

# OPUNTIA

## 255

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

### FAPA: 75 YEARS AND 300 MAILINGS

I circulate OPUNTIA through a science fiction apa called Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA). 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, but this works out cheaper than mailing individual copies. 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.

The oldest apa is the National A.P.A., founded 1876. FAPA was founded in 1937. Details from Robert Lichtman, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, California 994611-1948. In addition to articles, there will be mailing comments on other apazines in the last FAPA bundle. I quote the remark I am commenting on or otherwise make the context clear, so hopefully an outsider can still read the comments with interest.

The 300th mailing of FAPA was dated August 2012, and contained 35 zines with 433 pages between them. It is also the 75th anniversary of the apa. Incredibly, there are four charter members still in the land of the living, all of whom have commentary in this bundle.

**Mailing Comments On FAPA #300**

FAPA #300 was received in Calgary on September 4. The FAPA Clearcut Award for the most pages published in a bundle goes to our Danish member Knud Larn, who had 90 pages.

**All That Jazz #3** This issue also includes a CD-R disk of editor Curt Phillips' radio show "G.I. Jive", big band jazz of the 1930s and 1940s, heard on WEHC-FM, Virginia. I enjoyed the play list compiled of songs current in 1937, the year FAPA was born and which all the founding members would have heard on their radios. Talk about timebinding! I'm sure your listeners were baffled by your shout-out for FAPA but thanks for mentioning us on the air.

**A Propos De Rien** *"Did people lament the passing of scribe-written copies of books when the printing press was invented?"* Yes, they did. I have a limited-edition fine-press book called IN PRAISE OF SCRIBES, a 1977 translation of the 1494 DE LAUDE SCRIPTORUM by the monk Johannes Trithemius. He had become an abbot by age 21 at Sponheim, Germany, and built its library up

into one of the finest in Europe. It had printed books but he argued that copying by hand forced people to pay more attention to the text. Copying by hand concentrated the reader on a few texts, rather than having large numbers of books that one would never read, much like some people today have 16,000 songs downloaded onto their computer but never listen to.

**The CONventional** It was nice of Knud to produce this daily single-sheet zine for the Danish SF convention Fantasticon 2012. I am glad to see reports on the actual content of the panels, rather than lists of which friends you saw and what you ate for dinner. The Nordic Fan Fund was new to me, to send a Danish fan to some other Scandinavian convention. Niels Dalgaard was quite right in saying that the personal computer seems to have made so many writers forget to economize with their words.

**Fandom Forever #1** Dalgaard's essay on the history of Danish SF in the first decade of the 2000s was an interesting read. As he wrote, the definition of SF used can indeed influence the total count of novels published. An SF background in what would be otherwise a mystery novel doesn't make it an SF novel per se. I liked his remark that: *"Judging from the Danish SF novels of this decade, the Danes are a worried people."*

**Stories From The First Fandom Archives** I will file this separately with my other references about SF fandom history. The accounts of the early SF fans who were there in the 1930s as fandom was being born were interesting, particularly about the first true SF fanzine, THE TIME TRAVELLER, which began in 1932.

**Voice Of The Habu** Re: young people not wanting to work for high-tech companies because of frequent layoffs. This is what happened to the petroleum industry in western Canada in the 1980s after the Liberals crippled it with their National Energy Policy. Today geologists out here are generally in their 60s or 70s, with a small number in their late 20s and early 30s. After the NEP was imposed, kids back then saw their fathers laid off and forced to change careers. Every geologist told his children to stay out of the business because it had no future. Only recently, with the advent of Peak Oil, have younger people been attracted into the business. I don't remember meeting any geologists in their 40s or early 50s. An entire generation of geologists vanished.

**Number One** You were wondering how I keep track of my publications. I use a spreadsheet.

*"Someday I may be forced to get a cellphone due to the nonexistence of pay phones and my occasional need to make a call when I'm not at home."* I missed the era of brick phones but

did get a candy-bar phone in 1998. As you say, pay phones are scarce these days. Few people will open their houses to let a stranger make a call if you have trouble out on the road. In rural areas, where I do a lot of driving, a cellphone is peace of mind. I seldom make or receive more than a couple of calls per week. In March 2012, I got a new smartphone because the batteries on the old cellphone wouldn't hold a charge anymore and they were custom sizes that the manufacturer quit making years ago.

Re: garbage bins. The City of Calgary converted residential garbage pickup to the bin system a few years ago. These are wheeled carts, waist-high with lids, and about two cubic metres in volume. They have enough capacity that I only have to set them out for emptying about once every four months, although some families up and down the alley fill them every week. They speed up collection because the operator uses mechanical arms to lift and empty them. The Solid Wastes Dept. reported a dramatic drop in Workers Compensation injuries after they were introduced, and collection goes faster because the operators aren't as tired by the end of the shift. Each house has two bins, a blue one for recyclables and a black one for landfill trash. I keep mine near the side of the house and wheel them into the back alley when ready for dumping. There are two trucks on each route, one for each type of bin. The City will be introducing a small green bin for food scraps and compostables, but I do not intend to use mine because I've been tossing scrap food

onto my lawn since I bought the house in 1982. By the next morning, the scraps are gone. Whatever the squirrels or snowshoe hares didn't want, the magpies and crows clean up.

**Alphabet Soup** *"When you think about it you really don't own land. You just rent it from the government."* It has to be that way in every country to maintain sovereignty. Otherwise, people could just abdicate their responsibilities in helping pay for the common good such as roads, police, sewers, and parks. Libertarians babble about how we should be free to choose, much like the old British adage that people had the right to be poor. In the absence of peace, order, and good government (to use a Canadian legal phrase) gangsterism and cronyism take over, as they do in so many Third World countries.

*"Being hit by a meteorite is God's way of telling you he isn't pleased with you."* By coincidence I just picked up a bargain-bin DVD six-pack of disaster movies, several of which were made by Faith Films. Their movie THE APOCALYPSE is about a big asteroid heading to Earth. It starts out as the usual clichéd disaster film but takes a neat twist when the Rapture starts happening halfway through. Because of the harbinger meteorites wreaking havoc, the authorities have no time or patience to deal with people vanishing into thin air. The mass media are too busy filming explosions and flames to notice. The ending is very unusual among movies of this kind.

*"Combining a post office with a dry cleaners does sound strange."* Calgary has three such retail postal outlets. Most of them are in the traditional sorts of places such as drug stores, supermarkets, copy shops, and convenience stores, but one is in a cigar store.

**Edgar's Journal** *"The world of fanzines was once the golden field, before the Internet."* Or perhaps before Star Trek, when the media barbarians surged into the field and trampled the turf into grey mud. When a creative hobby gets too big and the next generation turns out to be consumers rather than producers, the magic goes away. Psychologists say that there is a sea change in human relations once a village has more than 500 people and it is no longer possible, even in theory, for everyone to know everyone else personally. The same thing happened to SF fandom.

**Nice Distinctions** *"If you depend on a computer system, the scariest word in the world can be 'upgrade'."* That depends. You don't have to upgrade anything except your anti-virus software. OPUNTIA is produced on a 1998 Toshiba laptop running Windows 95 and WordPerfect 8. I also use a 2006 Toshiba laptop with Windows XP and WordPerfect 12 for more advanced work. Neither will ever be online. I got 14 years out of my first cellphone and expect to do the same for the second one.

**For FAPA** Re: houses being liabilities rather than assets. Few people understand this point. When I bought my house in 1982, with the mortgage at 17% for the first five years, I lived in the basement suite and rented out the main floor. Not only did I have rental income, but because the main floor was half the house, I deducted half the mortgage, half the utilities, and half the property taxes as expenses. My tax refund was bigger than my rental income.

Because all the Boomers were buying houses in the 1980s and 1990s, people got the idea that a house was an asset because they could sell it for more than they paid. Of course this only works if you get the timing right. What house buyers today don't understand is that the Boomer generation is retiring and dying off, so they are out of the house market on a net basis. Thus Canadian house prices have started to slump, while young and stupid couples buy houses or condos with no rental units but 100% liability in the form of maintenance costs and reduced selling price. I know several couples who bought in Calgary in the last few years and are now struggling to pay off a house in a market where average selling time is now 13 months and only then at a price reduction. One lady and her husband lined up all night to buy a condo unit in a skyscraper not yet built, then found out a few months later that subsequent comparable units were priced \$100,000 less than what they were committed for.

There are three sites in downtown Calgary that are giant holes or only built up to ground level before the developer quit construction, not bankrupt but just spent all the money and then quietly folded. City Council had to enact a new by-law to deal with such abandoned sites. Since the developers are not bankrupts but just stopped work indefinitely, the usual seizure rules don't apply. The developers keep paying the minimal property taxes for undeveloped land, so the City can't take it for back taxes either. The neighbours are stuck living next to a big hole in the ground and can do nothing. The by-law requires developers to post a bond to complete the building to at least ground level as a single-story building, or if they have gone higher, to at least finish off up to the last floor that was framed. However, the by-law cannot be made retroactive, so there are some holes four years old now.

**Entropy Blues** You mention palaeofan Bob Gibson, whose collection is now in the University of Calgary Library. I only knew him as a nodding acquaintance in his final years, although I did visit his house once, not far from where I live. He showed up at Calgary conventions and spent his time in the bourse, working his checklists of books. The dealers loved him and often paid for their tables just from his purchases. He was allowed to sit behind the table with the dealer and would accumulate a stack of books at each place. I was probably the only convention attendee who knew his past history of the 1940s and 1950s era of Canadian fandom.

You ask about the Princess Patricia Light Infantry. Yes, it was based in Calgary until CFB Currie closed in 1997. I think they are now at CFB Wainwright. The base has been redeveloped into housing and the barracks into special-needs schools. I bought my house, two blocks from the base, in 1982. I remember the thumpa-thumpa sound of airborne infantry training as the gunships hovered over the base while the squaddies practiced rappelling from the choppers to the ground.

Re: house prices in Vancouver. Go to [www.greaterfool.ca](http://www.greaterfool.ca) and read the truth about what is happening in the Canadian residential real estate market. Vancouver is Ground Zero.

Re: mental depression. I follow Samuel Johnson's advice from two centuries ago and still valid today. Keep busy and don't let your mind dwell on negative thoughts. For today's world, or at least in Canada, I always keep lots of lights on in winter to avoid a gloomy house.

**The Past Recaptured** Nothing to make comments on about your reprints of historical documents from the earliest years of FAPA, but they were appreciated as background information. I will file this separately in my fanhistory collection.

**All other zines:** Read and enjoyed but no comment.

## ARCTIC PEST CONTROL

by Dale Speirs

Pest control for most of us is usually no more than setting out a mouse trap, or dealing with ants getting into the pantry. Lest you feel put upon, remember that there have been other people with far more serious problems, as detailed below.

THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS (1953) is based on a story by Ray Bradbury with SFX by Ray Harryhausen, a pioneer of stop-motion articulated animal models. The movie opens with stock footage of U.S. Air Force planes in the Arctic, overdubbed with an ominous narration by an announcer about a secret project. What it is, is that they're dropping an atomic bomb on the polar ice cap, presumably because they can. We see stock footage of the Bikini hydrogen bomb test mixed into footage of glaciers calving icebergs. At an observation post, a radar operator thinks he saw a blip on the screen but it vanishes. This is supposed to be foreboding but the Beast is a land/aquatic animal and does not fly.

A group of men are sent out to check the results of the bomb test, just as a blizzard develops. The group splits up and the men go in separate directions. They are walking in unstable pack ice as tall as houses, with no individual radios, in a blizzard, and they decide to split up. Doesn't USAF teach basic survival in the Arctic? We see the star of the show, the Beast, roaming the ice. Since reptiles

are exothermic, it had better get to warmer climates a.s.a.p., and it does. Along the way, it sinks a couple of ships and takes out a lighthouse. The lighthouse scene is quite well done and the image of an angry dinosaur demolishing it is iconic.

There is the usual disbelief, and the hero struggles to establish proof. Slowly a few converts are made, and the beast is eventually identified as a Rhedosaurus. Map plots of its sightings show it is heading south to New York City. The only known fossils of Rhedosaurus were dredged from the Hudson River submarine canyon. A bathysphere is brought in to search the canyon. No monster being in sight, stock footage is used of a baby shark fighting an octopus in an aquarium. When that gets stale, the Rhedosaurus model is passed over the combatants in superposition to make it look like it ate both of them in one gulp. Not a believable SFX as the gap between the model and the rear-projection screen of the fight is visibly noticeable. The Rhedosaurus then decides to clean its teeth on something crunchier and takes out the bathysphere.

Still hungry, it surfaces in New York City harbour, climbs out of the water, and then goes stalking down the streets of Manhattan. The stop-motion animation is very good for its time. It doesn't entirely mesh with the live actors and establishing shots on the rear screen, but for the early 1950s is acceptable. Mass panic ensues with people running down the streets the way they did on

2001-09-11. (Or vice versa; one frequent comment about the fall of the Twin Towers was how the dust clouds billowing through the streets emulated so many SF and disaster movies.) A policeman makes a bold stand with his revolver, which only reminds the Rhedosaurus that it is still hungry. A nice SFX ensues of the beast snatching up the man while he re-loads his gun and tossing him down its throat. It continues trudging down the street, stomping on toy cars while the rear-screen projection shows real cars.

A squad of policemen open fire with pump-action shotguns, which doesn't stop the Rhedosaurus but does make it take a detour through an adjacent building to get away from them. Detour as in punching a giant tunnel the shape of a Rhedosaurus through the building and out the other side. The military then takes their turn with bazookas, and get better results, wounding it in the throat. The Rhedosaurus turns and flees, and the soldiers begin tracking its trail of blood. However, the blood turns out to be loaded with pathogens that modern humans have no resistance to. A nice touch to the plot, and not improbable. One fallacy in the movie though is that the pathogens affect exposed personnel within seconds, which isn't how real life works. But let us be charitable and suppose that the blood also contains something that works like venom.

This cramps the military's style since they can't blow up the Rhedosaurus with artillery because that would spray the blood around the city and into the sewers and rivers. The wounded Rhedosaurus is cornered in an amusement park. The plan is to shoot it with a rocket grenade loaded with radioactive isotopes. Rather dubious because radiation poisoning doesn't kill instantaneously, but they can't very well use explosive nukes. Nonetheless, the skeptics are silenced and the critter is killed. The end credits roll and there is no doubt that the newspapers will increase their print run for tomorrow.

The movie's special effects are reasonably good for their time. The nitpicks are mainly because today we can freeze-frame DVDs and examine frames at leisure. Prior to the advent of VHS and Betamax such defects went by too fast for most people to notice. At least the producers were trying.

THE DEADLY MANTIS (1957) appeared near the end of the monster movie cycle of the 1950s and early 1960s. Every expense was spared in making this movie, and about one-third of it is stock shots. The film begins with a volcano suddenly erupting in the Antarctic. This is a stock shot of an Icelandic volcano, but hey, they all look alike. An announcer solemnly intones that for every action there is an opposite and equal reaction, and the camera pans across a globe to the North Pole. Cue the next stock shot, that of glaciers calving icebergs, which

releases a giant praying mantis frozen in the ice for umpty million years. Since glaciers calve icebergs naturally, there doesn't seem to be any need for claiming that a volcano at the opposite end of the planet shook the ice loose. Some things don't need explaining.

Before the action gets going though, we have to sit through a five-minute documentary about the DEW Line radar system in Arctic Canada, obviously free publicity material handed out by NORAD. There follows an aerial view of a weather station (stock shot) situated on top of a narrow mountain ridge blown clear of snow. The pilot overflying the station calls his base and says the place has been trashed and the two men operating it are missing. A jump cut back to the station shows the building in good order.

The news is flashed to Red Eagle One, the snow-covered Arctic base that controls the DEW Line. Colonel Parkman goes out to investigate. Why would he go? Isn't that what lieutenants are for? Well, he is the leading man, so they have to keep him busy. He lands his plane, not on the snowless ridge but on a frozen river bed. Next we see his plane beside the wrecked building. Establishing shots indicate that he didn't taxi his plane 45° up the mountain slope because the weather station is now shown in the bottomlands. And no, it didn't slide down the mountain, because the building foundations are still in place.

Parkman discovers giant three-toed footprints and long skid marks which somehow no one noticed from the air. He goes back to the base puzzled, as well he might be. In the next scene, the radar starts blipping; so he orders a red alert and scrambles all his planes. More stock shots, this time of pilots in summer dress scrambling across a snow-free launch pad. In the background the barren snowy mountains have been replaced by trees in full leaf. Nothing is found and the pilots return to base, the snow and mountains having re-appeared, as if by magic, or at least a different set of stock shots.

Then a transport plane goes missing. Fighter pilots spot the wreckage out on the wide open flat tundra (stock footage of a transport parked on an ice runway). The Colonel flies out and lands on the exact same river bottom again, this time without a meteorological station but with the plane wreck and some giant three-toed footprints. What happened to the tundra? Or the weather station? He lands his plane on the river bed from the opposite direction, the stock footage having been flipped over in mirror image to make it look different.

There is a new clue, though, a giant claw broken off some unknown beast. Nothing to do but send it down south for analysis by the scientists at the Pentagon. They haven't a clue but suggest that Dr. Nedrick Jackson, a palaeontologist at the Museum of Natural History, be consulted. Nedrick? What kind of a name is

that? All movies have disclaimers in the end credits that any resemblance to real people is purely coincidental, so it's not as if they were afraid of being sued by a real-life Fredrick Jackson. Ned (if I can call him Ned) quickly figures out that the claw was broken off a giant praying mantis, so at least he's read ahead in the script.

The movie heads back up to the Arctic. More stock film, this time of Inuit paddling their kayaks, run at double speed to make it look like they were frantically escaping from the mantis. The critter makes its first full frontal appearance. Regular public appearances then follow, as it trashes a radar base, impervious to the personnel's flamethrowers and automatic weapons. It then out-flies jet fighters as it heads south to warmer climes. The Maritime provinces and the American Eastern Seaboard are sent into a panic, and the news media are behaving as they usually do. U.S. Navy jets fire on the mantis but lose it in the clouds. It is good to know that the Soviets never learned that for their nuclear bombers to escape detection all they had to do was fly into a cloud.

The mantis makes it to land, where it smashes up a train and then a commuter bus. The mantis, by the way, now starts roaring continuously like a lion, notwithstanding its lack of vocal chords. It flies into Washington, D.C., and we see stock film of artillery readying for action against it.

The guns are emplaced in the California or Nevada desert, so they must have one hell of a range, not to mention very good artillery spotters. The mantis flew into D.C. in darkness but the USAF fighters scrambling a moment later from a nearby base take off in daylight. A few minutes later, the desert artillery, also in daylight, open fire as the mantis flies directly overhead, but the shots from the mantis point of view show it in coal-black night.

The mantis is briefly lost from sight, but USAF fighters pick it up over New Jersey and wound it. One pilot finds himself on a head-on collision course with the mantis. Instead of swerving away instantly with plenty of room to spare, he flies in a straight line into the mantis, throws up his arms in front of his face, and ejects. How did he ever make it through flight school? Fortunately it is daylight where he ejected (stock footage of a parachutist) even though the mantis is seen descending into a night-time New York City, where it takes refuge in a Manhattan traffic tunnel.

Then the film jumps over several scenes to one of the worst quality endings of any movie. The U.S. Army, under the command of a USAF officer, has tarped off the tunnel ends and is pumping smoke into it to subdue the critter. Fair enough, but Col. Parkman wants to speed things up because he thinks the mortally wounded mantis is going to claw its way out of the tunnel by digging through the reinforced concrete into the river and flood the system. It broke its claw digging into an aircraft fuselage

when it was in good health. Now, the mantis is badly wounded and dying, and the Colonel thinks it's going to dig through concrete. He was the one who found the broken claw, remember.

Crowd control at the tunnel entrance is atrocious, worse than Vancouver after a hockey game. Rubberneckers wander around in the midst of first responders, and everyone parks their cars right up against the tunnel entrance. Army personnel, still taking orders from a flyboy, put on hazmat suits and walk into the tunnel. What happened to their line of command? They're carrying rifles, which have been demonstrated many times already to be useless against the beast. They are walking into the tunnel depths with nerve gas canisters because the Colonel told them that the gas was only effective in a confined space. Isn't the tunnel a confined space? It's already closed off at both ends with tarps, so why don't they just pump the gas in and wait? Because it wouldn't provide the idiot in the idiot plot, that's why.

In they go, and the rest of the plot is incidental compared to the SFX, which rank among the worst ever perpetuated in a movie. The mantis is seen overturning plastic toy vehicles. Not just any toys but the cheapest kind produced from a one-piece mold, the unpainted type where the doors don't open and the headlights are the same opaque plastic as the rest of it. Suffice it to say, they finally bring down the mantis with the last canister of gas. Finis.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

FROM: Robert Jennings 2012-07-31  
29 Whiting Road  
Oxford, Massachusetts 01540-2035

[Re: Nero Wolfe] The thing that always struck me about these novels was the fact that Rex Stout created excellent characters and generally interplayed them well, but his plots were often obscure or downright pedestrian. The first book in the series has a very strong plot, but quite a lot of the rest of the series don't. I found this fact hammered home while watching the TV series that came out ten or twelve years ago. It attempted to adapt the novels to teleplays on a nearly weekly basis. The series had excellent actors and sets. Although some of the stories were well delivered, I was struck by how hard the script writers had to scramble to make some of those novels seem interesting in a format where plot and movement is more important than characterization.

Stout was primarily interested in detective stories. He wrote some other things but most were not particularly good. He turned out a couple of incredibly awful science-fantasy stories that are best forgotten. I sometimes wonder if he did not miss his true calling. If he had turned his talents to writing mainstream novels, his remarkable handling of characters would have served him very

well. He might have made even more of an impression on the literary world than he did with his work in the detective field.

Re: your comments to my previous letter, most people are fully aware of the eroding effect of inflation at any level. The situation is entirely different with governments. Most governments prefer to have a small and so-called "manageable" rate of inflation rather than any kind of deflation, because deflation creates enormous social and fiscal distress.

2012-10-01

[Re: 1950s monster movies] Some of them were pretty good, but even a few of the better financed films lacked believability. As soon as Hollywood figured out that the primary market for those things was teenagers, the standards began to drop. My understanding is that organized crime got into the monster movie business initially as a way to launder money, and then as a way to make some very fast bucks turning out cheap crap that even at its worse would still make money. They would play in last-run houses and drive-ins, and theatres in small towns that couldn't afford to book mainstream films but needed something to fill their weekly fare anyway.

[Growing up in rural central Alberta, I well remember our local theatre's scratchy, worn-out films of blockbusters that arrived in Eckville about a year after they premiered.] -11-

FROM: Murray Moore  
1065 Henley Road  
Mississauga, Ontario L4Y 1C8

2012-07-30

[Re: Calgary Parking Authority surveillance vans] Does Calgary have a similar system for detecting speeders as for detecting over-parkers? Huge money to be made for the city treasury if a vehicle equipped as is the parking scofflaw vehicle was cruising your major streets.

[Calgary's red light cameras also function as speeding cameras, but the main automated tool for speeding is photo radar in unmarked vehicles parked by the side of the road.]

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

2012-09-10

I've never been to the Calgary Stampede and I don't think I will ever be able to go. If I do go, I think I will try to avoid looking silly in a cowboy hat, plaid shirt, and jeans. Too many Easterners look ridiculous in that combination.

[So do westerners. I wear cowboy boots and black denim pants year-round but never plaid shirts, which us farm folk refer to as

lumberjack shirts. I have never owned lace-up shoes; -12-  
my boots are the comfortable working cowboy boots with plain black leather, not the dude boots with pointy capped toes and filigree on the shanks. Genuine cowboys wear their pant legs overtop the boots, so anyone walking around Cowtown with pant legs stuffed inside the boots is automatically identified as a city slicker. I only wear my cowboy hat when it is raining. Having written all that, many people don't attempt a full western outfit during Stampede. A cowboy hat by itself is fine, or just jeans and boots.]

**I Also Heard From:** Theo Nelson, John Hertz, Anna Banana, John Held Jr, Stuart Stratu, Rodney Leighton, Sheryl Birkhead, John Purcell, Franz Zrilich

## ZINE MACHINES IN COWTOWN

In recent years, some zinesters have refurbished old vending machines to dispense packaged zines. I don't know how successful this has been in weaning people away from the mass media, but more strength to them anyway. The concept arrived in Calgary in 2012. Karlene Nicolajsen, a Calgarian, has repurposed two vending machines here in our fair city, called Zine Machines. Feed in \$2 of quarters, pull the lever, and get something that isn't from a subsidiary of Springer Verlag.

## BOOK REVIEWS

by Dale Speirs

FANTASIA MATHEMATICA (1958) is an anthology edited by Clifton Fadiman of short stories relating to mathematics, mostly science fiction. The lead story is Aldous Huxley's "Young Archimedes", about a young Italian boy who is a mathematical genius. Alas, he was born in the wrong place and his talents are stifled by everyday life as a peasant. It undoubtedly has happened many times in history in many cultures, where a genius has his potential squandered because he never had the chance to develop.

The stories in this anthology are mostly short-shorts, too many to review properly. Some will be recognizable to SF fans, such as Robert Heinlein's "And He Built A Crooked House". A California contractor builds a house in the shape of an unfolded tesseract. An earthquake shakes it down into an actual tesseract, where every room shares its walls with every other room, and when you move across the house in a straight line you find yourself back where you started without having turned a corner.

Another famous SF story, is "A Subway Named Moebius" by A.J. Deutsch. It is about a convoluted subway system which turns into an interdimensional loop after a new route is opened up and it becomes a physical Moebius strip. A train full of commuters vanish, and the job is how to get them back.

A classic is Martin Gardner's "The Island Of Five Colours", in which an island is discovered that has five tribes which have common boundaries with each other. This violates the Four-Colour Theorem, which states that no more than four colours are needed to paint a map without two adjacent countries having the same colour. The explorers who discovered the island have their problems trying to prove the five common boundaries and resort to dropping paint bombs from the air to mark the lines.

THE AFFINITY BRIDGE (2009, hardcover) by George Mann is set in 1901. It throws in everything but the kitchen sink, from the usual airships to clockwork automatons to zombies roaming London to steam-powered buses also roaming London. The zombies, incidently, are the result of a brain virus disease brought back by expatriates returning from India. Queen Victoria, whom the general public thought was a recluse because she was in mourning for her dear Albert, is in fact secretly on mechanical life support, although she is able to get about in a specially-equipped wheelchair.

The plot gets moving with an airship crashing in London in mysterious circumstances. Sir Maurice Newbury, who is something in the government, is assigned to investigate, assisted by Veronica Hobbes. Sir Maurice is addicted to laudanum, not a 7% solution of cocaine, and Veronica has a sister who is in an asylum because she can see the future.

Notwithstanding all this clutter, the investigation reveals that the clockwork automaton which piloted the defunct airship is missing, and the factory that made both may have something amiss. Tangled into this are the revenants, as the zombies are called, some of whom get the jump on Newbury when he gets careless while investigating in Whitechapel.

Things begin to tie together when Newbury discovers that the automatons are not as clockwork as presumed, but have human brains, reprogrammed for reliability. Since there is no legal market in physical human brains, the manufacturer had to have Burke and Hare operatives harvesting them from Whitechapel, where no one would miss a few paupers. A problem arises when some of those brains installed in the automatons turn out to be infected with the zombie disease, which has a long latency period and is only now just becoming evident as more and more automatons go berserk.

It all ends up in a fight to the death on the swaying rooftops of a steam-powered road train, a fight to the death in the mad scientist's laboratory, a fight to death in an airship, and three epilogues. The author also lays the ground for a sequel, not subtly but telegraphing it like a semaphore operator with the St. Vitus disease. I rate this about three out of five. No magic was introduced and the true events of the day were adhered to, only explained differently by a secret history.

## SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

noticed by Dale Speirs

Blais, S.A., L.A. MacKenzie, and M.V.H. Wilson (2011) **Tooth-like scales in early Devonian eugnathostomes and the outside-in hypothesis for the origins of teeth in vertebrates.** JOURNAL OF VERTEBRATE PALEONTOLOGY 31:1189–1199

*"Although teeth are considered one of the most important steps in vertebrate evolution, details of their origins are obscure. Two prominent and opposing theories for the evolution of the vertebrate dentition are current: the 'outside-in' hypothesis and the 'inside-out' hypothesis. One of the main arguments against the 'outside-in' hypothesis is that, although similarities between teeth and scales have been observed, there is little fossil evidence of transitional forms between the two structures. Specimens of ischnacanthid acanthodians from the Man On The Hill locality in the Mackenzie Mountains of Canada provide the first unequivocal example of such transitional forms in an Early Devonian (Lochkovian) vertebrate assemblage. The head scales of these specimens are modified with proximity to the mouth to be extremely tooth-like. Three distinct morphotypes of modified cheek and lip scales are described. Their detailed similarity to teeth suggests that they are a result of the same developmental processes, and also suggests the existence of a field of gene expression near the mouth margin in which scales could be*

*transformed into teeth. These transitional forms remove one of the chief objections to the 'outside-in' hypothesis for the origins of teeth in vertebrates."*

Speirs: The outside-in theory of tooth evolution in vertebrates is that they originated from scales around the mouth and lip of ancient fishes and were selected for cutting ability, then later spread inside the mouth cavity and developed along the jawbone. The inside-out theory is that they developed as bits of bone along the jawbone and then later attached themselves to jaws. Current evidence suggests the outside-in theory is correct.

Ogden, D.E., and N.H. Sleep (2012) **Explosive eruption of coal and basalt and the end-Permian mass extinction.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 109:59–62

*"The end-Permian extinction decimated up to 95% of carbonate shell-bearing marine species and 80% of land animals. Isotopic excursions, dissolution of shallow marine carbonates, and the demise of carbonate shell-bearing organisms suggest global warming and ocean acidification. The temporal association of the extinction with the Siberia flood basalts at approximately 250 Ma is well known, and recent evidence suggests these flood basalts may have mobilized carbon in thick deposits of organic-rich*

*sediments. Large isotopic excursions recorded in this period are potentially explained by rapid venting of coal-derived methane, which has primarily been attributed to metamorphism of coal by basaltic intrusion. However, recently discovered contemporaneous deposits of fly ash in northern Canada suggest large-scale combustion of coal as an additional mechanism for rapid release of carbon. This massive coal combustion may have resulted from explosive interaction with basalt sills of the Siberian Traps."*

Speirs: The Permian extinction was the greatest extinction of life on the planet, far greater than the Cretaceous extinction which wiped out dinosaurs. Kilometres-thick lava flows in Siberia heated the entire planet to the 40° C range. This study also points out that coal beds would have been ignited by the lava flows and thereby emit vast quantities of greenhouse gases.

Wright, F.A. (2012) **The short story just got shorter: Hemingway, narrative, and the six-word urban legend.** JOURNAL OF POPULAR CULTURE, pages 1 to 14

This essay discusses the origin of the anecdote about Ernest Hemingway, who when challenged to write a coherent narrative story in six words, came up with "For Sale: Baby shoes, never worn." This is an urban legend.

The anecdote was extracted from a play about Hemingway by John de Groot called "Papa", which was fictional but came to be repeated as fact. The earliest print repetition of the anecdote appears to be 1988 by SF author Arthur C. Clarke in an essay "The Power Of Compression". It appeared in print as quotes a few more times in the 1990s but didn't really spread until the advent of the Internet. Claims by some people to have heard it prior to 1961 (Hemingway's death) are shown to be false.

Lewis, K., Gonzaleza, M., and J. Kaufman (2012) **Social selection and peer influence in an online social network.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 109:68-72

*"Disentangling the effects of selection and influence is one of social science's greatest unsolved puzzles: Do people befriend others who are similar to them, or do they become more similar to their friends over time? Recent advances in stochastic actor-based modeling, combined with self-reported data on a popular online social network site, allow us to address this question with a greater degree of precision than has heretofore been possible. Using data on the Facebook activity of a cohort of college students over 4 years, we find that students who share certain tastes in music and in movies, but not in books, are significantly likely to befriend one another. Meanwhile, we find*

*little evidence for the diffusion of tastes among Facebook friends, except for tastes in classical/jazz music. ... Controlling for peer influence and over a dozen alternative determinants of network evolution, we find that students who like artists in the "lite/classic rock" or "classical/jazz" clusters display a significant tendency to form and maintain friendships with others who express tastes in the same cluster. We also find that students self-segregate on the basis of movie preferences: two students who like movies in the "dark satire" or "raunchy comedy/gore" clusters are significantly more likely than chance to become and remain friends. ... Further, the one type of preference that does spread among Facebook friends, classical/jazz music, may be especially contagious due to its unique value as a high status cultural signal; whereas students whose friends like "indie" or alternative bands may try to symbolically distance themselves from these peers."*

Speirs: That birds of a feather flock together is nothing new, nor that members of certain groups try not to advertise their membership. There is no shame in publicly admitting you like jazz or classical music, but you might not want the boss to find out that your friends off-duty call you Heavy Metal Mike.