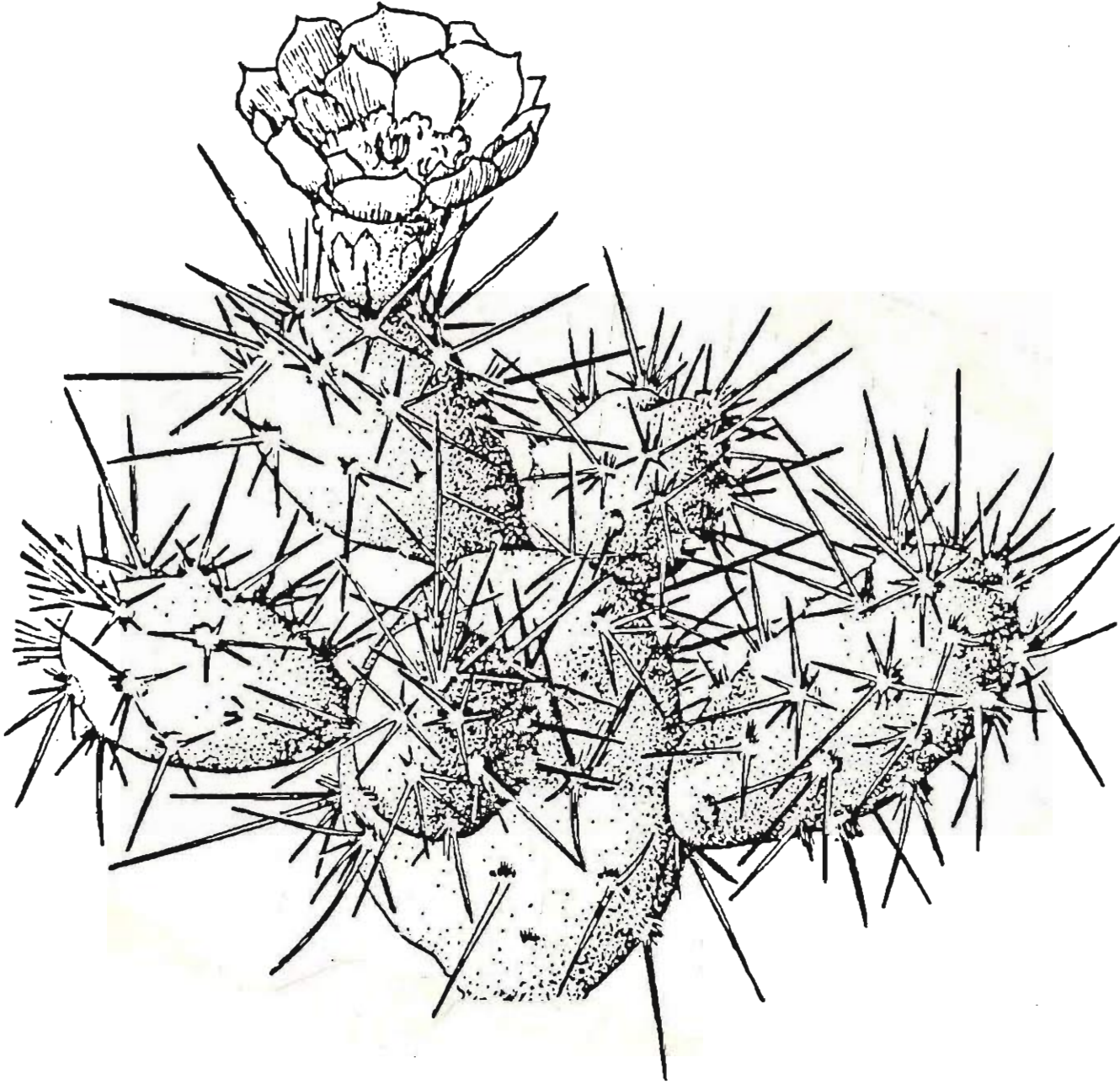


# OPUNTIA #2



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May 1991

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ART CREDIT: Front cover depicts Opuntia fragilis, page 10 shows O. basilaris, both drawn by Jeanne Russell Janish, from "Illustrated flora of the Pacific states." (1951). On page 13 is an O. polyacantha in flower, artist unknown, from "Illustrated flora of the northern U.S., Canada, and British possessions." (1913).

EDITORIAL: This issue is devoted mostly to a fan-history of Calgary, going up to about the end of 1988 or so. I have always enjoyed reading about the hobby in other cities, and I hope you feel the same way about this one. I am particularly keen to hear from loccers comparing the history of Calgary with their location. How does the hobby differ in your town? Did it evolve the same way? Or in a different direction and why? Is there a General Theory of Fandom? Do you think it behaves much differently from other hobbies?

In the September 1987 NEOLOGY, I published an article "Comparative hobbyology" in which I used my other two hobbies of philately and aquarium keeping as points of contrast and similarity. Those who holler that fandom is a way of life should see some of my friends in the aquarium hobby! More on

this later. Getting back to the Calgary fan-history, from my point of view outside Calgary fandom, this history seems well written, based on the data at hand. Garth Spencer is not a Calgarian, and has a bit of emotional distance from which to view the events.

I have always been an outsider in Calgary fandom. I attend the cons but do not involve myself in concons or attend club meetings. This has nothing to do with me being snobbish or a complainer instead of a doer. Rather it is because I am heavily involved in my other two hobbies, and want to preserve SF as the place where I can enjoy myself without having to be at such-and-such a place at 7 pm for a meeting. Writing I can do anytime and at my own speed. I daresay I have been on more aquarium and stamp show committees than anyone in Calgary has been on concons. I was a publications editor for the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics. I am currently President of the Federation of American Aquarium Societies (FAAS). The aquarium equivalent of the Hugo is FAAS Author of the Year, which I won twice in a row, the only person to win it more than once.

Fan feuds are nothing new in other hobbies. As an example, the Lake Erie Cichlid Society is an offshoot of the Ohio Cichlid Association, both of which belong to FAAS. They are trying to drag me into their feud, but won't succeed. I may live a couple of thousand kilometres away, but I don't want my tires slashed, dog poisoned or house vandalized, all of which have actually happened in that feud. OCA found out that LECS never incorporated and registered their name, so OCA trademarked the LECS name and are now forcing them to choose a new one. Does any of this sound familiar to SFers?

# TOWARDS A CALGARY FANHISTORY

by Garth Spencer

*"Tastes can be educated; exposure is the important thing." (Alexei Panshin)*

Many moons ago, I found myself accumulating bits and pieces of the fanhistory from different Canadian cities, from the 80's back to God knows when. "Great", I thought, "keep this up and I'll get all sorts of good ideas about how clubs work and how cons work and, well, what not to do as well." So I started publishing such chronicles as I could piece together, from what fragments people were willing to tell me.

Well ... what people are motivated to talk about are usually the feuds, and particularly their versions of events. When this is what you have to work with, you get all the versions you can.

Absolutely the hardest place to chronicle this way, has been Calgary (with the possible exception of Halifax, but then nobody can get any fan news out of Halifax). Nevertheless, after exhausting and Augean efforts, heroic adventures and opening several mysterious packages with 5-meter tongs, I can bring you this story ... such as it is.

*Eofandom:* There are only cryptic fragments of information about what SF fandom first existed in western Canada. There seem to have been at least a few fans in Calgary from time to time, as early as the 1930s, when SF fandom itself first took shape. Bob Gibson (b. 1908) of Calgary was a well-known fanartist known in the 1950s. The next information we have comes from the 1970s.

In the 1970s, there was an SF club in Calgary, the Alberta SF Society. It published a fanzine, beginning in 1971, edited by Randy Thomas. The fanzine was originally titled *The Great Nor'Western News* but beginning with issue #5, it was called *AltaEgo*.

The ASFS held an Open House on Thursday, July 1, 1971. Not really a full-fledged con, it attracted about 75 fans. Guests were

Forrest Ackerman, A.E. van Vogt, J.B. Clarke, and many others. A second Open House was mentioned for 1972-8-27, details unknown.

By the late 1970s, this Calgary group had mostly graduated, and gafiated at the same time. A new club formed from the remnant, including Bob Gibson, Gordon McNab, Eric Tilbrook, and Grant Thiessen (owner of Pandora's Books). Eric Tilbrook and Amin Bhatia produced the radio play "Cattlefarm Galactica", and it has been popular ever since (when it appears).

In 1978, Arlene Morlidge moved from Edmonton (and ESFCAS, Edmonton SF and Comic Art Society) to Calgary. About 1979, MacNab left to the States, Thiessen moved to Manitoba and opened a mail-order business, and Bhatia dedicated himself to his work. The remaining group included Bonnie Liesemer, Kevin Jeppson, and Eric Tilbrook. They then formed the next Calgary club, DEC (the initials standing for a Secret Message). Arlene Morlidge was the first president (largely, says Steve Johnson, because she was then the youngest member present).

DEC was apparently somewhat out of touch with fandom out-of-town. Regarding the name of the club, Stephen Johnson writes, " ... the secret name was not really a big deal, but we did think it was a cute gimmick. Alan Dewar eventually made a list of about 30,000 possible names (Decadent Embryo Club, etc.) including the real one, for parties."

Steve Pikov entered DEC in 1979. Lexie Pakulak moved to Calgary and joined DEC in the spring of 1980. Steve had perhaps little experience of fandom, but knew business procedures, budgeting, and commerce. Lexie knew Eastern fandom, and had attended numerous conventions there (and still didn't feel she knew very much about conrunning).

As Johnson describes it, early DEC meetings were occupied with sharing the members' enjoyment of books, authors, and occasional parties. He also recalls no politics in DEC's early history, "largely, I think, because we were all getting to know each other. Also, at that point there was nothing to fight about, no club dues, no

executive power, no magazine, and no fully organized club activities."

At about this time, some members of ESFCAS (in Edmonton) were thinking of finding, or forming, a local fandom in Calgary, with whom to trade NonCon back and forth. NonCon is a medium-sized con, then averaging up to 500 members, intended to be a rotating regional convention. The first three NonCons were held in Edmonton; since then it has been traded among different fan groups throughout Alberta.

The NonCon SF Society (separate from the NonCon committees) was set up under the Societies Act of Alberta. More than anything else this was to obtain financial protection for the NonCon committees. The Society is organized with the ostensible object of promoting awareness and appreciation of SF and related arts, for example by holding an annual convention. The Society is required to render a financial statement annually to the Province of Alberta, listing each newly elected board of directors.

*Monofandom:* At this point, and for some time to come, DEC was the only club in Calgary. Very much of what follows relates to DEC or its remnants. Reportedly, its interests were mainly partying, dancing, movie outings, and politicking.

DEC's low level of activity discouraged would-be members, who complained "but they don't *do* anything". For a while they produced *Duodec*, the clubzine, and *Duodec*, the fictionzine. Steve Pikov (of Vancouver) writes that *Duodec* was not available for trade, but was sold to club members only. (This was not standard fanzine practice, but many fictionzines do likewise.) However, Steve Forty says DEC did trade with *BCSFazine*.

Lexie Pakulak has the impression that DEC did not seek members, and SF readers who wanted a group to get into were either not attracted, or were actually expelled from DEC if they did not fit in and did not try to find each other outside DEC. Pakulak also thought DEC members were fairly isolated from out-of-town fandom, but Steve Johnson disputes this. He reports that DEC was

quite in touch with fandom out of town, at least in Edmonton; that a contingent attended V-Con 7 in Vancouver, and it coloured their idea of a good con -- "strong programming, diversity of fandom, an 'active' con model [always something going on]." At NonCon II, he writes, 'reality struck': "Cons can be dull!"

Perhaps DEC was in fact a fandom unto itself. I suspect that it would not have mattered much, except that DEC met the NonCon SF Society.

*The Gathering Storm:* The fans ESFCAS contacted were DEC members, not isolated fans. Someone in the group had already proposed putting on a small con, "Auroch"; this plan was shelved when DEC materialized a bid for NonCon 4. Gord Johansen, owner of a bookstore (The Sentry Box), bankrolled the con but did not participate in planning.

Steve Pikov writes:

"In February 1980, through the urging of club chairman Katherine Bonham, a bidding committee for the 1980 NonCon [was formed], comprising Steve Pikov (chair), Dave Desjardins (vice-chair), Dave Moloney (secretary), and Sheldon Wiebe (treasurer). Desjardins and Wiebe both left the club shortly thereafter, and after a number of growing pains and personnel changes, the bidding committee at NonCon 3 [Edmonton] consisted of Dave Moloney (chair), Nancy Niles (vice-chair), Lexie Pakulak (secretary), and Steve Pikov (treasurer). The con was to be held at the Palliser Hotel, with Pro GoH Larry Niven, Fan GoH Grant Thiessen, and Toastmaster Orson Scott Card, and the bid won by acclamation."

The Hotel Palliser is a Canadian Pacific hotel, like the Empress or Chateau Frontenac, very pricey and looking it. In most years its basic room rate is pretty steep; at either NonCon 4 or 6, it was halved to \$35, due to unpleasant construction noises going on next door. This was a break, but was not to be repeated or expected again.

Pikov reports that he and Pakulak had formed ties with the NonCon 3 executive, particularly Randy Reichardt (chair) and Robert Runté, and they had in mind the sort of "fannish" NonCon out-of-town fans expected. Pikov and Pakulak decided to do NonCon a la Edmonton, perhaps feeling this was how it had to be done. Other DEC members, as far as I can tell, simply did not share this attitude, and would not thrash out this policy difference in the open. Pikov writes that "Bonnie [Liesemer] and Dave [Moloney] wanted a small con, but with names like Niven and Card, it was impossible".

Nancy Niles left the bid committee after NonCon 3, to be replaced by Bonnie Liesemer. Cliff Samuels joined DEC in February 1981 and became involved as dealer's liaison. Dave Moloney went to Europe for three months in the summer of 1981, to be replaced by Eric Tilbrook, who remained after Moloney's return.

Pakulak reports that the young Moloney was the one most visibly running things, although he was relatively inexperienced. Pikov was the official chair, but people were responding to Moloney, who also held one of the NonCon post office box keys, and the only copies of the minutes. The other members of the concom (which was effectively identical with DEC) were generally in their early twenties or late teens; Pakulak was about 25, and Liesemer the only one over 25. Except for those indicated, none had business or administration experience. At least as far as Pakulak knew, at first they simply didn't do the work that had to be done. Some came through when the deadlines arrived, some did not.

After NonCon 3, a DEC meeting was called -- of which Pikov, Pakulak, Moloney, and Niles were not informed. From this point on, apparently, there was an official concom on paper, trying to work on NonCon, and a shadow concom formed by DEC. The shadow concom made its own plans and commitments, working without reference to the official concom, and at cross-purposes. To judge from what people have put into print elsewhere, some people in DEC gained the impression that Pikov and Pakulak had to be excluded from NonCon decision-making -- one meeting was in fact told to disregard anything they said. It developed that other DEC

members told Pakulak nothing about club or con business, and Pakulak (who had the other key) often found the post office box empty. It seems now that the real dispute was not the kind of con to put on, but who got to be in charge.

Under the terms of the NonCon constitution, the chair and treasurer offices had to be filled by different people. The official concom recognized that a reorganization was necessary when Sheldon Wiebe left, so Pikov and Pakulak came up with the idea of putting Moloney in the chairman's role, while they would do the donkey work. It was about this point that Robert Runté, aghast at how Pikov was being ignored, sat Moloney down and impressed on him forcefully that the Chairman is Ghod. This may not have worked out right.

One evaluation I received was that Moloney meant well and was eager to please, but he wanted to be in charge. He tried hard, gofered at quite a few cons to gain some experience in advance, but would not play figurehead; he tried to take charge wherever he was.

When Pakulak perceived work not being done on this committee, she asked that department heads give regular progress reports at meetings. Liesemer and Moloney vetoed this suggestion with comments like "How can you do that? No one wants to be called on the spot that way!" (although it is standard practice at concons I have worked on), etc. etc. Later, Pikov and Pakulak tried to shoulder the work of the convention themselves. At one point, Pakulak drew up, and tried to offer the committee, an organizational manual, laying out who was to do what. The committee ignored it, and refused to even look at it.

"In desperation," as Pakulak puts it, three weeks before the con, she tried to wrest control of the concom meetings. Pikov and Pakulak made commitments for a convention plan, printed up a progress report outlining what they had set up, and presented it at a meeting. Everyone else started saying "How dare you! We never agreed to this! It ain't gonna be!", etc. etc.. Pakulak was chastised by the vice-chair, and threatened to resign. When it came to a vote

of confidence, the committee gave it, but the dissenters felt they had no choice but to resign anyway.

*NonCon 4:* The revised concom apparently tried and failed to scrap the dissenter's program; ironically, NonCon 4 as held was still based largely on the dissenters' work. The DEC faction did scrap some panels and altered room bookings. The fact of the dissenters' resignation, along with some subtle insults, appeared in the program book. Aspersions were later cast on their handling of con finances. Someone else was brought in to 'fix up' the books.

Apparently Cliff Samuels was given only one or two months advance notice of dealer rates, etc., which he found to be insufficient lead time.

I have some information that the con was relatively enjoyable for outsiders. The club covered a minor financial loss, and they actually gained a few members. Attendance was about 520 people. Pikov writes:

"NonCon 4 muddled through. DEC gained a few members, though not seeking any. The concom suffered from the usual first-con problems. A number of authors were simultaneously contacted to become Guests of Honour, which is how Niven and Card both appeared on the bill. The opening of the bid committee's post office box appeared as a COA in Taral Wayne MacDonald's *DNQ*, well before NonCon 3, giving the Edmonton committee (envisioning NonCon attendees in the wrong city a year early) cause to descend upon the bidding committee personally with sonic stunners."

Pikov and Pakulak quietly vanished away from Calgary fandom, or tried to. It seems clear that they had taken their assignment seriously, and were frustrated by the mysterious obstructionism they met. Personally they suffered a good deal of trauma, of which I still see evidence today. Pakulak now figures that her only real mistake, and Pikov's, was in not getting out of the concom much sooner.

*NonCon 6:* At NonCon 5/Convention 5 in Edmonton, Calgary again won a NonCon bid. The bid committee was Eric Tilbrook (chair), Stuart Morlidge (vice chair), Arlene Morlidge (secretary), and Bonnie Liesemer (treasurer). Orson Scott Card was GoH, and Toastmaster was Robert L. Forward.

A number of Calgary fans report a perception that Bonnie Liesemer was the real leader of DEC, and that after NonCon 5, she had total control of NonCon 6. In the winter of 1983, as Steve Johnson puts it, there was a "hostility meeting" at Tilbrook's, regarding NonCon 6 having no short story contest, no video, no security, and no supervision at daycare. There was a confrontation with Tilbrook about Liesemer's domination.

A feud developed again, and split the concom -- the difference being that six members of the committee resigned, in February 1983; three-quarters of the DEC members left, along with the dissenters, in the summer, well in advance of the con. The "Black Sheep", as the NonCon 6 dissenters were labelled, gave a number of reasons for leaving. Just one of them, "It isn't fun anymore", was acknowledged in print. The chair once again wrote remarks about the dissenters in the program book. This did not sit too well with Mr. Card.

DEC officially ceased existing some time after the defection. The remainder of the concom carried out NonCon 6, with much assistance from ESFCAS, whose funds prevented NonCon 6 from running at a loss. About 150 persons attended.

*ConVersion:* In the summer of 1983, a decision was made to do another con. In the months following NonCon 6, Doug Edgington, the owner of Spellbound Books, talked and bankrolled Cliff Samuels, Katherine Jeppson, Leslie Williams, and Steve Johnson into setting up a con. Thus began ConVersion, another Calgary con, chaired and guided by Edgington.

ConVersion 1 was held in July 1984, with GoHs L. Sprague and Catherine Crook de Camp, at the Port o'Call Inn. Cliff Samuels

indicates there were still some procedural problems with at least the first few ConVersions. Doug Edgington wrote to *Maple Leaf Rag* (then Canada's fan newszine) to clarify what Lethbridge-area Trekkers did, and did not, contribute to this ConVersion (they were so much in evidence that Robert Runté reported they were in charge). Tim Hammell could not confirm his presence at the con until very late, so unfortunately he wasn't named in the convention literature as a confirmed guest, and was left very much at loose ends. SpellBound Books closed shop on January 7, 1985, but Edgington continued to sell books on a mail-order basis. He resigned that year from Conversion.

The "rump group" in DEC became the Calgary SF Forum in 1983, which was an electronic billboard, operated on University of Calgary computers. At ConVersion 1, Dewar and Liesemer published their first "issue" (printout), which they titled *Calgary SF Forum*.

Pikov observes that "because of the state of Calgary fandom, and the materialization of the Red Deer bid for NonCon 8, the DEC faction was discouraged from bidding on NonCon that year." Pakulak writes that this group maintained a stranglehold on the Calgary aspects of politics within the NonCon SF Society, thus trying to shut out ConVersion as the 'unofficial' or 'other' Calgary con. "It didn't work; ConVersion thrived anyway." Cliff Samuels tells me that the ConVersion charter requires the group to run conventions specifically in Calgary, which he interprets to mean that the Conversion group are barred from bidding for NonCons.

*ONOcon*: Later, under the name 'ONOcon Illuminati', the DEC faction began to hold small cons. ONOcon 1 was held February 22 to 24, 1985. It helped fill the gap left in the calendar when Rain, Vancouver's relaxicon, folded. Pakulak writes that ONOcons are "better suited to the group's size, skill level, and lack of fannish connections." ONOcon 1 was held at the Palliser. This meant a large pricey hotel again, and it also meant just about 75 people came. The Palliser offers no recreational water facilities (jacuzzi, sauna, pool) which are expected at several Northwest cons. Not all Edmonton fans showed up, nor fans from Calgary. But fans like

Diane Walton-LeBlanc enjoyed themselves, and the concomm appeared willing to take suggestions about a different location.

In 1986, ONOcon was held February 21 to 23, but have no further information. A flyer announced ONOcon 86½ which was held at the Sun Bow Inn on August 9. This was a fundraiser dance with a discount at the door for ONOcon 87 members. The 1987 con was held February 13 to 15, again at the Sun Bow Inn.

*ConVersion 2 et seq.*: ConVersion 2 was held July 26 to 28, 1985, at the Carriage House Inn. GoH was Poul Anderson, Fan GoH was Mary-Karen Reid, and TM was Frank Robinson. Programming included items on art, media, science, SCA activities, costuming, a short story contest, and "The Old Nazgûl Tavern in Space". Leslie Williams wrote to *Maple Leaf Rag* and mentioned that ConVersion felt they did the 'serious' con (a con "should be dedicated to programming"[sic]) and that there was space for both cons.

On July 25 to 27, 1986, ConVersion 3 was held in the Carriage House Inn again (rooms \$40/night), with GoH Jack L. Chalker and Fan GoH Bjo Trimble. TM was Phyllis Gotlieb. 650 or more attended; most not regular congoers according to Williams, due to radio and bookmark advertising.

In 1987, the Black Sheep group set up "Breakness Institute" [EDITOR'S NOTE: A major subdivision and park in Calgary are both called Bowness], which I was informed was a forum on conrunning, but turned out later to focus on costuming and masquerade-running (at least this year). A weekend of panels, discussions, and workshops was held May 2 and 3, attended by 35 people, who had a good time.

ConVersion 4 was held July 24 to 26, 1987, again at the Carriage House Inn, with GoH Joan D. Vinge, Special Guest Jack Williamson, and TM Jim Frenkel. William Gibson was later added as "Canadian" Guest Author. To this con were introduced new features such as club rooms, video minitheatres, and a writer's workshop. Al Brown was A/V head; this con specialized in older films. Leslie Williams was 'president' of the con.

*Let's Get Silly:* In 1987 news surfaced about a Calgary bid for the 1990 NASFiC, in Erwin S. Strauss' *SF Convention Register*. This seems to have been a hoax. Strauss' information was pretty incomplete -- and his circular is a worldwide reference source on upcoming SF cons. (NASFiC is the North American SF Convention, and people bid to hold it when the Worldcon is held outside North America. It's big.) The "Put the NASFiC in the Hole!" bid made a big deal of proposing to put it in an underground mall (which I have since realized has nothing to do with the West Edmonton Mall; a lot of downtown Calgary is underground). There were odd things in it, like the lack of an address, and the name "Fay K. Nounsemant" on the sheet. The first that the ConVersion group ever heard of it was from John Mansfield asking them about it.

Calcon was a gaming convention first held in 1987, and regularly ever since.

ConVersion 5 was held July 22 to 24, 1988, with Robert and Karen Haber Silverberg, L. Sprague and Catherine de Camp, fan guest Jon Gustafson, and Canadian author Crawford Kilian. A membership limit of 700 was instituted.

1988 was the first year of annual Star Trek cons. S.T. Con '88 was held April 8 to 10 at the Marlborough Inn. It conflicted with a comics con held the same weekend, and suffered for it. Subsequent S.T. Cons seem to have done better.

*NonCon 11:* At NonCon 10, in Edmonton, two bids were presented for the following NonCon. One was from an Edmonton Star Trek club, which had no experience, no GoHs, had no hotel contacts, and yet confidently assumed they would get the next NonCon. The other bid was from Calgary, which had a prepared case to present. Calgary got the bid.

I am told that the NonCon 11 chair, Philip Liesemer (Bonnie's son), had no experience, and approached the ConVersion committee, asking to help out "so I'll know how to run a convention." The

committee did not accept. (It takes several years of experience, heading a number of different departments, to gain enough experience to chair a con.) Other members of the committee were Bonnie Liesemer Dewar, Alan Dewar, Eric Tilbrook, Cat Neshine, Joe 'Bucks' Rosenstein, Rick Gray, "Tempest", Jacky Tilbrook, Tony Whalen, Bruce Walters, Arlene Morlidge, Richard Bartrop, Grant Costa, Robyn Raymond, and John Tooker. Thus I now identify the Calgary Illuminati as basically the Liesemer-Dewar clan and associated septs. News appeared in Michael Skeet's MLR that the artshow director, Marc Holmes, had been fired. No reason or replacement was known. By the time NonCon 11 came around, the committee was still chaired by Philip Liesemer, now eighteen years old, but the former co-chair "Tempest" was replaced by Karen Parker, Philip's girlfriend.

NonCon 11's flyers and progress reports were rather fun, if puzzling. They promised "new, innovative ideas" as well as the usual thing for NonCons, and "multistream programming", which is, well, conventional. They advertised the tenth anniversary NonCon (that arithmetic has to be wrong). Progress Report #2 listed 159 preregistrants, of whom 63 were obvious hoax names (e.g. Rod Gallowglass, Paul Atreides, God, Tasha Yar, "Edmonton, Alberta", Span Dex, Win Dex, etc.) Membership and dealer table rates were reasonable (\$15 to \$20, and \$50 respectively).

NonCon 11 was held October 7 to 9, 1988, in the Palliser Hotel (*again*). GoH was F.M. Busby and Fan GoH was Elinor Busby. TM was J. Brian Clarke, Consuite Guest was Janis Svilpis, and Special Guest was Bob Gibson. Room rates were rather high (\$70/single room night and up), and may have contributed to low attendance. Advertising was poor to nonexistent, according to one person; or the con did everything including radio spots, according to another. Depending on who you talked to and when, NonCon 11 attracted 230, 270, 300, or 340 people.

This concom did some odd things. On con publications, the program book contained no program, and the membership kit included no maps. The book's cover had no title, and poorly reproduced Richard Bartrop's cover art. On other departments, there



was no con security and no writers' workshop/contest. The comics censorship panelists thought they deserved free memberships, and the concom thought they went only to the official GoHs like F.M. Busby. This apparently wasn't worked out.

What was to the good? The consuite was pretty decent, and so was the mezzanine/programming floor, if you value meeting and interacting with people as I do. I heard one guy grumbling about the price of beer and cider, which was going for \$2 Saturday (on a 'suggested donation' basis) and \$1.50 the next night, but then I regularly pay over \$3 per drink in Vancouver.

Function space was costly, which became more and more clearly a problem for the concom, as it became certain that only about 300 people were attending. On Friday night, a few older fans were audibly wondering how the concom was going to make out financially.

The NonCon Business Meeting was delayed about half an hour while those present waited for a quorum of executives (all, I believe, on the NonCon 11 committee) to show up. Bonnie Liesemer-Dewar did not show up. Arlene Morlidge and Bryan Quinn were there; 'Tempest' eventually showed up and announced "we're it". Bryan Quinn moved at the NonCon Business Meeting that the Society be dissolved. He felt the Society was not doing its job, and was unnecessary in view of the low interest in Edmonton and Calgary in hosting future NonCons, and in view of the fact that both cities were running other SF cons anyway. In Calgary there was S.T. Con, Calgary Comics Con, ONOcon, Calcon, and ConVersion. In Edmonton, First Contact had already been held, and ConText was being planned for 1989.

It developed at this meeting that the NonCon Society effectively had no funds to cushion debts incurred by NonCon 11. Later that fall, At the October 1988 BCSFA meeting, Vancouver fans considered a motion to donate some money to the NonCon 11 committee, should they have some outstanding debts to pay.

### *Tentative conclusions and more questions:*

To judge from the whole account, DEC was a fringe fan group, which is okay by itself. They wanted to do a nonstandard con, which is also okay, and they wanted to do it as a NonCon, which might also have been entirely all right. But DEC members might have thrashed this out in the open, and established an understanding with the dissenters, to judge from the information at hand. Instead, they instigated a petty fight.

Why was DEC motivated to bid for NonCon 4? And for that matter, for later NonCons? Why did the Calgary bid win at NonCon 3 (and 5)? Why was DEC motivated to respond to any difference of opinion with obstructionism?

DEC not only lost "people points" on NonCons 4 and 6, but also "goodwill points" -- which may be the most crucial currency in fandom; the same currency, really, as reputation. Yet the cons were, apparently, adequately enjoyable. DEC also lost some financial points. Did DEC/Illuminati perceive that they had any problem?

Fans sometimes do things not for a good reason but just because they are done -- or obstinately refuse to do things, for the same reason. Sometimes, we do not think through why we're doing clubs, fanzines, or cons. It looks from here like the DEC/Illuminati group had hosted NonCons before, "therefore let us do so again"; they had held them at the Palliser before, "therefore let us do so again" -- without considering alternatives.

For some reason, Calgary doesn't run to a very large fan community; which contrasts sharply with Edmonton, where ESFCAS ran up to 300 members at one point. The result was, until rather recently, it took a long while for any clubs *at all* to form in Calgary. It also became possible for one club to dominate, or to exist in comparative isolation. Somehow, by the late 1970s, only one club existed in Calgary.

Different people have different perspectives on the last decade or so of Calgary fandom. Lexie Pakulak has suggested that maybe

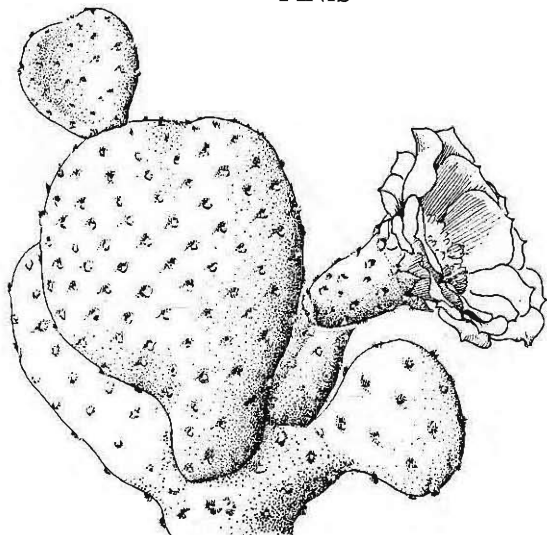
DEC in 1980 wasn't really an established fandom, wasn't ready yet to host a con. Jumping into conrunning might have been a critical mistake. (Be it noted that until *Xenofile*, which is attempting to provide Canadian newszine coverage, conrunning was almost the fan activity in Calgary). Arlene Morlidge has an idea that Calgary fandom has more than its share of people who insist on being in charge, to the point that they won't tolerate anyone else being in charge of the same bailiwick. Cliff Samuels' impression is that the DEC/Illuminati, as represented on NonCon II committee and membership alike, simply aren't fans, not readers, not even into SF or fannish interests.

Fans frequently fight with each other for no better reason than they mistakenly expect others to have their own interests and do things their own way. But the fact of life is, there are different fandoms, which have different interests and purposes entirely. Calgary fandom eventually developed diverse places to pursue different interests -- rather painfully.

The lesson I take is, you are well advised to settle together, *if you can* -- right at the outset, and pretty openly and publicly -- what your interests really are, and how your group will pursue them; otherwise you will undergo a history of fanfeuding.

Comments?

FINIS



FROM: Mark Manning  
1400 East Mercer #19  
Seattle, WA 98112

1991-4-21

Thanks for OPUNTIA #1. Look for my zine, Tand #6, in early summer sometime. I've already put you on my mailing list, insofar as you've passed the Fannish Turing Test.

You know about the Turing Test, don't you? His idea was that if you can't tell the inhabitant of a black box from a human, then the thing in the black box is intelligent. Even if it's a computer. I've decided that for fanzine editors the Fannish Turing Test is to see if someone you send a zine to can be distinguished from the Dead Letter Office.

I thought that "St Nomentanus" was disgusting. Is Polvikoski some kind of friend of that (Alberta??) pro-Nazi schoolteacher (whazzizname? Erik Zungl??)? Which isn't a very fair guess, nor a very good way to end this LoC, but that's what I seem to be doing. Keep up the good fan-ac.

EDITOR REPLIES: You've just passed the Fannish Turing Test for loccers, ie., you completely misread the St. Nomentatus. Go back and reread it; you will find it is against the type of "I said nothing" behaviour that contributed to the great success of the Nazis. You're thinking of Ernst Zundl from Toronto (hope I got the spelling right) or Jim Keegstra, always identified as an Eckville, Alberta, man, when he is from Benalto. I mention this because I was born in Eckville and the Polvikoskis homesteaded there at the turn of the century. Eckville is most decidedly NOT pro-Nazi; too many of its menfolk were killed fighting Germany in WW2.

FROM: Harry Andruschak  
Box 5309  
Torrance, Calif. 90510-5309

1991-3-5

Thanks for sending OPUNTIA #1. No, I had no idea what the title meant until you explained it. But I do have an acquaintance with prickly-pear cacti. I do a lot of hiking in the California deserts, especially Joshua Tree National Monument (not Forest, a Heinlein blunder) and the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Of course, the most feared cacti are the jumping cacti. Plenty of those in Joshua Tree!

As for the rest of your zine, I have read this sort before, and am still not impressed. Boo hoo hoo, it is all our fault that you watch USA TV, read USA magazines, books, and papers, watch USA movies, and have USA culture. I see no gun at your head forcing you to imbibe all this USA pop-culture. Ever hear of "just say no"? I haven't watched TV since August 1985. I haven't seen a movie for almost two years. I will admit to reading some SF, mostly USA written. Maybe one or two books a month. The rest of my reading is science journals, like NATURE, published weekly in the UK.

Opuntia . . . . . strange topic for a story. I'll have to pass up this one. Hmmm, is opuntia only in opuntias?

EDITOR REPLIES: There are two basic growth forms of opuntias, the low-growing groundhuggers, and shrubby chollas, a.k.a. jumping cacti. Away back when equine transport was the norm, opuntias were commonly known as 'horse crippers'.

Re: cultural imperialism. It offers the rest of the world a great deal of hilarity to see the fuss

the Americans are currently making about the Japanese buying up movie studios and real estate. The Americans own more of Canada than the Japanese own of the USA, but that doesn't stop the chest-thumping and ululation, or the cover stories in Time or Newsweek about the Japanese 'invasion'.

I don't know if opuntia is found in other cacti. Any chemistry students out there looking for a thesis topic?

FROM: Lloyd Penney  
412 - 4 Lisa Street  
Brampton, Ontario, L6T 4B6

1991-3-7

What is Canadian SF? Science fiction written by a Canadian. But should that Canadian SF have a Canadian theme to it? Can it? If it should, why doesn't it? Lots of questions, but few answers. I know of some American SF that is terribly Mom 'n apple pie, patriotic, flag-waving American, full of American themes and American triumph at the end. American cinema has done a lot to build up the idea of America in the form of positive symbols such as Uncle Sam, the eagle, and the Stars and Stripes. They stand out in the minds of Americans and non-Americans alike. However, the same cinema has made fun of the symbols of other countries to make the American symbols look even better, and the symbols we identify with (beavers, maple leaves, and Mounties) wind up looking a little corny. We need more pride in our symbols and ourselves in order to make a unique brand of SF. I'm not saying anything like space Mounties or sentient beavers on the sixth planet of Betelgeuse, or anything like that, but a sense of being American produces a unique brand of SF,

(continued next page)

and we need a similar sense for ourselves. To approach it from a publishing standpoint, we need major Canadian publishers to recognize the lucrative nature of SF so they can join in with their own SF imprints. McLelland & Stewart, for one, is missing out on this kind of venture because of the typically Canadian lack of courage in taking financial risks. If the number of Canadian authors increases as it has over the past five years or so the idea of a major Canadian publisher printing SF in book form and in large numbers of titles may not sound so science fictional in itself.

FROM: Harry Warner Jr. 1991-3-10  
423 Summit Avenue  
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

First of all, the initial issue of OPUNTIA was the most difficult-to-open fanzine in a long while. I couldn't see anything holding its pages together and suspected one of Dr. Smith's force fields was the adhesive agent. The sense of touch eventually solved the mystery after my eyes failed. That must be the invisiblest tape in North America.

Second, I'm glad to find you publishing. Small fanzines are the best kind for me in some ways. I can read one entirely before my eyes give out, and skinny fanzines don't discourage me by making the stacks of unlocced fanzines visibly taller.

Since I refuse to run the risk of making money out of fandom and ruining my reputation as one of the few surviving all-amateur fans, I won't say anything about opuntia except the remark that the diagram looks remarkably like a single to right field with a runner on second base on one of those video baseball games.

I suppose I could term 'The Visit of Saint No-mentanus' ingenious and let it go at that. Well there is one matter; I recognize all the other German common and proper nouns but not Donder. I wonder if that's a misprint or a Nazi term I hadn't heard about.

There are several reasons why I refuse to bother my decomposing old head about what Canadian science fiction may be. One is the terror that I feel at the very thought of the reaction if someone in the United States demanded a way to determine who are the genuine U.S. writers creating honest-to-goodness United States SF. Another is the fact that SF is supposed to be imaginative fiction. It doesn't take any imagination to write fiction in which today's Canadian circumstances are faithfully transcribed into a future identical with today, so Canada should be different when it figures in genuine SF instead of the basically mundane fiction often mislabelled as SF today. The third reason is: what difference does it make anyway? It doesn't spoil the pleasure I get from my VCR to know that it's impossible to buy a VCR manufactured in the U.S.. My bosom doesn't swell with patriotic pride when I read about the opening of a MacDonald's on some foreign soil. Nationalism isn't fashionable nowadays in the ordinary daily pursuits of life. The music of Franz Liszt sounds the same, no matter if the listener decides he was Hungarian, French, German, or whatever. (He was born in Hungary but never learned to speak Hungarian, conversed most fluently in French, and had a French mistress as a youth, lived much of his life in Germany, but also had strong ties to Italy and Switzerland.) Do we fret over the question of whether Arthur Clarke is a British or Sri Lankan author? Does it matter?

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EDITOR REPLIES: I'm tempted to send your letter to 3M as an unsolicited testimonial to their product Scotch (tm) Magic (tm) tape. You've ruined organic chemistry for me forever with your remark about opuntia. I will never again be able to see a chemical drawing of a phenol or othersuch molecule without immediately visualizing a fielder going back to catch a pop fly. Donder was a typo, and should have been Donner, meaning, of course, thunder. VCRs are not culture; they are tools we use in our daily lives. The movies they play, on the other hand, are part of culture.

FROM: Buck Coulson 1991-3-11  
2677W - 500N  
Hartford City, Indiana 47348

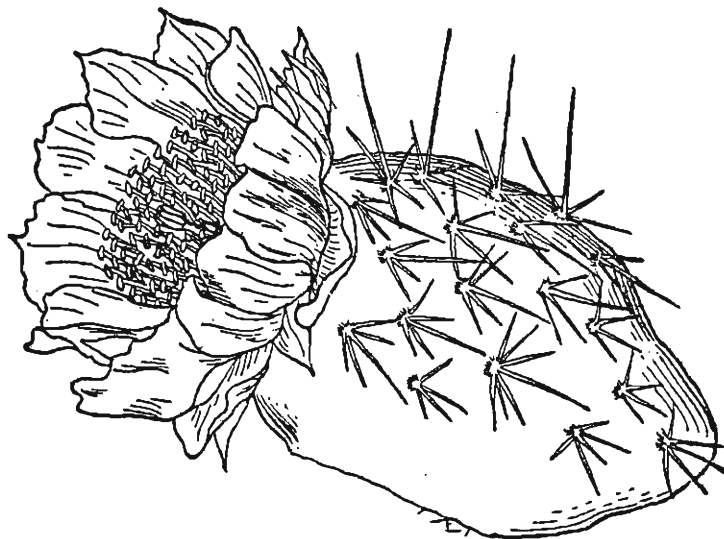
You have a pretty restrictive definition of Canadian SF. Michael Coney lives in Canada (or used to when I knew him) and some of his early books are set in Canada, which I'd think would be enough. U.S. science fiction isn't required to have a manifest destiny theme before being ascribed to our country. However, if you want a theme, I suppose you'll get a theme. I did read one book in which Quebec separated from Canada and received support from the USSR, so the U.S. invaded, not liking to see a large Communist country on the border. Cuba was bad enough and so on. The rest of Canada sent in its army to defend Quebec, which I believe was the end of the book. I can't guarantee it because I read it years ago and it wasn't mine; Derek Nelson loaned it to me, probably in the mid-1960s.

You might be interested in the fact that YANDRO #155 (January 1966) ran an article by Nelson concerning Canadian antipathy to America. One sentence seems pertinent: "... these I see as the causes: our historical traditions, our petty nat-

ionalism, the press of both our nations, American ignorance and Big Power mentality, Canadian frustration, irritation, and jealousy."

FROM: George Laskowski 1991-3-22  
55 Valley Way  
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan 48304

You've made some interesting comments about the influence of U.S. writers in all areas of SF, particularly in Canadian efforts. I hope that some are able to write in terms of the Canadian culture in spite of the influence of their southern neighbour. I read SF to experience other cultures, whether Earthly or not. Finding a Canadian SF writer who can typify his/her background effectively would be a real treasure. Tanya Huff comes close in "Gates of Darkness, Circle of Light".



FROM: Donna McMahon  
240 E. Kings Road  
North Vancouver, V7N 1H6

1991-3-25

Thanks for OPUNTIA #1. I confess that I haven't yet had time to read it properly, so this really isn't a loc but rather a COA. Please note my new address. Actually it's my Dad's address, but I'm using it as a mail drop until I relocate permanently. Glancing quickly through the issue, I admit that I find myself far more interested in the details and ramifications of Opuntia and opuntiol than yet another discussion of "What is Canadian SF?", but I promise that I shall eventually grit my teeth and wade through it. However, I would be interested in hearing more about your work as a horticulturist and any slants that may give you on SF (i.e. particular books/authors you think have treated the topic un/intelligently). I always enjoy the opportunity to learn something new or find a different way of looking at something old. As for contributions ... well, I'm afraid that other than locs it's unlikely at this time. But thanks for thinking of me (what did you do, copy Skeet's mailing list?) and I shall try diligently to give you some faint indication that you aren't mailing zines into a bottomless void.

EDITOR REPLIES: Actually there aren't many details and ramifications about opuntiol because it has never been discussed by anyone since the initial report. Which is why I am hoping someone can come up with something. The Canuck SF article is a rewrite of one I published in NEOLOGY. That one was reviewed by R. Graeme Cameron in BCSFazine 215 and he referred to it as 'insanely optimistic'. I am beginning to believe he's right. Horticultural SF? Mostly along the lines of 'The plant that ate Toronto' (serves it right too). I am a District Foreman with the City of Calgary Parks Dept., and

look after about 600 hectares of parks and freeway boulevards. My office is at Bowness Park, which is 80 years old this October. The print on the next page shows the lagoon next to my office, which is hidden in the background behind the trees. I spend most of my time dealing with economics rather than horticulture, so this explains why some of my articles in other zines are rantings and ravings about the lack of economic sense in almost all SF. Remember the Star Trek movie where Kirk and Spock didn't know what exact change was? In a pig's eye, I thought, since Starfleet couldn't launch a rowboat much less a fleet of starships without a budget approved by the Federation. And Kirk would spend a fair bit of time with the computer trying to figure out why the crew ate 5% more food last month than normal, and how to balance that out with the dilithium expenses. A cashless society is not the same thing as a moneyless society. Even if Kirk and Spock never had held a penny or a loonie, they certainly would be familiar with credit cards or debit cards.

I didn't use Skeet's mailing list. In fact, I had a devil of a time finding addresses. When first I contemplated OPUNTIA, I figured no problem getting addresses; I'll just copy them out of the zines I get. I found out that most of the zines only print the city. The first mailing was based on the BCSFazine membership directory, plus the few addresses I was able to scrape up in other zines.



FROM: Dale Speirs  
Box 6830  
Calgary, Alberta  
CANADA, T2P 2E7

WHY YOU GOT THIS ZINE

- \_\_\_\_\_ You contributed. Much obliged.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I'd be much obliged if you did contribute.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You subscribe. I'm greatly obliged.
- \_\_\_\_\_ We trade. It's a contractual obligation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be obliging and trade your's for mine.
- \_\_\_\_\_ This is the last issue you'll receive. You're obliged to do something to keep getting Opuntia.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Noblesse oblige.
- \_\_\_\_\_ How about obliging me with a loc?

**TO:**