA "*The time for paper newspapers has passed.*" Even a semi-Luddite such as myself has quit buying them. I stopped buying newspapers in 1998 when I realized that they only had news which I had read the previous day on the Internet, and most of that of no interest to me. This was further reinforced when I started reading blogs such as theoildrum.com and goldseek.com and discovered how selective newspapers were in editing out the real news. If someone leaves a newspaper in the canteen, I'll glance through it, but most of it is news that only upsets me and about which I can do nothing anyway.

Re: cheques being obsolete. Britain will do away with them in the near future but we still use them quite a bit in Canada. I still get all my oil royalties as cheques.

"*Cigarette lighters in cars are a dead loss.*" Not to cellphone and laptop users, which is why all modern vehicles have them still, and label them as power points, not lighters. Our newer trucks at work also have USB ports for wireless connections.

Science Fiction Adventure Magazine V4#1 "*Another promising electric car battery material: Lithium. Scaling up production enough to supply a significant electric car market may not be easy. The largest known deposit of lithium is in Bolivia, and the Bolivians are already gearing up to spend all of the money they think they'll have when we become dependent on them for the material to make batteries for our electric cars.*" The Bolivians are in for a terrible disappointment. Lithium is extremely abundant, and already mining companies are racing to open up deposits in Chile, Argentina, and Québec, to name a few. The reason the Bolivians were in a predominant position until now is that the demand for lithium was so low that it didn't pay to prospect for more, so Bolivia had a near-monopoly by default. Once everyone else gets into the game, Bolivia will be relegated and will have to take a cheap price. I looked into lithium as part of my investment research into commodities, but concluded that buying into any lithium mines won't pay. It will be like investing in limestone quarries or gravel pits; the operator might make a little money but gold or oil it's not. Nor is it, as many people mistakenly believe, a rare earth mineral.

"*Global warming is a third-rail topic for most people.*" Part of the reason is that the term is inaccurate, and a better phrase is "climate change". On average, the Earth's overall temperature is warming but that doesn't mean that some areas can't have increased cold snowy winters or cool wet summers. The public also confuse weather with climate. When eastern USA got clobbered by back-to-back blizzards this past winter, many skeptics said this disproved climate change. On the other hand, the snowiest month in Alberta is traditionally March, yet we had none and the farmers were talking a drought in the making. Then in May we had two blizzards in as many weeks plus a wet June.

Re: alternative histories caused by volcanoes cooling off various regions and causing crop failures at inconvenient times. Circa 1607 when Québec was being born, this would have disrupted French colonization and encouraged the King to send his loyal subjects to the Caribbean instead. The British were more into fishing than planting colonies, so they would have extended themselves up the river sooner and faster, and without having to fight on the Plains of Abraham. Thus no French and Indian wars.

Science Fiction Adventure Magazine V5#1 "*On-line is immediate but it is also ephemeral. A topic is discussed, drops off the radar ...* " I have this problem because I seldom post to a blog more often than once a week. When I come back to see any responses, I have to scroll back three pages.

I enjoyed my time in Point of Divergence APA, devoted to alternative history, but having to produce a separate 8.5 x 11 zine to match the binding was just too much extra work. If I could just submit OPUNTIA as is, I'd still be in it.

"*I had heard that gold prices were held down for many years by the fact that there was a technology out there that would allow extraction of a lot of additional gold if the price went above a certain point.*" Gold prices were suppressed during the 1980s because central banks steadily sold off their supplies. They wanted to keep the price down so people wouldn't realize how much the paper currencies had been depreciated by the banks. The situation reversed when they ran out of gold to sell and the demand soaked up the surplus. In 2001, Peak Gold occurred and despite higher prices, mining companies haven't been able to boost production. There is no new technology; it's just a matter that as the price of gold increases, then it becomes profitable to mine poor-quality deposits that were previously uneconomical. But, as with Peak Oil, the good deposits are gone and now only exists the difficult access and low grade ore bodies.

Lofgeornost #99 Re: your European trip via Iceland that was delayed partly by volcanic ash just before the big one that shut down Europe. "*The most obvious lesson would seem to be the need to build massive redundancy into as much as our infrastructure as we can manage.*" Studies have been done on this for such behaviour as building beachfront condos in hurricane areas (the Gulf Coast), living below sea level between an ocean and a giant lake (New Orleans), or next to active volcanoes (Italy). The conclusion of psychologists was that humans will refuse to spend the money on safe infrastructure if major disasters are several decades apart because there is no immediate payback. Only if they get hammered year after year will something be done.

The Road Warrior Re: your freelance writing including an article on William Shatner for GREAT LIVES IN HISTORY. Oy vey, they must be scraping the bottom of the barrel to include him! The current Governor-General of Canada is finishing up her term and the Prime Minister is being bombarded with suggestions as to who to appoint as a successor, with Shatner a popular choice. It is, of course, unlikely that he would be appointed, if only because it would mean two GGs in a row from Québec. (Shatner is from Montréal.) He would probably be a good GG, since the job is mainly ribbon cutting and making the Speech from the Throne at the opening session of the House of Commons. It would undoubtedly be the highest rated television programme in Canadian history, as every Canuck would tune in to see if he read the throne speech the way he did his lines in Star Trek.

Cyfddydd #2 " ... *we have to accept that TAFF* [Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, which sends an SF fan from one side of the Atlantic to the other and back] *is not the property of a select community which recognizes the SF fanzine as its cultural root.*" Although zinesters established the award, it is now the property of whoever votes in choosing the fan. If media fans vote in the majority, then they decide. For years, the Aurora Awards in Canada were decided by Trekkies because they voted in strength.

MAILING COMMENTS ON FAPA #292

FAPA #292 received in Calgary on August 24, 2010.

A Different Drummer #22 Re: the rise of paperbacks killing off SF magazines. One attempt to get around this was to publish fiction magazines in paperback format, such as DESTINY and FAR FRONTIER. I always thought that was a good idea (I have complete sets in my library) but distribution problems and economics killed them off. Now it is the e-books which pose a threat to paperbacks. E-magazines have never succeeded, and the announcement by a print magazine that it is converting to a Website is widely taken as its final death throes.

Visions Of Paradise #152 Re: the Hugo Awards: "*The biggest shock in the nominations is that Dave Langford is not on the Best Fan Writer list.*" It always annoyed me that he won so many Hugos for his zine ANSIBLE because it was not about SF, it was about the British publishing industry and who did what to whom or was in bankruptcy. It is a good zine and I read it myself, but Langford is a news reporter, not a fanwriter.

Picayune Re: Britain having a coalition government after the recent election which sent off Labour. Canada has a minority government (not the same as a coalition) where the Tories are the largest party but don't have a clear majority. This keeps them on a short leash because they have to be nice to the opposition parties to stay in power. In turn, the Liberals are having their own problems and don't dare to force an election, while the NDP (labour-socialist) and the Bloc Québecois balance each other (the Bloc is capitalist). It is a classical Mexican standoff; the opposition parties could pull the plug but would be punished so they don't dare. Minority governments have been surprisingly productive in Canada. Universal health care, the Canada Pension Plan, the maple leaf flag, abolition of the death penalty, and language rights were the result of the 1960s standoff between the governing Liberals and the opposing Tories.

For FAPA Australian postage rates seem incredibly high if the membership fee for ANZAPA is A$50.

Re: your laser printer problems. I have an HP LaserJet 5 printer, bought in 1998 and still going strong. My 1998 Toshiba laptop running Windows 95 and WordPerfect 8 is used to produce OPUNTIA and keep my financial records. My 2006 Toshiba laptop runs Windows XP and WordPerfect 12, which I use for professional publications that require more memory. People say that Apple computers are the best, yet I have several correspondents who have a litany of complaints about their machines and seem to buy a new one every few years. My cellphone is a 1998 candy-bar style model with voice mail, speed dial, and nothing else, nor anything else needed.

Number One #17 Re: comparison of how SF and rock-and-roll have expanded: "*But what the heck is a definition for the rock and roll of today?*" As you suggest, both fields are too wide to include everyone under the same tent (pardon the metaphor). I've always wondered why, in the field of music, you are only expected to like one or a few genres. I have a recording of "The Blue Danube", and there's nothing so rousing as "The Anvil Chorus", but I also have lots of techno music (Fatboy Slim, Orb, G.O.L.), traditional rock (Beatles, Pink Floyd, CCR), female vocal (Nancy Sinatra, Feist, Dot Allison, Sally Timms), male vocal (Gordon Lightfoot, Jack Scott, Murray McLauchlan), country (Johnny Cash, Handsome Family, Statler Brothers), and oddball stuff (Laurie Anderson). Just as fanzine fandom was first swamped by and then relegated to the sidelines by the media barbarians, so it is that the 1950s rock-and-roll was overrun by all the other genres of music from heavy metal to techno.

Re: Robert Sabella's retirement from the New Jersey school system and your involuntary retirement from lack of work. Yes, I hear you. I retired August 8, 2010, after 31 years with the Calgary Parks Dept. and am still trying to reset some sort of schedule. I wake up when I feel like it, usually about 08h30, nap during the day, and work on all those projects I've been meaning to do. No retirement party at my request. Instead I made the rounds of the depots in a grand tour and shook hands goodbye with everyone. I'll be 55 this November 3rd.

"*We just had an earthquake here in Daly City*" No matter where you live, there's always something! If I lived in earthquake country I'd always be worrying about having the books shaken off the shelves and then having to put them back.

Nice Distinctions #19 "*Another aspect of my SF was the Robot Car, which would drive itself ... That would be nice but I know I don't live in that reality.*" Wouldn't it be easier just to keep buses, trains, and taxis? Let someone else do the driving for a fraction of what it would cost to set up the infrastructure for self-piloting cars.

Re: your criticism of Margaret Atwood, who says she doesn't write SF because there are no talking squids in her stories. It must be noted that she comes from the Canlitcrit group, who all started out as Angry Young Women/Men back in the Sixties and are now fossilized professors living off Canada Council grants and mostly publishing unreadable books through subsidized presses. She is one of very few Canlitcrit authors who has sold commercially to the general public, hence her high opinion of herself.

The Road Warrior Re: your Nashville neighbourhood being flooded in May 2010. No matter where you live, there's always something! You were very fortunate that the flood waters only reached the yard and didn't get into the house. That is definitely too close for comfort.

Shaw, J., et al (2010) **Catastrophic tidal expansion in the Bay of Fundy, Canada.** CANADIAN JOURNAL OF EARTH SCIENCES 47:1079–1091

"*Tidal models for the Bay of Fundy, Canada, site of the highest recorded modern tide* [16.3 metres], *show that tidal amplification began in the early Holocene and by ca. 5000 BP the range was almost 80% of the present range. Empirical data consisting of 146 sea-level index points and other observations appear to contradict model results. Aggregated relative sea-level data for Chignecto Bay and Minas Basin show that rapid tidal expansion began ca. 3400 BP. However, if we separate these two geographically separate data sets, evidence for this rapid late-Holocene tidal expansion is confined to Minas Basin. We explain this singularity by positing a barrier at the mouth of Minas Basin, at the Minas Passage, that delayed tidal expansion. With the rapid breakdown of this barrier and near-instantaneous tidal expansion, water temperature dropped, tidal currents and turbidity increased, and the form of the inner estuary was changed from lagoonal–mesotidal to macrotidal. We argue that the catastrophic breakdown of the barrier is related in the aboriginal legend of Glooscap, showing that aboriginal peoples observed the rapid environmental changes and preserved an oral record for 3400 years.*"

"*The catastrophic breakdown of the barrier appears to have been recorded in oral tradition of the First Nations of the region. ... A useful source for this legend is Beck (1972), who states that: "It came to pass in those days that the beavers had built a dam across from Utkoguncheek or Cape Blomidon, to the opposite shore, and thereby made a pond that filled all the valley of Annapolis." Beck was advancing the possibility that these legends were folk memories of the former existence of the Pleistocene giant beaver Castoroides ohioensis. She went on to describe how Glooscap broke the beaver dam: "And when the dam was cut from where it joined the shore there was a mighty rush of many waters, so that it swung round to the westward, yet it did not break from the other shore. Therefore the end of it lodged with a great split therein where the flood had found a free course, and the hole may be seen there still, even to this day, and may be seen by all who of those who pass up the bay; and this point, or Cape Split, is called by the Micmacs Pleegun, which being interpreted, means the opening of a beaver dam.*"

Speirs: What is interesting to me about this report is that it demonstrates that oral history can survive 3,400 years and be verified by hydrogeology, much like the city of Troy was found by referring to THE ILLIAD.

Bloch, G., et al (2010) **Industrial apiculture in the Jordan valley during Biblical times with Anatolian honeybees.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 107:11240-11244

"*Although texts and wall paintings suggest that bees were kept in the ancient Near East for the production of precious wax and honey, archaeological evidence for beekeeping has never been found. The Biblical term "honey" commonly was interpreted as the sweet product of fruits, such as dates and figs. The recent discovery of unfired clay cylinders similar to traditional hives still used in the Near East at the site of Tel Reov in the Jordan valley in northern Israel suggests that a large-scale apiary was located inside the town, dating to the 10th-early 9th centuries B.C.E. This paper reports the discovery of remains of honeybee workers, drones, pupae, and larvae inside these hives. The exceptional preservation of these remains provides unequivocal identification of the clay cylinders as the most ancient beehives yet found. Morphometric analyses indicate that these bees differ from the local subspecies Apis mellifera syriaca and from all subspecies other than A. m. anatoliaca, which presently resides in parts of Turkey. This finding suggests either that the Western honeybee subspecies distribution has undergone rapid change during the last 3,000 years or that the ancient inhabitants of Tel Reov imported bees superior to the local bees in terms of their milder temper and improved honey yield.*"

Speirs: This indicates that beekeeping was in an advanced state at least 12,000 years ago, if Jordanian apiculturists were importing bees from Turkey. There had to be enough communication for beekeepers to keep records of hive outputs, share information, and thereby recognize who had the better bees.

Eberth, D.A., et al (2010) **Dinosaur death pits from the Jurassic of China.** PALAIOS 25:112-125

"*Three newly discovered bonebeds from the Shishugou Formation of Xinjiang, China, are unusual in preserving vertically stacked and articulated to associated skeletons of at least 18 small, non-avian theropod dinosaurs in pits that are 1–2 m deep. The pits host a soft sediment-deformed mixture of alluvial and volcanic mudstone and sandstone. There is no evidence that the pits were discrete depressions in the topography that filled through time. Rather, they appear to have been highly localized areas of liquefaction caused by large-dinosaur (possibly sauropod) trampling of saturated sediments. Evidence indicates that the small theropods, and some other small vertebrates, became mired and died in these mud-filled pits. High quality skeletal preservation suggests that most individuals were buried within days to months after their deaths. Carcasses were buried successively, coming to rest above previously buried individuals.*

In some cases, skeletal body parts became separated or were removed, probably during scavenging. Given the large sizes of the pits relative to the small body sizes of the vertebrates contained within them, we conclude that small vertebrates (<3 m long and <1 m tall) were particularly susceptible to miring at these sites. Although the small, presumably herbivorous ceratosaur, Limusaurus inextricabilis, dominates the combined small theropod assemblage from these bonebeds (minimum number of individuals [MNI] = 15), there is no evidence that any biological features other than its small size and a large, and possibly, gregarious local population were responsible for its becoming mired in large numbers."

Speirs: In other words, the big dinosaurs were so big that their footprints became open-pit traps for dog- or bear-sized dinosaurs.

Gong, E., et al (2010) **The birdlike raptor *Sinornithosaurus* was venomous.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 107:766-768

"*We suggest that some of the most avian dromaeosaurs, such as Sinornithosaurus, were venomous, and propose an ecological model for that taxon based on its unusual dentition and other cranial features including grooved teeth, a possible pocket for venom glands, and a groove leading from that pocket to the exposed bases of the teeth. These features are all analogous to the venomous morphology of lizards. Sinornithosaurus and related dromaeosaurs probably fed on the abundant birds of the Jehol forests during the Early Cretaceous in northeastern China.*"

Kim, T.H., et al (2010) **Human brain activation in response to visual stimulation with rural and urban scenery pictures: A functional magnetic resonance imaging study.** SCIENCE OF THE TOTAL ENVIRONMENT 408:2600-2607

"*Human brain activation was assessed in terms of eco-friendliness while viewing still photographs depicting rural and urban surrounding environments with the use of a functional magnetic resonance imaging technique. A total of 30 subjects who had both rural and urban life experiences participated in this study. In order to explore the common and differential activation maps yielded by viewing two extreme types of scenery, random effect group analysis was performed with the use of one-sample and two-sample t-tests. Activation of the anterior cingulate gyrus, globus pallidus, putamen and head of the caudate nucleus was dominant during rural scenery viewing, whereas activation of the hippocampus, parahippocamus and amygdala was dominant during urban scenery viewing ($p < 0.01$). These findings allow better characterization of neural activation, suggesting an*

inherent preference towards nature-friendly living. Such a theoretical acquisition may have an important practical impact in view of potential applications for bio-housing and the development of environmental psychology-related areas."

Speirs: We were all happier back on the farm, weren't we.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

FROM: Lloyd Penney 2009-07-21
1706 - 24 Eva Road
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

I still go to SF conventions to socialize; it's been a long time since a Guest of Honour induced me to attend. Still, I've been around long enough that I can socialize with the GoHs too, so I guess I've covered it all.

2010-02-23

Now that Charlie Brown has passed away, and his assistants have taken over the SF-review magazine LOCUS, Rob Sawyer is getting some attention. Charlie followed his likes and dislikes, and that interfered with his coverage of the field. I hope his successors are more objective.

You wrote that if a movie or TV series is more than two years since the last episodes were released, its fandom dies out. The exception to this rule is Doctor Who fandom, which continued on through the years, and whose patience has been rewarded with

new episodes and actors. I haven't seen any of the new episodes but I hear that Whofans are very pleased with what's being produced.

[Star Trek was another exception, but I note the rule generally holds locally in Calgary. The browncoats flooded Cowtown conventions a few years ago but have since been displaced by steampunk and sexy-teenage-vampires-in-love fans. The Trekkies here are pretty much extinct, and Whovians were always rare on the ground. I'm waiting for cowpunk to develop, so I can go in my regular daily outfit of denim shirt, jeans, and cowboy hat, and win the hall costume prize without having to dress up.]

FROM: Joseph Nicholas 2010-01-20
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You note that: "*British fans did nothing when Abi Frost absconded with travel funds and never paid them back.*" This isn't quite true. Some time and effort was devoted to thought and discussion as to how the missing money might be recovered, with some people even suggesting that the police be involved and that a criminal prosecution for theft be initiated. I argued against this on the grounds that such a course of action would probably cost almost as much money as had been misappropriated. It would be

unlikely to succeed for the simple reason that fan funds operate entirely on trust and there were no legal safeguards to prevent such theft in the first place. Ergo, what was the breach other than a moral one?

Frost sanctioned herself by sundering herself from SF fandom and thus from almost all of her former friends. She stayed in contact with a couple of fans she'd known before actually encountering fandom, and died in April 2009. A Wikipedia entry for former Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund administrator Martin Tudor contains the following passage: "*Following Tudor's return to the UK, both he and Dan Steffan (the U.S. TAFF administrator) were criticized by certain fans for not revealing during his tour that the previous UK administrator Abi Frost had diverted TAFF funds for her personal use and was unable to repay more than L2,600. Tudor and Steffan defended their decision by stating they did not want the entire trip overshadowed by Frost's fraudulent actions. Despite promising to do so, Frost failed to repay the majority of the cash and disappeared from the social circles she had once been so active in. Tudor and Steffan subsequently built the funds back up to the pre-fraud levels, mostly with donations from British SF fans, and TAFF survived the scandal.*"

I Also Heard From: John Held Jr, Ken Bausert, John Hertz, Franz Zrilich